

THE LONGFELLOWS:
ANOTHER PORTLAND FAMILY

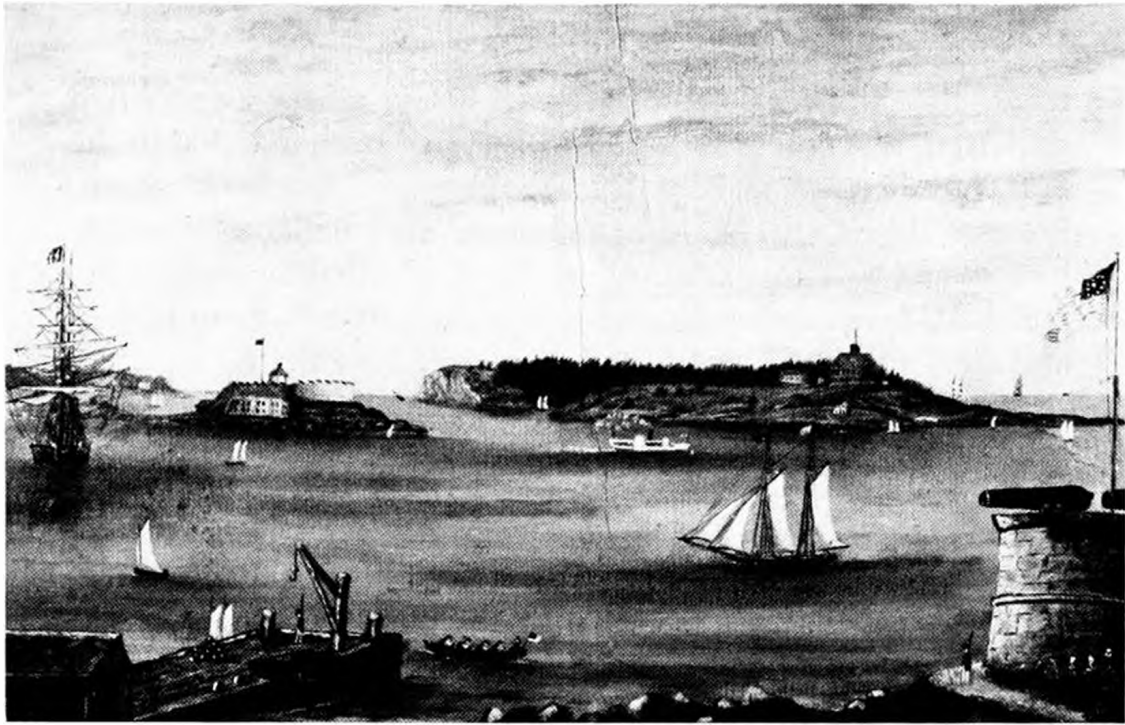
On Sunday, September 5, 1813, the attention of the people of Portland was focused on the sea. Forty miles away off Monhegan Island the British brig *Boxer* and the American brig *Enterprise* were engaged in battle. In the observatory on Mountjoy Hill Captain Lemuel Moody looked east with his telescope and could see smoke from the battle. The brief but furious engagement would leave the *Enterprise* victorious, but both young captains and four of their crew dead, twenty-seven others wounded.

The next day the badly damaged vessels with their grim burdens were brought into Portland harbor. From the Cape Elizabeth shore observers watched the blackened hulls with their shattered masts trailing burnt and torn canvas as they slowly moved into the harbor. Some could see "the glittering lines where blood had streamed over the sides" of the vessels.¹

The bodies of the dead were brought ashore in ten-oared barges rowed at minute strokes by Portland shipmasters as guns fired a counterpoint from vessels and from shore. The bells of Portland's churches tolled solemnly as the procession bearing the bodies moved through the streets. The funeral for the gallant dead, British and American alike, was held two days later.² To the people of Portland these impressive scenes must have seemed the inevitable climax of the six long years of economic depression that had thundered down upon them as a result of the Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812.

