



The Longfellow Washington Bulletin

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Frances Appleton Longfellow (1817-1861)

On October 6, 1817, Frances Appleton was born in Boston. She grew up to marry the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and they enjoyed eighteen years together in the grand house on Brattle Street. In 2017 we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of Fanny Longfellow's birth and exploring her life.

After marriage, Fanny threw herself into caring for her household and family. She did not write for publication or openly push for political change, but she was an educated, lively, and observant woman. She not only supported her

husband during the most successful part of his career but became a popular figure in his literary circle. Her papers, preserved at the House, offer insight into the society of mid-1800s Cambridge and into her thoughts as an individual.

In 1956 Edward Wagenknecht edited a volume of Fanny's letters and journals. More recently, Diana Korzenik (founder of the Friends) published articles about her artistic education, evident in her illustrated travel diaries. We think Fanny Appleton Longfellow deserves more attention, and this issue of the Bulletin explores the many facets of her life.

The "Fanny Papers" and a New Finding Aid

One of the exceptional archival collections available for study at Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters is the Frances Elizabeth Appleton Longfellow Papers. While the majority of her husband's papers were transferred to Harvard's Houghton Library, Fanny's personal papers remained at the House: nearly five linear feet of papers that include thirty-one journals and notebooks, almost 800 letters from Fanny and 1,000 letters to her, as well as financial documents, transcriptions of poetry, pressed flowers, recipes, and other papers.

Beyond these archival holdings, the museum collections include well over 100 of Fanny's drawings, 119 books with her name, and personal items ranging from writing desks to locks of her daughters' hair. Her portrait was taken as a young woman in oil paint and in marble and captured as an adult in pencil and photography. Together these provide insight into Fanny Longfellow's youth and later life, including her search for self and encounters with loss, her delight in European travel, her life with Henry Longfellow, and her incisive commentary on society and the increasingly fraught politics of the nineteenth century.

As part of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of her birth, a new edition of the Finding Aid to the Frances

Elizabeth Appleton Longfellow Papers has just been released! This fourth edition features an updated and expanded biography, newly incorporated material, and a list of her correspondents. Recognizing the potential of her

archival materials for research, other projects indexing and transcribing Fanny's papers have been underway since 2010. Volunteer Ted Hansen recently completed indexing the Fanny Appleton Longfellow correspondence and is continuing his work with Fanny's collected papers. A project to transcribe Fanny's six European Grand Tour journals (1835-1837) has been undertaken by staff and volunteers Patricia Grandieri and Nancy Jones, and is over halfway complete. Transcriptions of Fanny's outgoing correspondence by Kate Hanson Plass, Museum Technician, have just been finished. This work has made clear the extent of Fanny Longfellow's keen intellect and her wide-ranging curiosity, and how those qualities shaped her life with Henry Longfellow.

Researchers interested in studying Fanny Longfellow's papers are welcome to contact the House and schedule a visit. The archives are open throughout the year, even in months when the House is not open to drop-in visitors.

—Christine Wirth and Kate Hanson Plass



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For more information, please visit www.friendsoflongfellowhouse.org for additional information linked to this issue, including additional portraits of Fanny Appleton and sketches by her.

Visit www.nps.gov/long for information on visiting the House and events there, as well as photographs, descriptions, and finding aids for its collections, garden, and archive.

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Since 1996 the Friends of the Longfellow House–Washington’s Headquarters, a not-for-profit volunteer group, has worked with the National Park Service to promote educational visitor programs, scholarly access to collections, publications about the Longfellow–Washington site’s history, and advocacy for preservation.

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The Longfellow–Washington site became part of the U.S. National Park Service system in 1972. Built in 1759, the House’s many layers of history reflect the birth and cultural flowering of the nation. The House served as headquarters for General George Washington in the Revolutionary War. From 1837 to 1950 it was home to popular poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his family.

Growing Up Appleton

Beloved daughter, impetuous youngster, inquisitive and bright young woman, Fanny Appleton was raised in privilege on Boston’s Beacon Hill. The family’s wealth provided riches and opportunities, but Fanny’s growing up was also quite ordinary. She grew within her family’s love, and as she matured she sought self-understanding.

