



# Charley Longfellow: Coming of Age in a Time of Turbulence

## Lesson 3: Family Tragedy (1861)

Letters, journal entries, news accounts, and personal effects challenge students to imagine how the tragic and unexpected death of Mrs. Longfellow affected the Longfellow family, and to consider how a researcher's personal experiences and biases can influence the interpretation of source material. Students process their findings by writing a poem.

Longfellow House-  
Washington's  
Headquarters NHS

**LESSON 3**  
**FAMILY TRAGEDY**  
**1861-1862**

**Teacher's Notes**

**Main Objective**

This lesson challenges students to imagine how the tragic and unexpected death of Fanny Longfellow affected the Longfellow family (particularly Henry), and to consider how a researcher's personal experiences and biases can influence their interpretation of sources and construction of historical hypotheses. Students analyze a variety of documents, then write a poem that expresses their thoughts on how Fanny's death affected Henry Longfellow and the Longfellow family.

**Guiding Question**

What happens in 1861 and what affect do you think it has on Charley Longfellow?

**Intended Learning Outcomes (Understandings)**

*By the close of the lesson, students will be able to:*

- Explain how Fanny Longfellow died.
- Describe the centrality of the family home to this event.
- Describe the impact Fanny Longfellow's death had on Henry and the family.
- Explain how the experiences and biases of a researcher influence the interpretation of source material and construction of historical hypotheses.

**Intended Learning Outcomes (Skills)**

*By the close of the lesson, students will be able to:*

- Draw inferences from primary sources to answer basic historical questions;
- Develop a hypothesis based on sound evidence and personal experience;
- Express research findings through poetry.

**Curriculum Connections**

*History/Social Science*

Concepts and Skills

8. Interpret the past within its own historical context rather than in terms of present-day norms and values.
10. Distinguish historical fact from opinion.

*English Language Arts*

## Reading and Literature Strand

8.24. Interpret a character's traits, emotions, or motivation and give supporting evidence from a text.

## Composition Strand

19.20. Write poems using poetic techniques, figurative language, and graphic elements.

### **Prior Knowledge**

- Relationship between Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Charley Longfellow
- Relationship between Fanny Appleton Longfellow and Charley Longfellow
- Role of Fanny Longfellow as mother and female head of the household
- Relationship between Fanny and Henry Longfellow

### **Teacher Preparation**

1. Review lesson plan
2. Ensure that students are familiar with content identified under "Prior Knowledge"
3. Review and introduce vocabulary to students
4. Divide class into six small groups
5. Copy Guiding Question Worksheet and Primary Source Packet for each group (6)
6. After small group research, post Guiding Question: "What impact does Fanny's death have on the Longfellow family?"

### **Time**

Two fifty-minute class periods and one homework assignment

### **Challenging Vocabulary**

The following words may be challenging for students. You may wish to introduce them prior to small group work.

Agony, anew, assuage, blight, consolations, consoled, divine, ether, inexpressible, laudanum, martyr, stake, resigned, sustainments

### **Materials**

#### For Teachers

- lesson plan
- Primary Source Packet and Guiding Question worksheet for each group
- paper and writing implement for each student
- Cast of Characters: Lesson 3
- Photograph of "WISHES" by Edith Longfellow

#### For Students

- Primary Source Packet for each group
- Guiding Question worksheet for each group
- paper and writing implement for each student
- Cast of Characters: “Family Tragedy”

### Activities

Divide students into six small research groups. Distribute a copy of the Primary Source Packet and Guiding Question Worksheet to each group. Point out that the Guiding Question is in the box at the top of the worksheet, and is followed by a series of supporting questions. Students examine the source materials in the Primary Source Packet and reflect back on what they already know from Lessons 1 & 2 to answer the questions. For homework, each student writes a poem that captures his/her personal response to the discoveries made during this exercise. A culminating discussion focuses on the impact Fanny’s death had on the family, and the role that a researcher’s personal experiences and biases play in the research process.

#### I. Introduction

- A. Read the following excerpt taken from “New Book for Children” (by Edith Longfellow, August 1861) to students:

WISHES

that mama wold come back  
that papa was well  
that I was well

See page 5 of lesson plan for a photograph of the book.

