



# Longfellow House Bulletin

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A Newsletter of the Friends of the Longfellow House and the National Park Service

December 2008

## Harvard Scholars Use House As a Laboratory to Examine Material Culture

This fall, for the first time, two renowned scholars conducted their Harvard University undergraduate class at the Longfellow National Historic Site, using the wealth of artifacts held within the House as the basis for study. Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and author of *A Midwife's Tale* Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and art and cultural historian Ivan Gaskell taught the students how to decipher objects in order to gain insight into the cultures that produced them. During the semester, students visited the House at least a half dozen times to examine objects ranging from a vernacular door lock to fancy satin brocade shoes.

Not only historic documents, but also everyday objects provide clues and information about the past. Examining the material culture of a society serves as an

important tool for historians. The lower echelons of society usually generate few written records, but the objects they leave behind can tell us much about how people lived and what they thought.

Students in this course called "Confronting Objects/Interpreting Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on North America" are exploring the methods used in interpreting artifacts from colonial and early American history. NPS museum staff assembled a list of dozens of objects from which to choose, including textiles, ceramics, architectural fragments, and arche-



Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Jim Shea, and Harvard students at the House

ological items. The high level of documentation for many artifacts in the House offers additional and unusual information for the historian sleuth. Many objects have a long

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## Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House Celebrates 250th Anniversary

The year 2009 marks the 250th anniversary of the construction of the now famous yellow Georgian mansion for wealthy merchant John Vassall Jr. at 105 Brattle Street. The Longfellow National Historic Site will celebrate the building's anniversary throughout the year with commemorative programs, special walking tours, and lectures on Georgian architecture.

Because of the date "1759" cast into the iron fireback of the second floor southwest chamber, residents and historians have long assumed that the House was built in that year. "This fireback looks as though it is probably original to the fireplace and has no other markings to suggest that it is commemorative of some other historical event occurring in 1759," Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities' historian Morgan Phillips concluded in his report for the National Park Service in 1975.

Research into deeds, probate records, and tax records is needed to provide more definitive confirmation of the date.

Although it was enlarged significantly in subsequent years, the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House remains a fine example of Georgian architecture and features many of the most typical elements of the eighteenth-

century colonial style, such as the symmetry of its facade and floor plan, the central staircase, the gently sloping hipped roof, and the classical ornamentation. But the House's projecting central pavilion crowned by a balustrade and the four decorative Ionic pilasters on the facade give it a unique character, as do the two man-made terraces leading up to the mansion extant today. The terraces raise the house and are surmounted by three short flights of steps.

The original 1759 structure is still intact and consists of a simple rectangle comprised of the parlor, study, dining room, front of the library, and the bedrooms above these. The piazzas [side porches], the rear ell including the "Blue Entry," and the rear part of the library are all later additions to the original structure. "The piazzas at the sides did not exist, I believe, in Washington's days," Longfellow wrote in

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Iron fireback in the second floor bedroom, showing date of 1759



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## Harvard Scholars Use House As Lab *(continued from page 1)*

history of ownership, before and after Henry Longfellow's tenure at the House.

Ulrich and Gaskell's course emphasizes the relationship between particular objects and larger historical themes, such as colonialism, patriotism, or the beginnings of mechanization. Students also learn about other historical tools, including laboratory analysis of materials, quantitative studies of household inventories, and iconography [interpreting symbols]. After selecting and analyzing a particular object, each student is asked to give an oral presentation and write a paper about it.

"The Longfellow House collections extend from pre-history through the twentieth century," Ulrich and Gaskell write in their course syllabus. "In addition to art works, furniture, clothing, household implements, and a wide range of 'souvenirs' from all over the world, the house has printed works and manuscripts of all descriptions. Supporting materials can be found in Harvard's libraries and museums and in nearby collections."

As a preliminary exercise, Ulrich and Gaskell chose an iron rod for the class to

study. As the students passed around the mystery item, each offered an observation, such as "it is smooth" or "it is black." Next they contemplated how this rod could have been used, given its known connection with the House. Ulrich showed nearly matching photos from an Internet search, one of which was a nineteenth-century surveyor's tool. Shea provided what he knew about the object: Harry Dana, Longfellow's grandson, bought the rod in 1942 because it was purported to have been made by Henry Longfellow's great-great-grandfather, a blacksmith. Dana kept the unidentified plain rod in the front hall. After he died, other House occupants leaned it against the study wall near the fireplace as a fire poker.