Born in 1817, Fanny was the fourth of Nathan and Maria Theresa Gold Appleton’s five children. Nathan was already successful, and his wealth would grow dramatically through far-sighted investments in the new cotton mills in Lowell, and through further investments in mills and railroads. The family’s elegant townhouse at 39 Beacon Street, built for Nathan by Alexander Parris in 1819, was filled with books, European paintings, and fine furniture.

The children were: Tom (born in 1812), Mary (1813), Charles (1815), Fanny, and George (1826). They were close friends, corresponding when apart.

The Appletons prized education for both sons and daughters, sending the boys to the Round Hill Academy in Northampton. Fanny had private tutors, and was enrolled at local academies. She studied Geography, Grammar, Arithmetic, Latin, French, and Greek history. Her wide reading included Shelley, Coleridge, Fenelon, Goethe, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Fanny’s other close relationships included “Aunt Sam” (Mary Lekain Gore) and Uncle Sam Appleton who lived next-door, and Maria’s Berkshires family, whom Fanny visited frequently with her mother. The author Catharine Maria Sedgwick was among those relatives, and in 1835 Fanny wrote her teasingly:



You have known me only as the wild, romping girl, who used to scour Berkshire hills...but since I have arrived at years of discretion how little have I seen of that friend who had half my heart as long as I can remember!

In 1833 Maria died of consumption, and those family relationships provided critical support. Nathan returned home from serving as a representative in Congress. Later that summer he took the family on a tour to Niagara Falls. Fanny recorded her experiences in sketchbook and journal. This ten-year practice documented her travels, inner growth, and the deep consolation she found in nature. Departing the Berkshires in 1835 she wrote:

Nature has been the one friend I have vainly sought elsewhere—& here where it is grander & lovelier than many mortal spirits, I have basked in its every shadow with a visionary’s fervor.

In October 1835 Fanny’s brother Charles also died of consumption, and again Nathan was moved to travel, this

time taking his family on a long-delayed European grand tour. In Switzerland, Fanny met Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Though she enjoyed the man’s company, to her he was simply “The Prof.”

Through the summers of 1838 and 1839, Mary and Fanny experimented with independence, renting a house in Stockbridge and entertaining. Fanny wrote her best friend Emmeline Austin: “we are most satisfactorily established...& have already been favored with nearly all the male visitors the place affords...” By the end of 1839 Mary was married to Scotsman Robert Mackintosh. It would be another three and a half years before Fanny would make that same commitment.

—C.W.

When Henry Met Fanny

As a seventeen-year-old, Fanny wrote to a friend: “I have often felt a sort of presentiment that I should marry somebody, disapproved of by all my friends.” Is it any wonder, then, that her courtship with the universally liked Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would take seven years?

The two met in Switzerland in 1836. In her journal for August 2, Fanny wrote, “Have a nice walk in the P.M. with Mr L to the old bridge, sketch the cloister spires from a wall, then on the other side of the river, a dark picturesque



cottage. A nice talk—delicious twilight.” The scenes that Fanny sketched on that day appear on this page.

Henry told friends that he had traveled with a fair lady “whom I now love passionately.” Even before she returned to Boston, Fanny was peppered with questions about the “Professor.” Her Aunt Sam claimed that Henry was “lively as a bird” and her “beau ideal for a husband.” Her family began to wonder if she would be the “last rose of Summer left blooming alone, all its lovely companions” married and gone. Fanny remained aloof and unconvinced. When Henry later reflected about the start of their relationship, he called it, “that season of love and restlessness, of hope and fear.”

By 1838, their relationship began to sour. It seems that Henry made his feelings known to Fanny and she did not return them. Henry wrote to Mary Appleton, Fanny’s sister, that he would always love Fanny as his own soul, but that when they were last together, “we left one another without understanding.” To his friends, he said that Fanny was now “as cool as an East wind.” In 1839, he hinted that there might have been a refused proposal:

The lady says she will not! I say she shall! It is not pride, but the madness of passion. I visit her; some-times pass an evening alone with her. But not one word is ever spoken on a certain topic.... So we both stand eyeing each other like lions.