- B. Prompt students to speculate on why Edith (not quite 9 years old) wrote this. Let them know they will find out in this lesson.
- C. Divide the class into six small working groups. Each small group reviews all source materials.

#### II. Research

- A. Guiding Question: What happens in 1861 and what affect do you think it has on Charley Longfellow?
- B. Supporting Questions:
1. What happens to Fanny Longfellow and what is Henry’s role in the event?
  2. What is the sequence of movements through the house as described by Felton in his July 10, 1861 letter to Charles Sumner? Speculate on how the event might have influenced the family’s views and uses of this space.
  3. In the days following Fanny’s death, Henry writes an excerpt from an Alfred Lord Tennyson poem in his journal. Why does the poet borrow the words of another poet?
  4. What does Henry’s letter to Fanny’s sister (Mary Mackintosh) reveal about his mood, other losses affecting the family, and his concerns for the children?

5. Henry throws himself into writing, but not poetry. What does he begin doing? Why do you think he turns to this instead of poetry?
6. How does Henry feel as the months pass? What do you imagine keeps him focused?

III. Independent Activity – Write a Poem

- A. For homework, each student writes a poem that expresses his/her ideas on how Fanny's death affected the Longfellow family. The poem should not be about the event itself, rather it should communicate a hypothesis based on research findings and personal sensibilities.

IV. Conclusion

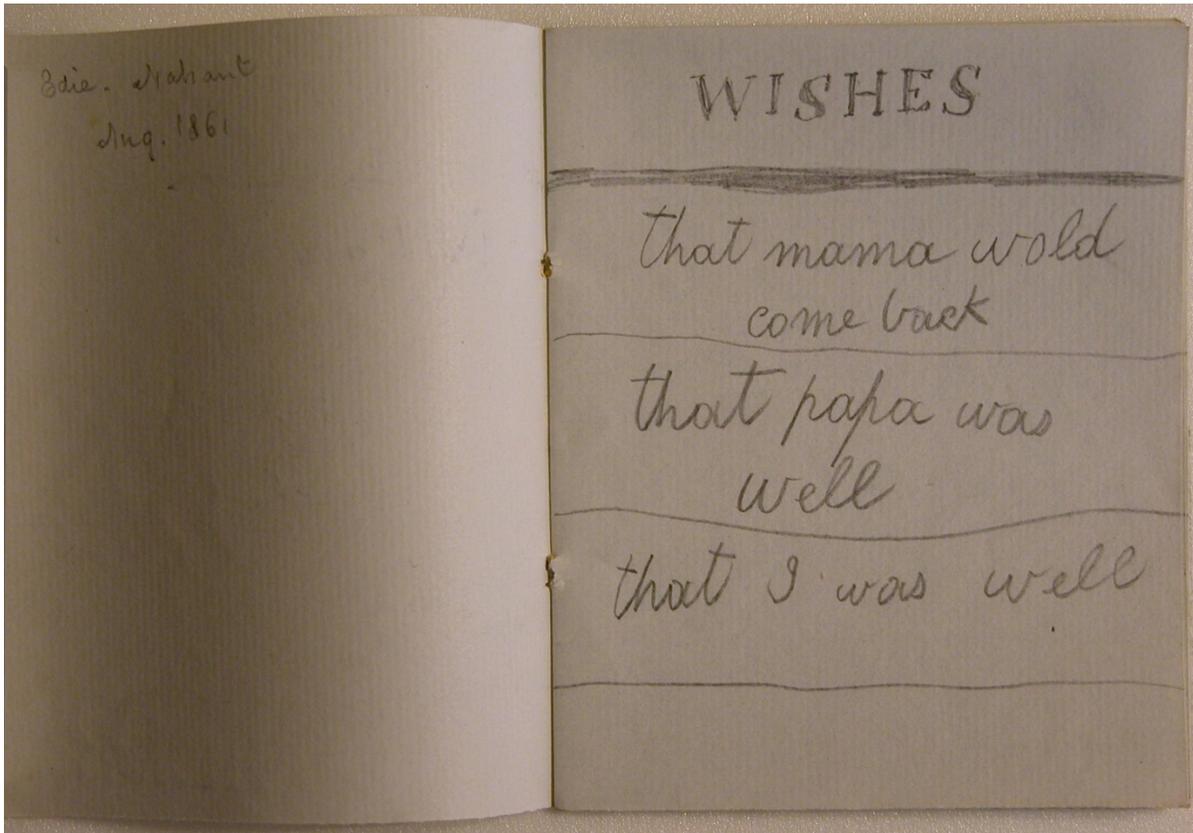
- A. Pair/Share: Students form pairs and read their poems to one another.
- B. Group discussion: As a large group, discuss the following:
1. What impact does Fanny's death have on the Longfellow family?
  2. To what extent did your experience at the Longfellow House influence either your hypothesis or your poem?
  3. To what extent were your own personal experiences and biases revealed through poetry writing?
- C. Re-read Edith's quote of August 1861 and ask students to describe what Edith means by it.