During the semester, students also heard special presentations at the House. NPS senior archeologist Steven Pendery gave a lecture on the more than 25,000 archeological artifacts in the House's collection, all excavated in and around the house. Harvard anthropologist David Odo conducted a class on the photographs that Charley Longfellow commissioned and purchased in Japan in the early 1870s.

## House Celebrates 250th Anniversary *(continued from page 1)*

1856. "They were built by Mr. Craigie, who enlarged the house in the rear. So old Mr. Sales once told me; and he lived in the days of Craigie, and may be supposed to know." Andrew Craigie acquired the house in 1791, and records corroborate that within a couple of years and prior to moving in, he hired someone to build these additions.

Exactly who designed Vassall's house in 1759 is unclear, although some experts suggest it may have been the professional architect Peter Harrison. (See article on page 6.) Most educated wealthy gentlemen of the day, such as John Vassall Jr., had some knowledge of architecture. This knowledge together with the many available pattern books, which disseminated the current style, enabled people to design their own houses. They hired skilled carpenters and

craftsmen to execute their plans.

This Georgian mansion was one of many such country houses that once lined Brattle Street and were scattered throughout the region. (See articles on pages 4 and 5.)

This coming summer during its annual Cambridge Discovery Days, the Historic



The 1759 section of the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House

Cambridge Collaborative will celebrate Cambridge's heritage of Georgian architecture and offer multiple tours of the historic buildings. Comprised of the Cambridge Historical Society, the Cambridge Historical Commission, the Cambridge Arts

Council, Mount Auburn Cemetery, and the Longfellow National Historic Site, the collaborative has designated knowledgeable volunteers from the community to present guided walks on two Saturdays in the month of August.

## Interview with a Friend...Meet Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Historian

Professor of history at Harvard University, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich writes about early American social history, women's history, and material culture. Her books include *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* – winner of the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1991 and the basis of a PBS documentary – *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Making of an American Myth*, and *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*. We spoke with her in her office in Robinson Hall.

**Longfellow House:** How did you become interested in material culture?

**Laurel Thatcher Ulrich:** I have always enjoyed museums and art and architecture, but I became interested in a scholarly way in these materials when I was working on my book *The Age of Homespun*. In that project I wanted to find a new kind of focus for writing about early American women. I'd worked with a diary in *A Midwife's Tale*, so I thought it would be interesting to work with fabrics themselves. I'd done a lot of documentary research on household productions, and it appeared to me that fabrics matter. At a conference I met a museum curator who was at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, and she suggested I apply for a fellowship to go there and use the collections. That was a really formative experience because she helped me feel more comfortable working with artifacts. Eventually my interest in [studying material culture] grew and developed into a sub-specialty.

**LH:** What is the difference between studying objects and studying documents?

**LTU:** There are a lot of similarities, but the biggest difference is access. If you're looking at unique objects, you can't Google and find it on the Internet and you can't walk into a library, go through the card catalog, and have them pull it up for you. Artifacts are usually kept in museums. You have to make appointments, interrupt people, and rely on them to help you. At the Royal Ontario Museum, I had full access, and it was a marvelous experience because I met so many fabulous scholars who worked in museums, not in universities. I think working on objects is more collaborative in a lot of ways because you rely so much on specialists and conservators, who are just amazing resources for so many things.

I had a couple of specialists come to my rescue. When I was working with an Indian basket at the Rhode Island Historical Society, it had fragments that the museum said

were wool. I prevailed upon a University of Rhode Island professor, a textile scientist, who worked with museums. She agreed to take little filaments from the basket and examine them with her electron microscope. What was amazing was that she could not only tell me that, yes, it was wool, but what kind of sheep it came from. Then I worked with a conservator from the Peabody Museum on another basket, trying to figure out what the pigment was on the stamp on the basket. They sent it over to the Museum of Fine Arts to get a final report. It turned out



it was probably ordinary lamp black, but it was wonderful to discover the complexities of that kind of examination of artifacts.