Henry made matters worse for himself by firing “off a rocket,” hoping to sway Fanny in her “citadel.” This was the

Fanny Appleton Longfellow

publication of *Hyperion*, a thinly-veiled autobiographical romance about a young American who travels to Europe and meets a woman who ultimately refuses his marriage proposal. Henry felt that his heart had been “put into the printing press and stamped onto the pages.” She felt the story was “desultory, objectless, a thing of shreds and patches like the Author’s mind” and that it lacked the “zest of novelty...as we have had the misfortune to have been behind the scenes.” When her cousin reported on her fame as far away as Cincinnati, Fanny retorted, “My vanity is *not* flattered because...the heroine of H... is as unlike me as most creations of the fancy.” References to Longfellow disappear from Fanny’s correspondence over the next few years.

Then in 1843, the wind changed, and Fanny reportedly wrote Henry a letter saying, “you must come and comfort me Mr. Longfellow.” She was 25, her brother was traveling in Europe, her sister had married and moved to England, and she felt alone in her Beacon Hill home. We don’t know what changed Fanny’s mind, or why she reached out to Henry. The next complete letter states: “Oh come to me my dearest Henry...& let me tell thee how wholly I am thine.”

The two were engaged on May 10. “This news will astonish you doubtless,” Fanny told an aunt, but “my heart has always been made of tenderer stuff than anybody believed.” In Henry, Fanny finally found a companion: “It is not common for two to meet in this world every portion of whose natures harmonize.” The two married on July 13 in her parlor, Fanny wearing orange blossoms in her hair.



Fanny gave the sketchbook she had filled in Switzerland to Henry on their wedding day. She inscribed it, “Mary Ashburton to Paul Flemming”—the names of their alter egos in *Hyperion*.

Fanny’s brother Tom reflected happily on the marriage: “She is a nature that ripens late and she will be far happier than if she married earlier. With her, to be understood and to understand is to love.”

—Anna Christie

Meet a Friend: Archives Volunteer Ted Hansen

Researchers studying the Longfellow family papers in the House archives benefit greatly from the work of **Ted Hansen**. And he has been a great colleague for both the staff and the Friends. We talked to Ted about his work with Fanny Longfellow's letters and more.

What's your professional background, and what brought you to the Longfellow House archives?

I'm a retired professor from Salem State University—business management, to be exact. I was active in the Cambridge Historical Society, where I indexed the letters to Sarah Bull. Her brother married Annie Allegra Longfellow, and they lived next door. I enjoyed that work. I became president of the CHS from 2003 to 2009. Then I came here to Longfellow House, feeling that I wanted to do some more volunteer work. Jim Shea steered me into the archives, and I never left.

What do you do in the Longfellow archives?

I'm indexing letters. I record who each the letter is to and from, what's the date, where the letter was sent from, a brief summary of the contents, and where in the archives it's located. When possible, I actually quote from a letter in the index if I think it's cleverly written or on an important subject.

The first letters I indexed were Sam Longfellow's [Henry's brother], working under Anita Israel's supervision. There were not that many. Very soon after I finished Sam's letters I went directly to Fanny's outgoing correspondence. When I finished that, I did her incoming correspondence.

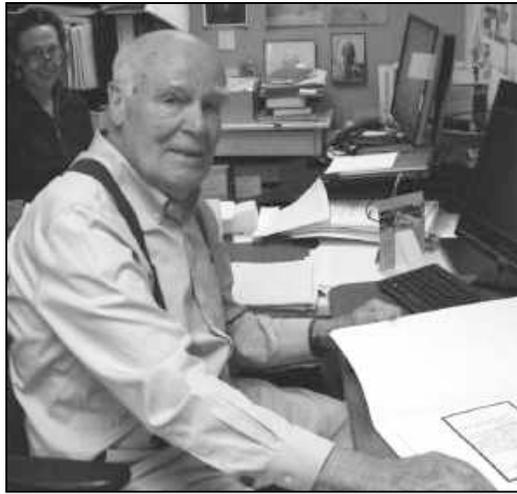
You can see how the letters change as they go along. One of the first letters Fanny wrote was to her brother Tom when she was eleven, and she said, "I do not associate with boys." Her last letter was shortly before she died.