1. WISHES
2. that mama wold come back
3. that papa was well
4. that I was well

**Resources for further Research and Discovery**

Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Longfellow family plot on Indian Ridge

**“WISHES” by Edith Longfellow**



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Family Papers

## **Cast of Characters: Family Tragedy**

### **Principal Characters**

**Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (b. 1807):** [HWL] Henry Longfellow was a scholar and educator, translator, poet, compiler of anthologies, and husband to Frances Appleton Longfellow with whom he fathered six children. He was raised in Portland, Maine, and graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825. He was a professor of Modern Language at Bowdoin (1829-1835) and afterwards professor of French and Spanish literature at Harvard College. Longfellow was the first American poet to make substantial sums from his work, and at the turn of the 20th century, copies of his poems sold worldwide in excess of one million. During his lifetime, Longfellow was the most popular and widely read American poet in the world.

**Frances Appleton Longfellow (b. 1817):** [FAL] Daughter of Nathan Appleton, wife of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and mother to six Longfellow children. Fanny was raised in the fashionable Beacon Hill section of Boston, though the family traveled to Europe with some degree of regularity. Fanny married Henry Longfellow in July 1843, at which point the two set up home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Fanny was an avid reader and writer, and appreciated the fine arts, theater, and music.

**Charles Appleton Longfellow (b. 1844):** [CAL] The first born of the Longfellow children. In an 1848 journal entry, his mother describes Charley as one who “promises to be the man of action.”

### **Supporting Characters**

**Appleton, Nathan (1779-1861):** Fanny Appleton Longfellow’s father. Nathan Appleton was a member of the Boston Associates—a group of investors who financed the early Lowell textile manufacturing system. Nathan Appleton purchased the Brattle Street home for his daughter and her husband as a wedding present, and proceeded to finance their acquisition of furniture, carpets, and other textiles used in the house interior, as well as a stretch of land that connected the house to the Charles River.

**Dana Jr, Richard Henry (1815-1882):** Writer, lawyer, close friend and neighbor of Henry W. Longfellow, and father-in-law to Longfellow’s daughter Edith. After spending two years (1831–33) at Harvard, he shipped as a common sailor around Cape Horn to California. The narrative of this voyage, published as *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), was written to secure justice for the sailor and has become an American classic of the days of sailing ships. Dana graduated from Harvard in 1837 and entered law practice. Active in politics, he helped found the Free-Soil party and represented escaped slaves who became fugitives with the passage of the Compromise of 1850 (Fugitive Slave Act).

**Dolben, Richard:** Gardener for the Longfellow family.

**Dunn, Mary:** Nurse or nanny for the Longfellow children from October 1846 – October 1850. She was born in Newfoundland, Canada.

**Felton, Cornelius (1807 – 1862):** Close friend of Henry Longfellow and frequent guest at the Longfellow House. Felton graduated from Harvard in 1827, served as professor of Greek (1832-1834), then assumed the Eliot Professor of Greek Literature (1834-1860). He was appointed president of Harvard College in 1860, a position he held for two years until his death on February 26, 1862.