**LH:** What is it like working in a house museum setting rather than an art museum?

**LTU:** The Longfellow House is really unusual because it is so professionally organized and managed. There are so many house museums, particularly in New England, that are run by volunteers on a really low budget. I did a lot of research in places with people pulling stuff out of drawers and boxes and bags. The other distinction between a house museum and an art museum – there's a kind of rationalization about specialized museums that take things out of context, so you get row after row of spinning wheels in museums of American textile history. You go to the MFA, and you can look at many hand-stitched embroideries of idealized spinners. But you go into a place like the Longfellow House and it's all there. It feels kind of hodge-podge, but it's the way people live. It puts something in a context that's really fascinating. The other thing that's exciting about the House is the documents. Having the family papers and

the family artifacts, and the property all in one place together is an unparalleled resource for doing historical investigation.

**LH:** Can you tell us a little about what you teach your class here at the House?

**LTU:** This is a course in developing history out of artifacts. And kind of like the archeologist knowing which part of the ground an object came out of, the House tells us which part of the world of the nineteenth century a particular object took its meaning from.

Ivan Gaskell and I both believe that the first task is to get the students to look. It's the first task with documents too – it's not about casting your eyes over the page. It's all about intensive investigation. Our students are extremely bright, but a lot of them have never done anything like this. They sometimes feel very cautious about making an observation. They haven't been trained, and they don't want to be wrong. We show them an object and tell them nothing about it. For one hour they go around the table, and each person has to make an observation. Finally, we ask them to take some wild guesses. What do you think this was? How might it have originated? Through close looking and trial and error, they figure it out. One of the wonderful things about this method is it's a social process of learning because they are interacting with each other.

The next strategy is library research to get background on whatever it is. They do methodological and theoretical readings. But the real learning happens when they have to apply this and they have to choose their objects. They write a complex paper that uses close observation, library research, and material culture methods of analysis to make a historical argument.

**LH:** What does the historical argument include?

**LTU:** The paper has to situate the chosen object in a lot of context. They're building complex connections out of the objects. We sometimes think of the object as a hub of the investigation, and then there are spokes. The historical argument is the rim. I like source-based studies. A lot of people start with the big broad secondary picture and look for ways to challenge it. By starting with the artifact, it's fascinating how they tend to escape easy categories.

**LH:** We're learning a lot from the students. They're doing a kind of analysis on these objects that has never been done before.



## Georgian Country Houses In and Around Cambridge and Boston

In eighteenth-century New England, wealthy gentlemen built lavish mansions in areas not far from the city of Boston. They modeled these Georgian country houses after large country estates in England, such as Blenheim Palace and Stourhead, with extensive gardens and landscaped parklands. Situated on rising ground, the English Georgian country houses were classical in style—inspired by ancient Greece and Rome—both inside and out. The classical design and ornamentation of the houses and grounds conveyed the status and erudition of the owners.

The new world gentlemen had made fortunes off England, some as appointed colonial officials and others as businessmen who benefited from favorable tariffs and the British navy's protection of their ships.

With their enormous wealth and loyalty to the King, colonial gentlemen emulated the fine English country houses of their counterparts back home. Clusters of these mansions sprang up in such places as Cambridge, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Dorchester, and Milton. Although some wealthy men also had a town house in Boston, for many the country house was the main residence, named for its location in the outlying areas.

The American eighteenth-century country house represented the full embodiment of all the Georgian architectural principles. Unlike the more modest farm houses of the same period, these country houses were fully designed with Georgian-style elements, not only in their facades, symmetrical-plan interiors, and elegant woodwork throughout, but also in the landscaping complete with orchards and cultivated ornamental plantings.

All of the Georgian country houses in and around Cambridge and Boston described below are still preserved today.