Some of the letters are very hard to read, partly because of people's handwriting and partly because in that era they wrote "crossed letters" to save paper—writing a full page, then turning it ninety degrees and writing more lines across the first ones. That's very difficult to read. Some of the writing is too faint. Other letters are in amazingly good condition because they used acid-free paper.

I'm now doing her sister Mary's letters.

What have you learned about Fanny Longfellow?

Fanny's letters reveal a wealthy woman of the time. One thing of interest is how long it took for her to recognize Henry Longfellow as worthy of marrying.



Henry thought of Fanny as an intellectual woman. She would engage on religious matters in a very serious and thoughtful way—she went into theological concepts in her letters, particularly with Samuel Longfellow. She doesn't just say, "I liked that sermon," but she says what exactly she liked and disliked. She gave Sam advice for his own preaching. Maybe all the wealthy young ladies did this, but that struck me.

Fanny was also almost a literary critic. In her letters she comments on various literary works that came her way—not just saying what she had

read but analyzing and looking into what the author was trying to say.

Very soon after Fanny and Henry were married, the children came. And quickly. Many of her letters then are reports on commonplace family events. Fanny wrote wonderful descriptions of her children. Especially in letters to Emmeline Austin she also opens up about herself and talks about her frustrations of being tied down to the House.

Any stories you enjoy tracing in the letters?

The two people she wrote to most often are Emmeline Austin and her brother, Thomas Gold Appleton. She was younger than Tom by five years, but she sort of lectures him: *when will you settle down, why won't you come home?* She really opened up to Emmeline, who had married and moved to mid-state New York. That separation was hard for Fanny, but of course if they had lived in the same neighborhood they would have chatted in person and we wouldn't have the letters.

Fanny developed very strong feelings in the political realm, especially as the Civil War approached. That wasn't always popular with the industrialists of the day, who depended on southern cotton. Compared with her economic peers, who had no use for abolitionists, Fanny just decries slavery and supports the Republicans, who were the party of reform.

What advice do you have for other people interested in the Longfellow archives?

I enjoy it. I come in twice a week, usually. I enjoy working with Chris Wirth—I'll be reading a letter, and I'll come across a name. I'm sitting right next to Chris's desk. I might say, "I wonder who this person is"; she'll get on Google and find out. "What was 19th-century homeopathy?" Fanny got involved in that—it was very fashionable. I enjoy digging into this stuff. It gives me a picture of what a particular stratum of life was like in that era.

Fanny Longfellow and Motherhood

On her first anniversary, Fanny Longfellow wrote, “What a year this day completed! What a golden chain of months & days, & with this diamond clasp—born a month ago!” The diamond clasp was the couple’s first of six children, Charley. Motherhood became one of the defining roles of Fanny’s adult life. She proudly nursed her children, oversaw their education, and worked to instill religious and moral values in them.

In 1848, Fanny began keeping a journal titled “Chronicles of the Children of Castle Craigie.” Here she recorded her three children’s lives, from the mundane to the profound. In January: “Charley busy driving the sofa for omnibus. Erny as omnibus-boy.” In April: “Charley said to day at the window, ‘How very tidy the river is’—i.e., how full of tide the meadows being overflowed.” In May: “Fan toddling and singing and the boys too noisy for this quiet neighborhood.”

In September, seventeen-month-old Fan died of a sudden illness. The “Chronicles” document a mother’s overwhelming grief, as well as the first real experience of loss for her two boys. Fanny wrote: “Every day our burden becomes harder to bear. She is everywhere. In the garden I see only her merry steps & little hands grasping the flowers with glee shouting ‘pretty’ & then I see her with them in her cold hands. But she is playing with the flowers of Paradise I fondly trust.” Fanny used the experience to teach her two boys about religion: “C. seems

pleased with the thought he offers them [prayers] to Him with whom baby is living.”

Fanny was her children’s first teacher. When her eldest was five years old, she reported to a sister-in-law: “Charley says his lessons to me now daily—geography he likes best, as I teach him countries by their product, & he likes to make his finger bring tea from China (on the map) gold from California &c.”