Zilpah Longfellow probably did not see the funeral ceremonies; she was recuperating from a violent attack of "lung fever" from which the family had feared she might not recover.³ As her six-year-old son Henry would remember the "sea fight far away," so too one of his earliest memories was of his mother's dangerous illness.

The years had brought significant changes into Zilpah's life since she and Stephen had carried their infant son Henry from his birthplace on the Portland waterfront to the house on



View of Portland Harbor, Cushing's Island and Fort Scammell from Fort Preble (artist unknown). Portland's harbor forts, begun in 1807, the year Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born, guarded a town with a promising commercial future. The Poet's parents, Zilpah and Stephen, established their family in the Wadsworth house on Congress Street in the years just before the Jefferson embargo temporarily cut short Portland's vigorous growth. Courtesy MHS.

Congress Street. He and his older brother Stephen were infants then; now they were sturdy little boys.⁴ And they had been joined by two sisters: Elizabeth Wadsworth Longfellow, named for the aunt who had almost been her mother, and Anne.

Zilpah and Stephen and their two little boys had come to live in her father's house on Congress Street six years before. Now on quiet afternoons that provided time for reflection, when she looked up from her bed to the mirror that hung between the windows, she might have thought pleasantly of Henry as he had been when they moved into the house, "an active rogue [who wished] for nothing but singing and dancing." How he had loved to have his Uncle Alexander "raise him to 'see the balls' on the mirror."⁵

Wadsworth Hall in Hiram and the loved ones there provided a sometime haven for the Longfellows, as did "Longfellow Elms," the Gorham house where Stephen's parents

lived. But home was the Portland house where Zilpah had grown up and where she and Stephen had been married in the best chamber. Lucia, Zilpah's younger sister, lived with them. It was, after all, still her father's house, and Lucia preferred life in the busy village.⁶ "Aunt," as she was called by the family, had quickly become indispensable as the babies had multiplied and a pattern of ill health had developed for Zilpah.

Stephen was busy outside the house with his law practice. If not at his office in Mussey's Row on Middle Street, he was in attendance at court, pleading the cases of his clients.⁷ There was much work for lawyers as businesses failed during the Embargo and war years, for Portland was economically dependent on its shipping. Stephen's hours during court week were long: 8:30 in the morning until 8:00 or 9:00 at night.⁸

Zilpah had even more need for Aunt Lucia's presence in the house in 1814 when Stephen, like his father-in-law before him, was elected a representative to the General Court of Massachusetts in Boston. He was also one of two delegates chosen to attend the Hartford Convention in Connecticut that year. These duties kept him from home during the winter months of January and February.

Zilpah, who was pregnant with the couple's fifth child, Alexander, wanted Stephen to write often. "Remember my seclusion," she wrote. "All my amusement will be to join in your amusements, all my visiting to accompany you in yours."⁹ Stephen replied, "It would not accord very well with the harmonies of domestic enjoyment to introduce to you all the confusion & furor of a legislative Assembly consisting of four or five hundred men."¹⁰ Zilpah, who often wrote her letters surrounded by "chatting, laughing, crying" children, must have smiled at Stephen's concern.¹¹ In the Longfellow household that winter the mumps provided an added measure of "domestic enjoyment."

On January 30 Stephen wrote to Zilpah, "I feel very anxious about fire, and as all my earnings are on my books I should like to have them taken to the house every night."¹² But

when fire came, it came to the house on a noonday in late summer, long after Stephen had returned from Boston. The kitchen maid, Rebecca Ridlon, built too hot a fire on the hearth. The flue caught fire and it spread to the roof. Nine-year-old William Woodford, a neighbor, looked up and saw smoke coming from under the shingles. Zilpah was sick in her chamber, probably still recovering from the birth of Alexander in May. Dr. Weed happened to be with her. He wrapped her in a blanket and carried her next door to the Preble house. The Longfellow children were evacuated to the yard, and stood in amazement watching their father, who had leaped upon a fence post with a brass horn and was shouting directions to the firemen and gesturing wildly. The firemen flooded the top floor of the house with water before the fire was extinguished.¹³ A temporary roof was put in place, but not before rain further damaged the rooms at the top of the house.