Isaac Royall Sr. made his fortune from his plantation in Antigua, trading in sugar, rum, and slaves. In 1732 at the age of sixty, he decided to retire to an easier life in the American colonies and bought a seventeenth-century farm house in Medford, Massachusetts, west of Boston, close to the Mystic River. He enlarged and rebuilt it into a Georgian

mansion with 550 acres of orchards, farms, and a formal garden. This was Royall's only abode. His daughter Penelope married Henry Vassall (see article on page 5) and moved to Cambridge, and his son, Isaac Royall Jr., inherited the property and continued to live there after his father died in 1739. Isaac Jr. embellished the front of the house with faux stonework in wood and an elaborate door and windows. He entertained guests



Royall House, Medford, with facade remodeled in 1747

often and lavishly, invested in real estate, and held several public offices and military positions. Having journeyed to Boston when the Battle of Lexington broke out, Royall could never return to Medford. General John Stark made the Royall House his headquarters early in the war and conferred here with Generals Washington and Lee. The Isaac Royall House still stands along with its separate slave quarters for the Royalls' thirty to forty slaves.

In 1747 William Shirley built an ornate country house, now known as the Shirley-Eustis House, in Roxbury, three miles south of Boston. King George II had appointed him Royal Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and Commander-in-Chief of all British forces in North America. With money he made from the capture of Louisbourg in the French and Indian War, he purchased thirty-three acres in rural Roxbury on which he erected a mansion, possibly designed by Peter Harrison. During the winter Shirley lived at Province House in Boston, where he performed his official duties, and spent the warmer months at his country estate. Shirley died in 1771, thus avoiding any need to flee Boston on the eve

of the American Revolution.

As Commodore of the Lakes of North America, Joshua Loring retrieved the cargo and equipment of large sunken ships and received commissions for his work. In 1760 this wealthy British naval officer built on an old farmstead a Georgian mansion, now the Loring-Greenough House, on South Street in Jamaica Plain, five miles southwest of Boston. His sixty-acre estate was his only residence, surrounded by gardens, orchards, and livestock. Loring, a Loyalist Tory, abandoned the house in 1774 and fled the colonies. Colonial troops confiscated the mansion and used it as a headquarters and hospital for Continental soldiers during the Siege of Boston.

The Apthorp-Borland House at 10 Linden Street in Cambridge was erected on property originally owned by John Vassall Jr. Peter Harrison designed the ornate Georgian mansion in 1760 for the first minister of Christ Church, East Apthorp. Its extravagance, however, so irritated Puritanical Cantabrigians, who dubbed it "the Bishop's palace" that Apthorp left for England in 1764. In 1765 John Borland and his wife, Anna Vassall, acquired the mansion. The house is now enclosed in the courtyard of a Harvard dormitory and is therefore missing its original magnificent terraces and sweeping view of the river.

Leonard Vassall owned most of Western



The "Old" House as it was when Leonard Vassall Borland conveyed it to John Adams. Watercolor by E. Malcolm, 1798.

Jamaica and had about one thousand slaves. In 1730, eight years after he left the West Indies for the American colonies, he constructed the core of the Georgian gambrel-roofed Vassall-Adams House (known as The "Old" House), now the Adams National Historic Site,

in Quincy, nine miles southeast of Boston, on a large tract of land. He willed this house and his slaves Pompey and Vidalia to his first wife, Phebe. She, in turn, passed them to her daughter Anna, who married John Borland. The Borlands lived in the Apthorp House in Cambridge (see article on page 5). In 1787 John Adams bought the house from Leonard Vassall's grandson Leonard Vassall Borland.

## The Vassalls and Their Relatives on Eighteenth-Century Brattle Street

WEALTHY gentlemen related to John Vassall Jr. through blood or marriage lived nearby along the King's Highway (now Brattle Street) in Cambridge. All owned slaves, remained loyal to the King of England—hence the name Tory Row by 1776—and all fled Cambridge on the eve of the American Revolution. Their massive estates of land are now gone, but their Georgian-style houses survive today.

William Vassall, the first of the Vassalls to leave England and settle in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, arrived in 1635 with his wife and six children. Although he was an early member of the colony, in 1648 he moved with his family to Barbados and grew wealthy raising sugar cane and buying and selling slaves. For the next century Vassall family members amassed fortunes from their slaves and plantations in the West Indies and also acquired land in Massachusetts.