In a family where literature was of primary importance, Fanny read often to the children. In 1852 she told her friend Emmeline Austin Wadsworth:

It is not easy to find very good ones [books] for a young child, & I remember, in my despair, I often thought of writing some myself knowing so well what pleased best my own children. They liked always stories of simple truth, without being spiced with horrors or with fairy fancy, but as they get older their tastes are less innocent.

Fanny also read the children the Rollo books by Jacob Abbott, the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and fables. She valued that activity so much that she even posed for a daguerreotype photographer with Charley, Erny, and a book, as shown here.

The epigram Fanny chose from Dante for the front of each “Chronicles” journal reflects her desire to capture her children’s earliest years: “Pensa che questo di mai non raggiorna,” or “Think that this day will never dawn again.”

—K.H.P.



“Proud to Be the Pioneer to Less Suffering”

Fanny Longfellow took a bold step as a mother on April 7, 1847, when she gave birth to her third child. In addition to a midwife, she asked to be attended by Dr. Nathan Keep, a dentist who knew how to dull pain by administering ether. Fanny thus became the first American woman to give birth with anesthetic to numb pain.

At the time, anesthesia (a term invented by family friend Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes) was controversial. Some people viewed it as dangerous, others as unnatural. Physicians were feuding over who should get credit for pioneering the practice. Fanny addressed those disputes in a letter to her sister-in-law Anne Longfellow Pierce:

I am very sorry you all thought me so rash & naughty in trying the ether. Henry’s faith gave me courage & I had heard such a thing had succeeded abroad where the surgeons extend this great blessing much more boldly & universally than our timid doctors. Two other ladies I know have since followed my example successfully & I feel proud to be the pioneer to less suffering for poor weak womankind. This is certainly the greatest blessing of this age & I am glad to have lived at the time of its coming & in the country which gives it to the world, but it is sad that one’s gratitude cannot be bestowed on worthier men than the first discoverers, that is men above quarreling over such a gift of god. As one of my brother’s lady friends abroad, a proud, noble woman says, one would like to have the bringer of such a blessing represented by some grand lofty figure like Christ, the divine suppressor of spiritual suffering as this of physical.

The healthy new baby was named Fanny after her mother and nicknamed Fan. Unfortunately, she died after turning one, the only Longfellow child not to reach adulthood.



Fanny as a Poetic Muse

Even before she was married to America's most popular poet, Fanny Appleton inspired poetry. An admirer, Franklin Dexter, wrote "At Papanti's Ball" in 1838, describing Fanny and her sister:

*arm in arm the sisters stood, like sylphs of night and day.
Their brightest dreams were not more bright, their sweetest not so sweet,
As thus to see those lovely forms like night and morning meet.*

A decade later, a friend, Maria White Lowell, sent Fanny a condolence poem, "The Alpine Sheep," for the loss of a child. In this empathetic message, Lowell recalled what had helped when she lost her own daughter the previous year:

*When on my ear your loss was knelled,
And tender sympathy upburst,
A little spring from memory welled,
Which once had quenched my bitter thirst.*

Also among the poems that Fanny inspired are pieces by James Russell Lowell and a couple of mystery admirers.

Of course, Henry wrote some poems about Fanny—notably the sonnet "The Evening Star," printed below. That poem in turn inspired Henry's niece Mary King Longfellow to paint the watercolor shown here.

Fanny also inspired poetry in the sense that she urged her husband to write. Henry attributed one poem in particular, "The Arsenal at Springfield," to an idea that Fanny first shared with him during their honeymoon. In reference to this piece, Fanny described herself as a "spur" to his Pegasus and she advocated for

him to write a peace poem. She seemed charmed by her role as poetic muse and many of the above poems were saved and are in her personal collection at the House today. —A.C.



A Tragedy Beyond Dispute: The Death of Fanny Longfellow

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said he trembled when passing the Longfellows' home, "for those who lived there had their happiness so perfect that no change, of all the change which must come to them, could fail to be for the worse."