While this work was being done, Zilpah and her youngest children went to Gorham to stay with Grandpa and Grandma Longfellow. Stephen and Henry were sent to Hiram where they enjoyed their unexpected vacation from school.¹⁴ While the damaged rooms were to be replastered that fall, the third floor Peleg had decided to put on his house at a cost of \$500 would not go up until the following summer.¹⁵ On January 31, Stephen's presentiment about a fire in his office was fulfilled. We do not know whether Stephen lost his accounts receivable in the blaze, but it was probably at this time that the decision was made to turn the family's second best parlor into his law office. The mantelpiece was modernized, and a new bookcase to hold Stephen's books was added to Zilpah's sideboard.

Although there is uncertainty as to just when Peleg's old store beside the house was removed, the new brick side entrance into Stephen's office was probably added in 1815 when all these other renovations were made.¹⁶ It provided a convenient, private entrance from the street for clients. A discreet sign, "Stephen Longfellow, Counselor at Law," pointed the way. Stephen paid his father-in-law \$200 a year for office rent.¹⁷



Zilpah Longfellow

The work on the third floor was done in July and August, 1815. With the younger children staying in Gorham, Zilpah, Stephen, and Henry went to Hiram. The family hoped that time away from the Portland house would give Zilpah an opportunity to build up her health. Instead, Henry developed an infection that threatened the loss of his foot. It was only through bedrest and the diligent application of poultices that the swelling was reduced and the leg brought back to normal.¹⁸

While Zilpah struggled with Henry, Stephen struggled with the house. The masons and carpenters began work at dawn on a late July day that promised to be clear and sunny. By noon, with the roof off and the new walls partially completed, it began to rain. Although a “roof” of sails was rigged, the furniture had to be moved. Stephen described the incident to Zilpah.

I bundled up the beds, bedding, etc., etc., as well as I could, considering that the water was pouring down in all directions, and got it down into the lower rooms, hoping ... that it would not be necessary to move it further; but the water soon followed it and I was obliged to tumble it into the porch & wood house where it still remains. The scene was very similar to



Stephen Longfellow

that which we witnessed about a year ago, at the time of the fire, and the damage done to the house and furniture about the same.¹⁹

By mid-August Stephen was predicting that the work would be finished in another week. "We shall have seven very convenient and pleasant chambers." They would have need of them. The following June another daughter, Mary, was born. She was followed the next summer by Ellen, and two years later by Samuel. Thus, by 1819, Zilpah and Stephen had eight children. The Longfellow children kept track of their own multitudes with this little verse:

Stephen and Henry
Elizabeth and Anne
Alex and Mary
Ellen and Sam.²⁰

The older boys were ensconced on the third floor in what came to be called "the boys' room." As the new babies were being born, Stephen and Henry were studying at Portland Academy.²¹ When not in school the boys had easy access from their back yard to Wind Mill pasture and down over the hill to Nathaniel Deering's woods.²² Those forest glades and other

interesting places in Portland, such as the wharves and the ropewalks, would be remembered by Henry in the poetry he wrote as a man.