Born in Jamaica, Leonard Vassall moved to Massachusetts in 1723, bringing with him his four children. His son Colonel John Vassall Sr. bought land at what is now 105 Brattle Street in Cambridge. According to a nineteenth-century genealogist, Colonel Vassall erected a house and lived in this property until his death in 1747. Remains of a recently unearthed foundation at the front of this site appear to support this claim.

When John Sr. died, he bequeathed properties in Boston and Dorchester and two parcels of land in Cambridge—one of which was the current location of 105 Brattle Street—to his nine-year-old son, John Vassall Jr. John Sr.'s wealthy father-in-law, Lt. Governor Spencer Phipps, and his brother Henry Vassall helped to raise the young boy.

Two years after graduating from Harvard College in 1757 and only twenty-one years old, John Vassall Jr. built his famous mansion, later called the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House, on the six-and-one-half-acre lot diagonally across from his uncle Henry's house on the King's Highway. He continued to expand the property by acquiring six parcels adjacent to the mansion as well as property in the surrounding

area. By 1774 he owned over one hundred acres along the King's Highway and was one of the largest landholders in Cambridge.

Although John Vassall Jr. never lived in the West Indies, he continued to receive a huge income from the plantations he inherited there. He owned slaves not only in Jamaica and Antigua, but also at home in Cambridge, like many other Bostonians and Cantabrigians. Slaves worked as household servants, coachmen, gardeners, and craftsmen. Owners often gave their slaves their surnames, and there were several generations of black Vassalls in Cambridge.

Henry Vassall built a house for his new bride, Penelope Royall, at 94 Brattle Street in 1742. Penelope had grown up in Antigua, and she and Henry owned over a dozen slaves. When Penelope's father, wealthy gentleman and slaveowner Isaac Royall Sr., died in 1739, she had inherited "One Negro girl called Present, One Negro Woman called Abba and her six children named Robin, Coba (Cuba), Walker, Nuba, Trace and Tobey." Henry bought Tony "Vassall" in Jamaica to be his coachman. Cuba was Penelope's maid. Tony and Cuba married and had children. When Henry died in 1768, Penelope sold her slave Cuba and Cuba's children to John Vassall Jr., but she kept Cuba's husband, Tony, to take care of both Henry Vassall's and John Vassall's homes on Brattle Street.

Richard Lechmere married Mary Phipps, daughter of Lt. Governor Phipps. Her sister Elizabeth Phipps married John Vassall Sr. Mary inherited her father's massive farm comprising most of East Cambridge, which became Lechmere Point. Lechmere was a

rum distiller and therefore part of the slave trade "triangle." Rum from New England bought slaves from Africa for West Indies sugar plantations whose sugar supplied the

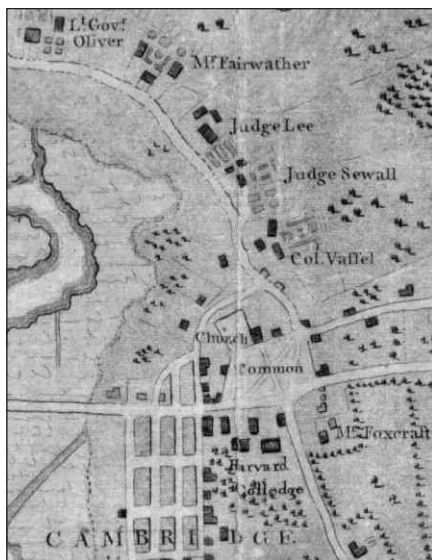
New England rum business. For a time he lived on his forty-four-acre Tory Row estate, the Lechmere-Sewall House, built in 1761, at 149 Brattle Street. In 1774 Lechmere sold his home to Jonathan Sewall, the royal attorney general. A crowd mobbed the house that September, and Sewall and his family fled from Cambridge the next day.

Judge Joseph Lee had married Rebecca Phipps, the youngest child of Lt. Governor

Phipps. In 1758 Lee purchased and modernized the Joseph Lee House (now called the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, home to the Cambridge Historical Society) at 159 Brattle Street so his wife could be near her sisters. Judge Lee helped found Christ Church in Cambridge. Although he was a Loyalist, he did not actively participate in the Revolutionary War and supported the new government. In 1777 he was the only person on Tory Row who was allowed to return to reclaim his property. He died there in 1803 at age ninety-three.