**Freiligrath, Ferdinand (1810 – 1876):** A radical German political poet of the 19th century and friend of Henry Longfellow.

**Greenleaf, Mary Longfellow (1816 – 1902):** Henry Longfellow’s younger sister. Mary married cotton trader James Greenleaf and lived down the street from Henry and Fanny Longfellow half of the year, and in New Orleans the other half. Mary’s brother, Sam Longfellow, described James as a Copperhead.

**Hillard, George Stillman (1808 – 1879):** Close friend of Henry Longfellow; lawyer in practice with Charles Sumner.

**Longfellow, Alice M. (b. 1850):** Henry and Fanny Longfellow’s second daughter.

**Longfellow, Annie (b. 1855):** Henry and Fanny Longfellow’s fourth daughter.

**Longfellow, Edith (b. 1853):** Henry and Fanny Longfellow’s third daughter.

**Longfellow, Ernest (b. 1845):** Henry and Fanny Longfellow’s second son. In 1848 Fanny Longfellow described Erny as the one who “promises to be the poet.”

**Longfellow, Fanny (b. 1847):** Henry and Fanny Longfellow’s first daughter.

**Longfellow, Reverend Samuel (1819-1892):** Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s youngest brother and biographer, Samuel was a Unitarian minister and author of many hymns still in use today. Sam believed in transcendentalism, temperance, and women’s suffrage, and strongly opposed the institution of slavery. Sam lived with Henry and Fanny Longfellow while attending Harvard (1844-1846), and continued to live with the family on-and-off until his death in 1892.

**Longfellow, Stephen (1805-1850):** Henry Longfellow’s oldest brother.

**Longfellow, Zilpah (1778-1851):** Henry Longfellow’s mother. Daughter of Brigadier General Peleg Wadsworth who served with Paul Revere in the Revolution and later became a member of the Massachusetts Senate and Federal Congress. Zilpah married Stephen Longfellow in 1804 - two years after the death of her sister Eliza - Stephen’s first fiancée. Zilpah Longfellow mothered six children. The home in which she raised her children is in Portland, Maine. Today, the house is a museum operated by the Maine Historical Society.

**Mackintosh, Mary Appleton (1813-1889):** Fanny Appleton's older sister. Mary lived in England with her husband, Robert, and their four children. She and Fanny communicated regularly about parenting, children, and family affairs.

**Patten, Mary:** Housekeeper and cook for the Longfellow family from September 1845 – October 1855.

**Pierce, Anne Longfellow (1810 – 1901):** Henry Longfellow's sister. In 1832, she married George Washington Pierce, a classmate and close friend of Henry. Following the death of her husband in 1835, she returned to her parent's home in Portland. Anne lived in the Portland house the remainder of her life. Henry, Fanny and their children made annual visits, usually in the summer, to visit Anne in Maine.

### Guiding Question

What happens in 1861 and what affect do you think it has on Charley Longfellow?

### Supporting Questions:

(UNDERLINE key words and phrases to help you answer the question.)

1. What happens to Fanny Longfellow and what is Henry's role in the event?

- LETTER: Cornelius Felton to Charles Sumner - July 10, 1861
- OBJECT: Edith's curl and envelope
- MEDIA: Notice [Funeral of Mrs. Longfellow] - July 13, 1861
- LETTER: Cornelius Felton to Charles Sumner - July 21, 1861

2. What is the sequence of movements through the house as described by Felton in his July 10, 1861 letter to Charles Sumner? Speculate on how the event might have influenced the family's views and uses of these spaces.

- DOCUMENT: Ground floor plan of Longfellow House
- OBJECT: Desk and chair in Library

3. In the days following Fanny's death, Henry writes an excerpt from an Alfred Lord Tennyson poem in his journal. Why does the poet borrow the words of another poet?

- JOURNAL: Henry Longfellow - July 10-13, 1861

4. What does Henry's letter to Fanny's sister (Mary Mackintosh) reveal about his mood, other losses affecting the family, and his concerns for the children?