Elizabeth and Anne, who probably did not have the freedom their older brothers had, went to dame schools with their little brother Alexander. The girls studied drawing and painting, but their father also wanted them to learn more “useful” subjects. Having read the advice of contemporary authorities, he wanted them to study arithmetic and “not just tend to [their] amusements.”²³

Stephen must have felt some concern over providing for his large family, particularly as he did not always collect his pay in money. A French clock, which still sits on the mantel in the room that was his office in the house, was given to him in lieu of a bill by a client. Anne’s first memory of it was seeing her father standing with it in his arms, no doubt explaining to Zilpah that it represented his latest earnings.²⁴

Stephen kept a rigorous schedule. His busy practice took him regularly to court — held in Portland in the spring and Wiscasset in the autumn. He was politically active, serving at least once as a presidential elector. He was a trustee of Bowdoin College and a working member of numerous educational and charitable organizations in Portland. Under the strain of all of this work Stephen’s health broke, and in 1821 he was attacked by epilepsy.²⁵ In the spring of 1822 he and Zilpah took their first vacation, traveling to Connecticut, New York, and then on to Philadelphia to consult with an eminent physician about Stephen’s health. They returned home by way of the health spa at Saratoga Springs.

The children were left in Portland in the care of their Aunt Lucia. At the age of twenty, upon observing Zilpah and Stephen’s wedding and its “attending circumstances,” Lucia had “declared against” ever being married. She lived according to that resolve, but living with and caring for her eight nieces and nephews, she did not need her own family.²⁶ While Stephen and Zilpah tended to the moral and educational needs

of their children, Lucia ran the house, cooking, sewing, knitting, and in general managing the entire family. It was Lucia who decided when it was time to bank the fires for the night and go to bed.²⁷ But her life was not limited to the house, as Zilpah's increasingly was. Lucia was out and about the village, and Zilpah was the first to admit, "Lucia knows much better than I what is passing in our hemisphere." Lucia also liked to travel, and visited friends and relatives throughout New England. Lucia, Zilpah wrote, "is very well, gains flesh, wears handsome caps, and is quite a stately lady."²⁸

Upon Stephen and Zilpah's return to Portland from their 1822 vacation, Stephen seems to have taken on more responsibility in local organizations, including the newly formed Maine Historical Society. Zilpah urged him not to work too hard. "We *can* live upon much less than we have done so do not be too anxious about a support."²⁹

In the autumn of 1822, as the result of a visit from Judge and Mrs. Roberts from Hallowell, Zilpah saw a way in which life in the house could be improved. She wrote to Stephen at Wiscasset, "The judge has been telling me of the manner in which Mr. Gardiner's house is warmed [by a furnace]. I think we *must* have ours warmed in the same manner." She assured Stephen that her health would be improved — "as Mrs. Gardiner's is. You see, dear husband, " wrote Zilpah, "I have learned to say *must* and use a little authority."³⁰ Nevertheless, thirteen more years would pass before Zilpah got her furnace.³¹

In the autumn of 1823 Stephen wrote to Zilpah from Wiscasset, "I am uncommonly feeble & exhausted ... and seriously fear that I must abandon my profession. I have lost all confidence in myself."³² Such sentiments are surprising considering that he had just been elected a representative to Congress. He left for the seven-and-a-half-day trip to Washington in late November, and once again, as in 1814, Zilpah was left in charge of the family. For the next two winters Zilpah would manage without Stephen at home.

With Lucia to run the household, and with the help of a kitchen maid and a hired man, Zilpah's greatest concern was

finances. Although she told Stephen, "I keep the strings quite as close as you do when you are here," her plaintive cry became, "I can't keep money."³³ At the beginning of Stephen's second winter in Washington he wrote to Zilpah,

As you have made pretty rapid progress in spending your money, it is, I presume desirable that I should furnish you some supplementary aid; especially as our sons will soon be returning to College, and will want money to pay their bills I now enclose you a check on the Bank of Portland for \$150.

Zilpah hastened to assure him she was careful with her funds, pointing out that the many visits from family and friends drained her resources. She then asked what *he* paid at his boarding house in Washington. Stephen replied at great length, apologizing and affirming his "entire confidence in [her] wisdom and discretion."