Son of a wealthy plantation owner, Thomas Oliver was born in Antigua and was a double in-law of John Vassall Jr. Vassall married Oliver's sister Elizabeth, and Oliver married Vassall's sister also named Elizabeth. Oliver retained property and slaves in the West Indies. He bought one hundred acres on Tory Row for his estate and built his house, the Thomas Oliver Home on Elmwood Avenue, just off Brattle Street, in 1767. When James Russell Lowell (a descendant of Henry and Penelope Vassall) lived there a century later, he called the house "Elmwood."

Captain George Ruggles married Henry Vassall's sister Suzanna and in 1764 built a mansion at 175 Brattle Street known as the Ruggles-Fayerweather House. He was born in Jamaica, where he owned plantations and slaves. In 1774 he sold this estate to Thomas Fayerweather and disappeared during the Revolutionary War.



Brattle Street on a 1777 map of Cambridge



Henry Vassall House, 94 Brattle Street, Cambridge



## Peter Harrison, Eighteenth-Century Architect in America

Although no conclusive evidence exists, Peter Harrison may likely have been the architect of the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House. Born in York, England, in 1716, he emigrated to Rhode Island with his brother in 1740. They established themselves as merchants and captains of their own vessels. Peter Harrison returned to England in 1743 for formal training as an architect, including a tour of Italy and Greece and the study of the works of ancient Roman architect Vitruvius and Renaissance architectural master Palladio. In 1745 Harrison returned to the colonies and embarked on his new career.

Harrison is considered the first professionally trained architect in America, and the buildings identified as his are some of the highest quality and finest examples of Palladianism in the American colonies. Although many buildings are attributed to Peter Harrison, only a few are fully documented as being his creations. These include Touro Synagogue (1759) in Newport, Rhode Island, King's Chapel (1749) in Boston, and Christ Church in Cambridge (1759-60).

In his 1960 book on the Apthorp House in Cambridge, Wendell Garrett proposed that Peter Harrison also designed both the

Apthorp House (built for minister East Apthorp) and the Longfellow (Vassall) House. He based this on the importance and activity of Harrison in Boston and Cambridge and on the use on both of these houses of Palladian features associated



Apthorp House, Cambridge, built in 1760 possibly by Peter Harrison

with Harrison's style, among them the projecting central pavilion with its two-story Ionic pilasters on high pedestals and the classical doorway.

Further evidence that Harrison designed the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House lies in the fact that the Vassalls helped to found Christ Church and hired architect Peter Harrison to build this Georgian treasure in 1760 on the Cambridge Common, not far

from where they lived on Tory Row. The Vassalls contributed land on which to build the minister's house and may also have arranged for Harrison to design it.

Garrett argued in his *Apthorp House, 1760-1960*: "On the basis of numerous stylistic similarities between his documented buildings and Apthorp House ... and Harrison's connections with the Apthorp family and their building of Christ Church, it is my conviction that Peter Harrison was the architect of Apthorp House." He makes a comparable case about the Longfellow House.

Jim Shea, Museum Manager of the Longfellow NHS points out the similarities in the interiors of the Apthorp and Longfellow Houses. Both have a broken pediment and paneling over the mantle in the parlor, similar turnings and risers of stairways, large floating panels and dentils in all the rooms, and window seats. "You have to look twice at photos of the Apthorp House to realize it's not Longfellow," he remarked.

Yet more research is called for to prove the authorship of the design or to discover the names of the carpenter or other workmen involved in both these projects. During the American Revolution, Harrison sided with the Tories and England. After his death in 1775, a mob of revolutionaries attacked his home in New Haven, Connecticut, and burned his library and all his papers and drawings. Thus the most important documents that could identify Harrison as the architect of his buildings were lost forever.

### Recent Visitors & Events at the House

*People from all walks of life have always come to the Longfellow House for cultural activities. Today the House continues to host numerous people and events. The following items represent only a small portion of what has taken place here recently.*

Museum professionals from the **Central State Historical Archives in L'viv, Ukraine**, toured the House to learn about its history, collections, and conservation practices. UNESCO designated the city of L'viv as a World Heritage Site.