- LETTER: Henry Longfellow to Mary Mackintosh - August 18, 1861

5. Henry throws himself into writing, but not poetry. What does he begin doing? Why do you think he turns to this instead of poetry?

- JOURNAL: Henry Longfellow - February 20 & 24, 1862

6. How does Henry feel as the months pass? What do you imagine keeps him focused?

- JOURNAL: Henry Longfellow – September 16 & October 5
- LETTER: Sam Longfellow to Henry Longfellow – May 28, 1862
- JOURNAL: Henry Longfellow – July 10, 1862

## Primary Source Packet

### LETTERS

#### **Cornelius Felton to Charles Sumner, July 10, 1861**

...Yesterday afternoon, she [Fanny] was sealing a small paper package, containing a lock of one of her children's hair. The light sleeve took fire; in an instant she was wrapped in a sheet of flame, flying from the library to the front room where Longfellow was sitting. He sprang up, threw a rug around her, but it was not large enough. She broke away, flew towards the entry; then turned and rushed towards him. He received her in his arms, and so protected her face, and part of her person; but she was dreadfully burned...She was carried to her room; physician sent for. She bore the agony like a martyr at the stake.

...(at 10 minutes past ten the next morning she died. Henry was severely burned.)

...His hands and face suffered most severely. He has been under ether and laudanum ever since: wanders: thinks he is growing idiotic, begs not to be sent to an asylum; could not see Fanny when she was dying.

#### **Cornelius Felton to Charles Sumner, July 21, 1861**

...I passed the forenoon today with Longfellow...He looks much better than he did two days ago. His face is still swollen, and he cannot yet shave...He talks readily and with interest upon the topics of the day... But he dreads his recovery from the physical pain of his wounds: "then," he says, "then I shall have to take up the great burden, and I do not know how I shall bear it..."

#### **Henry Longfellow to Mary Appleton Mackintosh, August 18, 1861**

Nahant, Aug 18. 1861.

Dearest Mary,

I will try to write you a line to-day, if only to thank you for your affectionate letter, which touched and consoled me much.

How I am alive after what my eyes have seen, I know not. I am at least patient, if not resigned; and thank God hourly – as I have from the beginning – for the beautiful life we led together, and that I loved her more and more to the end.

I feel that you and only you knew her thoroughly. You can understand what an inexpressible delight she was to me, always and in all things. I never looked at her without a thrill of pleasure; - she never came into a room where I was without my heart beating a little quicker, nor went out without feeling something of the light went with her. I loved her so entirely, and I know she was very happy...

I am afraid I am selfish in my sorrow; but not an hour passes without my thinking of you, and of how you will bear the double woe of a father's and a sister's death at once. Dear, affectionate old man! The last day of his life, all day long, he sat holding a lily in his hand, a flower from Fanny's funeral...

For the future I have no plans. I can not yet lift my eyes in that direction. I only look backward, not forward. The only question is, what will be best for the children? I shall think of that when I get back to Cambridge...

My heart aches and bleeds sorely for the poor children. To lose such a mother, and all the divine influences of her character and care. They do not know how great their loss is, but I do. God will provide. His will be done! Full of affection, ever most truly,

H.W.L.

**Samuel Longfellow to Henry Longfellow, May 28, 1862**

Frankfort, May 28th [1862]

Wednesday night

Dear Henry

...I received your letter in Paris. I felt anew from it & from the portrait what a terrible experience you had passed through, what a blight had fallen on your life. I can think how the springs of life must be broken, how every effort, every plan, every purpose may seem useless and motiveless since she is not here to share & enjoy & approve. But life is not without its springs & its motives while your children are with you. And that is not all. I trust you are feeling more & more that she is not out of reach of the consciousness of & the unbroken interest in all that interests you. This faith only, for which we have every reason, can I think assuage the sense of loss & fill the void. May it be yours with all its sustainments & consolations - - with best love to the children,  
Affectionately yours,

S. L.

**HENRY W. LONGFELLOW JOURNAL**

**July 10, 1861**

“Sleep sweetly, tender heart, in peace;  
Sleep, holy spirit blessed soul.  
While the stars burn, the moons increase  
And the great ages onward role.