I give twelve dollars a week for board, room, & fire & candles. We have a very good table, & the cooking is very good. We have generally six or seven different dishes, & a dessert. For drink they furnish nothing but water. But I adhere to my old diet. As the regular hour for dining is between four & five o'clock, I find it necessary to take some boiled rice between 1 & 2, & at dinner I take my potatoe & leave the luxuries to others.³⁴

In 1824, eighteen-year-old Stephen was at Bowdoin causing his parents much anxiety. He preferred play to study, an aptitude that would lead to his suspension.³⁵ Henry, age sixteen, also at Bowdoin, was on the other hand a model student. At home, Elizabeth, age fifteen, and Anne, thirteen, were schoolgirls busy with their painting, drawing, music (and no doubt their arithmetic), and their social life. Alexander was not quite ten. Mary, soon to be celebrating her eighth birthday, was making a sampler that winter and asked her father to bring her a work box when he came home in the spring. Six-year-old Ellen would have a work box too, but four-year-old Sam, who



Stephen Longfellow.

perhaps felt the need of a brother his own age, asked for a rocking horse with a “little boy” on [it].³⁶

Zilpah's gift that year was a portrait of Stephen. At the end of February Stephen wrote to her,

There is a fine portrait painter here by the name of King. He has a public room about 30 feet wide & 40 long ... filled with portraits & other paintings of his own execution, many of which are very excellent. As I take great pleasure in viewing *good* paintings I

frequently go in, & rest me in my walks. If you were here I would certainly have our portraits painted. Regretting as I do that we have no portraits of our parents ... & feeling also a hope that if I should be taken away my wife & children would not view with indifference the portrait of one so dear to them as a husband & parent, I have been almost tempted to have mine painted. What think you of it? It will cost \$40 exclusive of the frame."

"We shall all vote for the portrait, my dear husband," Zilpah replied. "I hope you will immediately sit for [it] ... and that you will think of the most pleasant subjects while the painter is sketching the likeness, and not get into a brown study or any other hue that will produce wrinkles in the forehead."³⁷

Stephen's winters in Washington from 1823 to 1825 exposed him to a vital and glittering world. He sent home details of the teas and New Year's Day soirees at the White House as well as descriptions of Daniel Webster's children and Mount Vernon. He also sent news of congressional deliberations and his own stand on various issues. Zilpah, whose reading kept her informed, did not hesitate to disagree with him. In response to his impassioned support for capital punishment she wrote, "Whence any man or body of men can derive authority to take life I have yet to learn."³⁸

Zilpah's letters to Stephen brought news of the family and occasionally news of Portland. Zilpah was not above sharing a little gossip. When smallpox appeared in the city she confided that it had first attacked a "woman of no very good character" in King Street, who had washed some clothes for a sailor from New York. Before the epidemic subsided "having the small pox ... [was] disgraceful and I believe many dreaded more being found out as acquaintances of Mrs. Brown than [they dreaded] the risk of having the disorder."³⁹

In the spring of 1825, Stephen returned from Washington, bringing with him the burden of his own ill health, which had caused a loss of memory and mental acuity.⁴⁰ That summer the Revolutionary War hero the Marquis de Lafayette visited Portland on his grand tour of America. Stephen Longfellow was

chosen to deliver the welcoming address. An observer later wrote, "Although [Longfellow was] ... a ready speaker, he was so impressed by the noble appearance and the associations connected with the guest, that after saying a few preliminary words, he hesitated and was compelled to refer to his notes in his hat."⁴¹ Stephen, who had met with Lafayette that winter in Washington, was surely not overwhelmingly impressed by the visitor, but was struggling with his own physical limitations.⁴²

Seventy-seven year old Peleg Wadsworth made the trip down from Hiram to meet his old comrade in arms, and Lafayette is said to have presented him with a pair of silver candlesticks.⁴³ Elizabeth Wadsworth did not accompany her husband. She had been in failing health for some time. Within a month she was dead.