Longfellow's London-based great-granddaughter **Ann Hutchinson Guest**, founder of the Language of Dance in London, and her husband **Ivor Guest**, a scholar of French Ballet, stopped by the House when they were in Massachusetts to be honored jointly by the American Society for Aesthetics with an award for Lifetime Achievement in Dance Scholarship.

Pakistani higher education and government officials visited as part of the **Pakistani Educational Leadership Institute**, a summer program funded by the U.S. State Dept.'s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Based at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire, the institute trains leaders in Pakistan's educational system.

**Cholthanee Koerojna**, president of the King of Thailand Birthplace Foundation, and colleagues viewed rare photographs from Siam that Charley Longfellow obtained there in 1873-74. Thailand's present King Rama was born in Cambridge in 1927.

### Longfellow House in the Media

The Country Dance and Song Society published Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1840 drawing of "The Village Smithy" in a booklet titled "Cracking Chestnuts." Old New England dances are known as "chestnuts."

On November 21, 2008, the Harvard Musical Association presented a musical tribute to honor Henry Longfellow's 201st birthday. The program featured the 1850 daguerreotype of Longfellow on the cover.

The Fall 2008 newsletter of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association ran a feature, with LNHS photos, called "Alice Longfellow's Quest for Authenticity" about their "longest serving vice-regent in association history."

## Smithsonian Class Studies Asian Objects

Students in a master's degree program in the History of Decorative Arts sponsored by Smithsonian Associates and the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C., spent a day at the Longfellow House as part of a course called Asian Influences in Anglo-American Decorative Arts, 17th to 20th Centuries. Their professor, Cheryl Robertson, a Cambridge-based independent scholar and museum consultant, brought them to view an unusual collection of in situ objects spanning three periods of Chinese and Japanese influences.

NPS staff Jim Shea and Lauren Malcolm first showed the fifteen graduate students Chinese-related items from the Colonial and Federal periods, such as the bedroom-fireplace tiles from the 1760s with a Chinese theme and the Chinese Chippendale fence Andrew Craigie installed in front of the House in the 1790s. In the mid-nineteenth century when Henry and Fanny Longfellow bought the House, they also displayed the prevailing taste for Chinese articles. They purchased a tall Chinese vase for the parlor and a Chinese table for the front hall.

After Commodore Perry opened up Japan in 1854, the Japanese influence in taste took over. Henry's son Charley Longfellow was among the first Americans to live in Japan. He brought back numerous items ranging from "high-end art objects to pop culture," said Robertson. "It's an unbelievably special collection, like a time capsule." In the archives, students viewed his 1870s' photos of Japan, kimonos, rare kimono pattern books, and a silver trophy Charley won at a sporting competition in Japan.

The House also contains American art pottery by Fulper, Grueby, and Marblehead, among others, during the Asian-influenced Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1897 Charley's cousin, Alexander ("Waddy") Wadsworth Longfellow — a fellow Japanophile — was a founder of the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, and Charley's sister Alice was a lifelong member.

Robertson and her students, many of whom are highly knowledgeable about the decorative arts and plan a career in the field, commented on the value of seeing these objects in their original context. "It is an utterly different experience from seeing them in a brightly lit gallery behind plexiglass," Robertson noted. "It's so helpful to see the objects in a house rather than a museum."

## Harvard Student Studies Servant Bells in House

Caitlin Hopkins, a graduate student in American Civilization at Harvard University, considered studying the Longfellows' kitchen stove or an item in the garden connected with servants, but she decided to base her project for Ulrich and Gaskell's course "Confronting Objects/Interpreting Culture" on the bell system used by the Longfellows to call their servants.

Bell pulls hung next to the fireplaces in many of the rooms so that a family member could summon a servant when he or she wished. The Longfellows would pull on the cord attached to a thin wire that ran through the walls to the kitchen or pantry, where it rang a metal bell.

Studying the servants' bells provides insight into the lives of the lesser-known occupants of 105 Brattle Street in those days. "The location of the bells in the kitchen and pantry indicates that servants would be expected to spend their time in those rooms unless engaged in specific tasks elsewhere," said Hopkins. That the Longfellows chose to request service with bells rather than shouting connotes "expectations for gentility and the tranquility of domestic space," Hopkins deduced.