“Sleep till the end, true soul and sweet,  
Nothing come to thee new or strange.

Sleep full of rest from head to feet|  
Lie still, dry dust, [secure] of change”

### **September 16, 1861**

The terrible days go by and bring me no relief. Nothing interests me.

### **October 5, 1861**

A week of delicious weather, the glimmer of golden leaves in the sunshine, the lilac hedge shot with crimson creeper, the river writing its silver S in the meadow; everything without fault of loveliness, but within me the hunger the famine of the heart!

### **February 20, 1862**

Translated the beautiful Canto XXV of the Paradiso.

### **February 24, 1862**

Translated Canto XXX of the Paradiso.

### **July 9, 1862**

That fatal day.

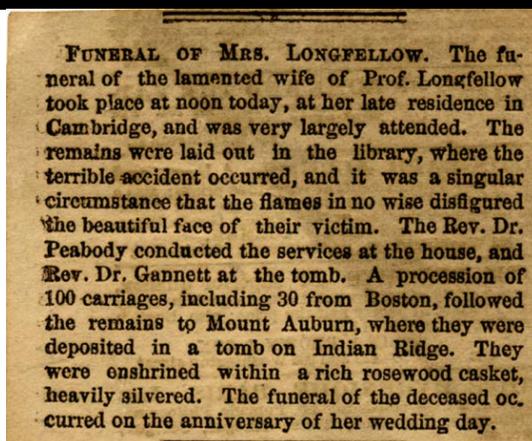
### **July 10, 1862**

I can make no record of the days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps some day God will give me peace.

### **July 13, 1862**

The Wedding and the funeral!