She was the second parent to die. The year before, on May 28, just hours before Stephen arrived home from Washington, his father had died in Gorham.⁴⁴ Patience Longfellow, Stephen's mother, would be the last parent to go, for she did not die until 1830. Peleg died in 1829 at Wadsworth Hall, just before winter set in once again. The Longfellows would continue to make occasional visits to "the mountains of Hiram," but, as Zilpah confided to a friend, "Hiram is no longer what it was, no father, no mother to welcome me. I can only wander round their graves and remember their many virtues."⁴⁵

Peleg left his Portland house to Zilpah and Lucia. While Peleg's death was a loss for the family, the death in the spring of Elizabeth Longfellow must have been harder to accept. She had suffered the extremities of some unnamed illness for nine months, and was twenty when she died. Elizabeth had been engaged to William Pitt Fessenden, a talented young Portland man who would go on to make a name for himself.⁴⁶ Elizabeth, like her namesake before her, would leave behind a sad story of unfulfilled love and a few clever drawings and paintings.

Her brother Henry heard of her death in Europe. Henry had graduated from Bowdoin, and a position as professor of romance languages offered by the college saved him the study

of law, which his father had wanted him to pursue. The Bowdoin offer was made on condition that Henry go to Europe and study the languages he was to teach, which he did with alacrity. Shortly after he left Portland and before he set sail for Europe Zilpah wrote to him, "I will not say how much we miss your elastic step, your cheerful voice, your melodious flute. I will say farewell, my dear son, may God be with you and prosper you."⁴⁷

Henry's brother Stephen, who had redeemed himself after his suspension from Bowdoin by returning and graduating, had gone into law with his father. Following the custom of the day, he read law in his father's office for three years before becoming a counselor at law. In 1826 Stephen moved his office out of the house to the Stuart Building on Court Street in the heart of Portland's business district. The office was moved again three years later to the Deering building on Exchange Street, opposite the Cumberland Bank.⁴⁸ Zilpah and Lucia probably turned Stephen's former office into a dining room, for its anteroom became a china closet. This room, which had been called the "little room" by the family, had been Henry's poetry-writing retreat. When he heard of its disposition, he playfully wrote that as a result his career as a poet was surely over.⁴⁹

One of the young men who studied law "in chambers" with Stephen Longfellow was George Washington Pierce, a classmate of Henry's. Pierce, who lived in rented rooms in the Elm Hotel, Portland's newest and most fashionable boarding house, was a frequent visitor at the Longfellow home.⁵⁰ The attraction was Anne. By the summer of 1829 they were engaged. The wedding was delayed due to Anne's ill health. She was sent to Boston to consult with doctors and visited for a time in Portsmouth with an aunt. The doctors diagnosed her trouble as curvature of the spine and recommended application of leeches, the use of an incline plane, walking, and exercise. George brought Anne a set of dumbbells "to take exercise."⁵¹

The 1830s brought an expanded family circle. Stephen and Henry, who had returned from Europe, were both married in 1831; Stephen to Marianne Preble of Saco, Henry to Portland's Mary Potter. Yet there were still young Longfellows for Zilpah and Stephen to guide: Alexander, who was a student at Bowdoin; Mary and Ellen, who had not yet finished their schooling; and Sam, the youngest, almost twelve. There had also been a grandchild. Stephen and Marianne's first son, who had been named Stephen in the Longfellow tradition, was born in 1832 but died shortly after his first birthday.