Servant bell in the kitchen

tations for gentility and the tranquility of domestic space," Hopkins deduced.

Using the 1850 census records, Hopkins learned that the Longfellows had four servants that year. Three were women, two of whom could not read, and three of the servants were immigrants.

Focusing on the servants' bells led Hopkins to contemplate "the master-servant relationship between a native-born American woman and her immigrant employees in 1850. As products of an industrial process, the bells are connected to the rising factory system that furnished the Appleton and Longfellow families' wealth."

Bells, too, have religious, alarm, and musical associations, and Hopkins examined what they might have meant to the servants and to the family. She has also looked at Longfellow's poetic references to bells, such as in his poem "The Bells of Lynn."

Hopkins plans to expand her discussion of the servants' bells into a larger exploration of bells as both symbols of continuity and instruments of change in regard to immigration, labor, and the market.

### Recent Research at the House

*The Longfellow House archives contain over 700,000 manuscripts, letters, and signed documents and are used extensively by researchers from around the world. Here are a few recent researchers from among the several hundred who use the archives annually.*

Kathleen Verduin, professor of English at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, is exploring how Longfellow's interest in Dante worked itself into his and his family's daily life and casual conversation. At the House archives she looked at Frances Appleton Longfellow's papers, diaries, scrapbooks, and other documents. At Harvard's Houghton Library she studied Longfellow's copy of his translation of the *Divine Comedy* interleaved with his handwritten notes and corrections.

For a monograph about writers' houses in New England, Nicola J. Watson, a senior lecturer in literature at the Open University in Milton Keynes, England, came to the archives to research how Henry Longfellow's private dwelling was transformed into a museum. She looked at the Longfellow House Trust papers, documenting the efforts of the Trust to manage the House as a museum from 1913-1972.

In the Bowdoin College library, recent Bowdoin graduate Aisha Woodward found the nineteenth-century British clergyman John Dayman's translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (into Dante's original *terza rima* rhyme scheme) and a letter from Henry Longfellow to Dayman. Woodward came to the House archives to view Longfellow's copy of Dayman's translations of *Inferno* (1843) and the entire *Divine Comedy* (1865), which the translator had inscribed to Longfellow.

## Spotlight on an Object

In each issue of the newsletter, we focus on a particular object of interest in the Longfellow House collection. This time our spotlight shines on a bookplate designed for John Vassall.

Engraved by the well-known Boston silversmith Nathaniel Hurd, this rectangular black-and-white bookplate displays the coat of arms of John Vassall Jr., the builder of the Longfellow House. The Rococo foliated cartouche with a shaded background depicts a goblet (vase) under a sun (sol), a rebus-like play on the name Vassall. At the crest of the cartouche is a ship with three lowered sails, three small swallowtail pennants at the mast heads, and an ensign from a staff on the poop deck. This may have symbolized the family's trade with the West Indies or that the family had gained great wealth by helping to defeat the Spanish Armada. Beneath the cartouche is engraved "John Vassall Esqr."

Henry Longfellow's grandson Harry Dana assiduously collected material related to the Vassalls. He probably purchased this bookplate and bookplates of two other Vassall family members for the House archives in the late 1930s.



## Longfellow National Historic Site, National Park Service

Longfellow National Historic Site joined the national park system in 1972. Its many layers of history, distinguished architecture, gardens and grounds, and extensive museum collections represent the birth and flowering of our nation and continue to inspire school children and scholars alike. The Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House most notably served as headquarters for General George Washington in the early months of the Revolutionary War. It was later the home of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of America's foremost poets, and his family from 1837 to 1950.

*For information about the Longfellow House and a virtual tour, visit:*

[www.nps.gov/long](http://www.nps.gov/long)



## Friends of the Longfellow House

Since 1996, the Friends of the Longfellow House, a not-for-profit voluntary group, has worked with the National Park Service to support Longfellow National Historic Site by promoting scholarly access to collections, publications about site history, educational visitor programs, and advocacy for the highest quality preservation.

*To find out more about the Friends of the Longfellow House, visit:*

[www.longfellowfriends.org](http://www.longfellowfriends.org)

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