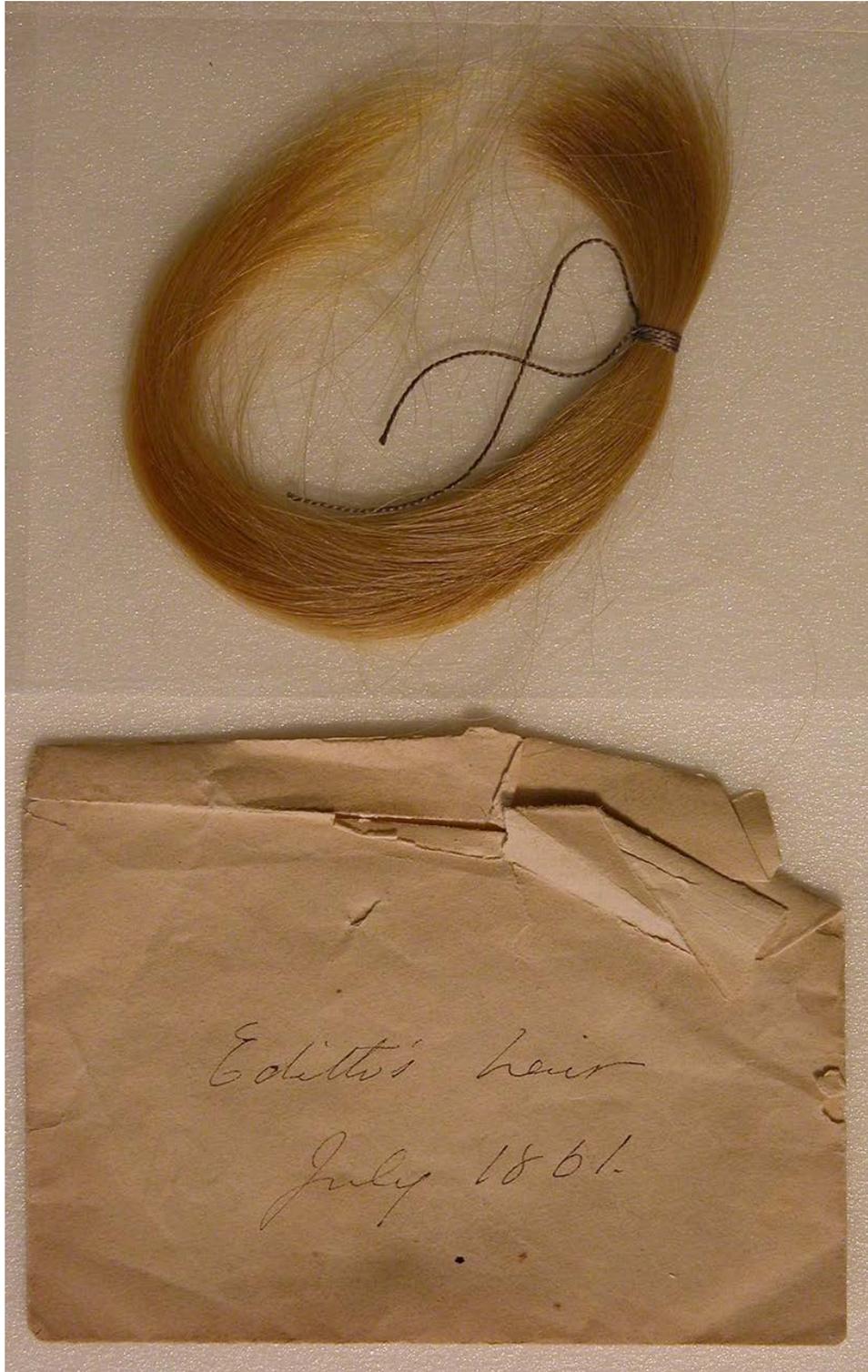
## **MEDIA: NOTICE [FUNERAL OF MRS. LONGFELLOW] - JULY 13, 1861**



Frances Elizabeth Appleton Longfellow Papers

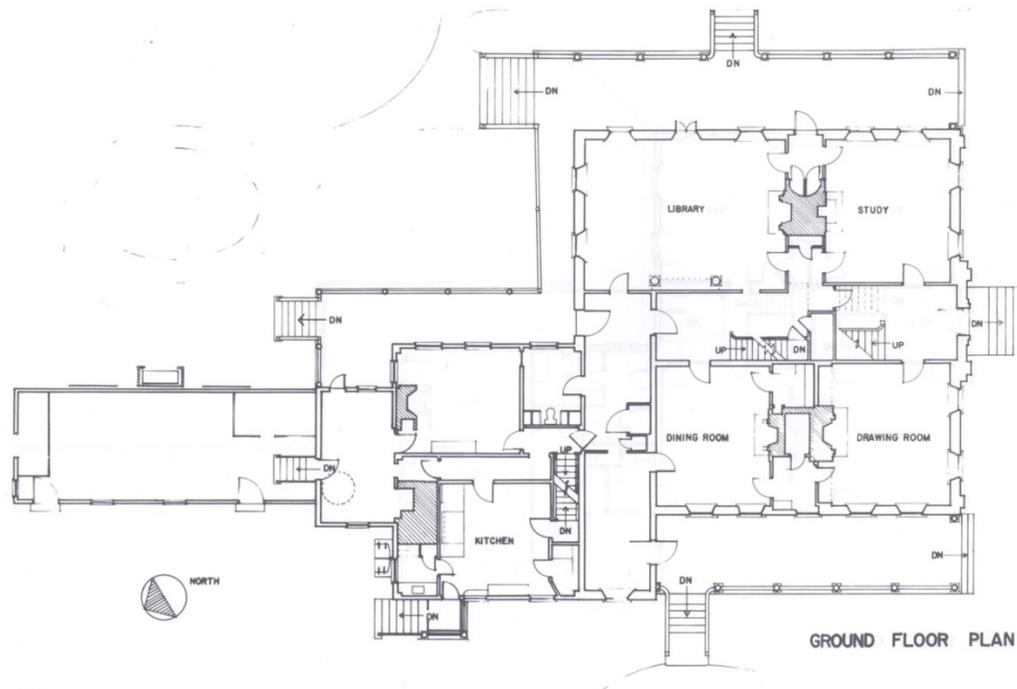
**IMAGES**

**Edith's curl and envelope**



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Family Papers

## Ground floor plan of Longfellow House



Historic American Buildings Survey Plan, National Park Service

## Desk and Chair in Library