The changes in the family, and probably to a larger degree changes in Portland, caused Stephen to think about moving to the country. By 1832 Portland was a city with a population of more than 13,000. Within a year the old market house, with a grand new pillared portico, became the city hall, and across the square, Marston's Tavern made way for a row of stores. The Congress Street house was changing from an enclave of serenity into a true bastion against progress. Although Stephen had already drawn plans for a house in Gorham, in the spring of 1835 he gave up the dream, blaming his increasing infirmities and "the uncertainty of life."⁵²

The decade that began with such promise brought multifaceted tragedy. George Pierce died in November 1832 of typhus from which he had been thought to be recovering. Ten days later sixteen-year-old Ellen Longfellow was dead of the same disease, and four days later Henry's wife Mary died in Europe as the result of a miscarriage. When word of Mary's death reached Portland in January it was almost too much to bear: young George gone, and Anne "almost inconsolable"; Ellen, "lovely and blooming," gone; and then the loss of "dear Mary" — her death "almost overpowers us," Stephen admitted.⁵³ Anne moved back home, and while she struggled to overcome her grief, Mary was a comfort to the household. It became Mary's custom each evening to play hymns on the piano. When she married James Greenleaf of Cambridge in 1839 her piano went with her to her new home. Stephen, as he grew older and his mind became less clear, would suddenly ask, "Where's Mary?"⁵⁴



As a professor of Romance Languages at Harvard, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow returned often to Portland and wandered the streets of his boyhood. The portrait at left was rendered in 1855, the year Longfellow wrote "My Lost Youth," a reminiscence about Portland.

Henry, now Smith Professor of Romance Languages at Harvard, spent his vacations from Harvard with them. He rambled about the city, admiring it, remembering his youth there, and in the little back room, looking out on the garden that Samuel and Anne had begun to nurture, he wrote poems:

The day is cold, and dark, and dreary;

It rains, and the wind is never weary.

On pleasant afternoons, Henry would carry his pipe to the garden to sit with his father on an old, high-backed bench. The bench was a relic from Old Jerusalem, the original First Parish Church, which had been torn down to make way for the new modern stone church. "How many dull sermons that dull wood has heard," Henry noted in his journal. "And now it stands under the plum trees, and we sit upon it and smoke pipes after dinner. To such uses may church pews come at last."⁵⁵

Zilpah spent time in Cambridge where Henry was teaching and Samuel was studying at Harvard. Stephen was content to stay in Portland. He had given up going to his office, although he went out to walk every day and kept his commitments to various organizations. Mostly he spent his time at home reading and taking morning naps. Sometimes there were special chores, like repairing a fence to keep the neighbor's cows out of their field.⁵⁶

To Zilpah the house on Congress Street was now "the sometimes sad and silent old mansion." And yet it was not altogether sad and silent; Aunt Lucia was there "busy as a bee"; in fact, "busy as a whole hive."⁵⁷ She now shared the running of the house with Anne, who had fought her way back from grief to a useful and pleasant life. More and more Anne was busy with house plants and in the garden, busy with needlework, and useful in the church. And there were grandchildren — eventually six, the family of Stephen and Marianne. The oldest was named Stephen, the seventh male in a direct line in the Longfellow family to bear that name. To Zilpah he was "Stevie"; to Stevie she was "Grandmamma."

Outside the house, Portland, with its teeming waterfront and busy streets, was a hive of activity. But there were pleasant things to see out the window. "Tomorrow is our Thanksgiving," Zilpah wrote to Mary on December 3, 1845, "And the turkeys & ducks are flying up and down the street in everybody's hands." Congress Street was noisy with carriages, many of them coming from the new railroad depot.⁵⁸ Railroad travel to Boston was a marvel to Zilpah who had lived long enough to know the fatigue of one-and-two-day trips to that city by sea and by stagecoach. "Only think," she wrote. "We are now within 4 or 5 hours distance from Boston. Our friends leave us at daylight & breakfast in Boston, and leave Boston after tea & take a midnight supper with us." Lucia, however, did not like "this express train which runs at such unseasonable hours, as it breaks in upon her regular habits of rising & retiring."⁵⁹

Occasionally something happened in the city that reminded Zilpah of the way things used to be in Portland. When

the steamboat *General Warren* was launched from Dyer's shipyard on Fore Street, she went to see it slide down the ways. It was the last vessel to be launched there, and she wrote to Mary, "The boat was built on your father's lot ... , over your great grandfather's cellar."⁶⁰ Stephen still owned the lot on Fore Street where his grandfather had built the house that the British had burned in 1775.