On July 9, 1861, this pessimistic prophecy came true. A friend of the family described what happened:

An hour since I saw the lifeless body of Fanny Longfellow! My God! That such a tragedy should have ended such happiness. Yesterday afternoon, she 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 round her, but it was not large enough. She broke away, fled toward the entry; then turned and rushed toward him. He received her in his arms, and so protected her face, and part of her person; but she was dreadfully burned; the dress was entirely consumed... She was carried to her room; physician sent for. She bore the agony like a martyr dying at the stake.

Henry plunged into depths of grief he feared would turn into madness. His friend described him as "dreadfully but not fatally burned. His hands & 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..."

Joseph Thorp, Annie Longfellow's husband, recorded a different story in 1918. Annie, then five years old, had been sitting in the window seat to her mother's right, playing with

a box of "parlor matches". These matches lacked the safety features of modern matches, and one accidentally ignited, starting the deadly fire. Annie, whose middle name Allegra was Italian for happy, would occasionally say she had killed her mother (a statement that always drew a rebuke from her father). She underwent such a personality change that her father told her, "I used to call you Allegra; I shall now call you Penserosa." —Garrett Cloer

The Evening Star

*Lo! in the painted oriel of the West,
Whose panes the sunken sun incarnadines,
Like a fair lady at her casement, shines
The evening star, the star of love and rest!
And then anon she doth herself divest
Of all her radiant garments, and reclines
Behind the sombre screen of yonder pines,
With slumber and soft dreams of love oppressed.
O my beloved, my sweet Hesperus!
My morning and my evening star of love!
My best and gentlest lady! even thus,
As that fair planet in the sky above,
Dost thou retire unto thy rest at night,
And from thy darkened window fades the light.*

Preserving Fanny Appleton Longfellow's Memory Today

Fanny Appleton Longfellow's legacy lives on in many ways—in her descendants, in her writing and the poems she inspired, and in the house she made into a family home. At Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters, the National Park Service preserves her journals and letters, cares for her clothing and portraits, and shares stories of her life with visitors.



The Friends of Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters supports that work by raising funds for public events, publications, fellowships, exhibits, and special projects that federal funding does not always make possible.

One project related to Fanny Longfellow is the conservation of a beautiful yellow evening gown in the House's textile collection. Experts tell us that it is rare for silk gowns from the late 1850s to be so well preserved. Without special care, however, the House will never be able to display this delicate garment for visitors. So we have made conserving this

gown one of our special projects, on top of the Summer Festival, annual lectures, and other ways we help to bring life to the Longfellows' house.

By joining the Friends or renewing your membership today, or by making financial gifts directed to the gown conservation project, you can help to preserve the treasures of Fanny's house and history for generations to come.

We give special thanks to these generous supporters.

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Spotlight on an Object: Portrait of a Sister

This portrait of Fanny Appleton was created by her brother Thomas Gold Appleton, possibly painted in 1832 when Fanny was only fourteen years old. It was an effort not well received by some acquaintances. In a letter written that same year, Fanny's friend Susan Benjamin commented: "I do not think that your brother has flattered you at all."

The Appleton family appreciated the likeness enough to have it included in an exhibition at the Boston Athenaeum in June 1832. Fanny wrote to her father Nathan in Washington, D.C.: "The exhibition [*sic*] is very good, no perfectly bad pictures. My visage makes a display there, but we are enraged that it is placed in such a bad light and position, as to show it to great disadvantage."

The portrait never hung in the Longfellow house during Fanny's or Henry's lifetimes. It is likely the same painting referenced in Thomas Gold Appleton's 1884 estate inventory, which listed a "portrait of his sister" with Appleton as the artist. In 1912 the portrait was in Alice Longfellow's second-floor bedroom; by 1950 it had moved to the parlor.

Although not normally on display, the portrait is now exhibited in the library in observance of Fanny Appleton Longfellow's bicentennial year in 2017.

—David Daly



In This Issue:

Fanny Longfellow

Frances Appleton sketched this view of Boston Common in the 1830s from her family's stately home on Beacon Hill. In 1843 the young amateur artist married a Harvard professor and moved to a certain house in Cambridge.

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