



Poets and Sages

Those were the Days

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819 in Huntington, Long Island, the second of nine children. He finished his formal schooling at age 11 and then worked in various printing shops. He was later a teacher and started his own newspaper in 1838, the Long Islander, which he sold in less than a year. He subsequently worked for several other newspapers.

Starting around 1850, Whitman began writing the poetry, like *Mannahatta*, that he would later collect in "Leaves of Grass," which was revised

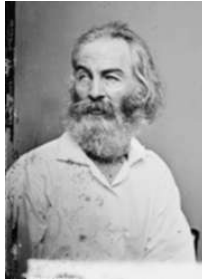
and re-released several times during his lifetime.

During the Civil War, while working for the federal government in the paymaster's office, Whitman volunteered as a nurse in army hospitals, a moving experience which he wrote about in "Memoranda During the War."

Whitman has been called "the poet of democracy" and Ezra Pound called him "America's poet ... he is America."

Whitman, then living in Camden, N.J. died on March 26, 1892.

—Gene Horan



Walt Whitman

From *Mannahatta*

Now I see what there is in a name, a word, liquid, sane,
 unruly, musical, self-sufficient,
 I see that the word of my city is that word from of old,
 Because I see that word nested in nests of water-bays, superb,
 Rich, hemm'd thick all around with sailships and steamships,
 an island sixteen miles long, solid-founded,
 Numberless crowded streets, high growths of iron, slender, strong,
 light, splendidly uprising toward clear skies,
 Tides swift and ample, well-loved by me, toward sundown,
 The flowing sea-currents, the little islands, larger adjoining islands,
 the heights, the villas,
 The countless masts, the white shore-steamers, the lighters, the
 ferry-boats, the black sea-steamers well-model'd,
 The down-town streets, the jobbers' houses of business, the houses of
 business of the ship-merchants and money-brokers, the river-streets,
 Immigrants arriving, fifteen or twenty thousand in a week,
 The carts hauling goods, the manly race of drivers of horses, the
 brown-faced sailors,
 The summer air, the bright sun shining, and the sailing clouds aloft,
 The winter snows, the sleigh-bells, the broken ice in the river, passing
 along up or down with the flood-tide or ebb-tide,
 The mechanics of the city, the masters, well-form'd, beautiful-faced,
 looking you straight in the eyes,
 Trottoirs throug'd, vehicles, Broadway, the women, the shops and
 shows,
 A million people—manners free and superb—open voices—hospitality
 —the most courageous and friendly young men,
 City of hurried and sparkling waters! City spires and masts!
 City nested in bays! My city!

by Walt Whitman



"Immigrants arriving, fifteen or twenty thousand a week"
 (Mulberry Street in Manhattan)

No self-respecting boy....

In my grade school days, no self-respecting boy was without a pocketknife. Though at times it might share space in a side-pocket with a rabbit's foot or other items of importance, the pocketknife was the true "vade mecum," the indispensable accessory, of the schoolboy set. This may be hard to believe in today's world, where a 10-year-old girl was severely reprimanded and suspended from school for bringing a nail file to class.

What did we use them for? For one thing, whittling. My early attempts at this age-old art were frustrated because the wood scraps I could find were much too hard. Then my cousin introduced me to the beauty of balsa wood: soft, compliant, and easy to carve. With it, I was even able to make a crude model of an old sailing vessel.

You could also use the knife for cutting rope or string or, regrettably, carving initials on

er to win as sections of an opponent's territory were repeatedly sliced off.

For me, a favorite destination when the family was on vacation at the shore was the penny arcade, with its skee-ball machines and other games. One device consisted of a round tray of pocketknives with brightly-colored, simulated-ivory casings. If you put in a penny, the tray would briefly rotate and stop. Then an arm would move through the tray and hopefully push a knife toward a drop-off point where you could retrieve it. How I coveted one of those colorful prizes!

All I could ever get the arm to do was move the merchandise around a little. I began to think winning was impossible, the machine a fraud. But hope springs eternal in the human breast and so, on the last day of one vacation, I decided to risk just one more penny. Eureka, five of those color-



The Whittling Boy by Winslow Homer

a tree.

Then there was the game of mumblety-peg, a game in which the players flip or throw a knife from various positions so the blade will stick in the ground. The version that was played in my neighborhood involved drawing a large box or a large circle on the ground and dividing it in two, assigning one half to each of the two players.

The first boy would throw his open pocketknife into the territory of the other player, then draw a straight line to cut off and take over part of the opponent's territory. The game got progressively hard-

ful pocketknives, enough to strike envy in the hearts of all my friends, were soon out of the machine and in my pocket. That event made a great vacation the greatest.

In those days pocketknives were as exclusive to boys as pocketbooks were to their sisters. And as in all eras, boys sometimes fought with their fists. But it seems that the thought of using one's pocketknife on the hide of another was simply not contemplated by either the protagonists or their parents. It was indeed a different world.

—Gene Horan



"The countless masts, the white shore-steamers"