The passing years brought other changes. Henry married again. His new wife was Frances Appleton, a Beacon Hill heiress. Zilpah, who had once dreaded that Henry might bring home just such "a city lady of fortune, with ... airs & graces & expensive habits," found that Henry's beloved Fanny "fit in beautifully." Fanny was struck by Zilpah's gentleness, and called Stephen stately."⁶¹

Now when Henry came, with Fanny, to visit in Portland he was apt to stay at the Verandah, a comfortable old farmhouse inn that stood at the entrance to Tukey's Bridge. Mary and her James vacationed at Cape Elizabeth's Cape Cottage where the sea ebbed and flowed at the very doorstep. But there were visits to the old mansion where the grownup Longfellow children left their names and dates on the wall in the back hall and on the window jamb in the boys' third floor room. There someone wrote, "How dear is the home of my childhood."

As for many years Stephen's life outside the house had brought the world to Zilpah, now it was their children who brought life into her quiet chamber. Zilpah must have felt satisfaction in their stable, modestly affluent lives, for as she herself had written, "I have never endeavored to awaken in the minds of my children, an ambition for riches & honors ... but rather for duty and goodness ... I think those in middle station in life have the best chance for goodness and happiness."⁶²

Henry, of course, was in the process of achieving the rewards of the world: fame and fortune. We are left to wonder what his mother thought of his success as a poet except for one sweet passage she wrote to him in 1845 upon receiving a copy of

his latest book — “Many of the thoughts and words from your pen go directly to my heart and make me happy.”⁶³

On July 6, 1849, Zilpah made out her will. She left her half of the house to Anne. Other than that, she had little of a material nature to bequeath — two bureaus and her clothing to her daughters, her work table to Lucia. “To my other dear children including my grandson Stephen, I can only leave my blessing & express a wish that when the house shall be sold they may each receive something as a remembrance of their Mother & of the dear & deep love she has ever borne them.” She was ready; but it was Stephen, her “dear friend,” who died, on August 3. Zilpah lingered, bearing her “unspeakable loss.”⁶⁴

The following March, writing to Mary, she closed her letter, “I have been reading much in the Old Testament of late, & I am ‘avised’ to say (as Mistress Milton has it) the words of Zilpah, the daughter of Peleg & Elizabeth, are ended.” It was to be her last letter.

On March 12, 1851, a year later almost to the day, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote in his journal:

As I was going to college this afternoon, I met a boy bringing a telegraphic dispatch from Portland. My heart failed me at the sight and foretold its contents. They were ‘Your mother died today, suddenly.’ In a few minutes I was on my way to Portland, where I arrived before midnight. In the chamber where I last took leave of her lay my mother, to welcome and take leave of me no more. I sat all that night alone with her, — without terror, almost without sorrow, so tranquil had been her death. A sense of peace came over me, as if there had been no shock or jar in nature, but a harmonious close to a long life.⁶⁵

NOTES

¹Elizabeth Oakes Smith, *Selections From The Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakes Smith*, Mary Alice Wyman, ed. (Lewiston, Me.: Lewiston Journal Company, 1924), p. 27.

THE LONGFELLOW FAMILY

²William Willis, *The History of Portland* (1865; reprint, Somersworth, N.H.: New Hampshire Publishing Company for the Maine Historical Society, 1972), pp. 759-760.

³Stephen Longfellow to George Wadsworth, February 13, 1813, Miscellaneous Box 42, Folder 19, Maine Historical Society (hereafter cited as MHS). See also Peleg Wadsworth to George Wadsworth, February 19, 1813, Collection 16, MHS; Stephen Longfellow to Peleg Wadsworth, July 26, 1813, Wadsworth-Longfellow Papers, Craigie House, Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, Massachusetts (hereafter cited as W-L Papers, LNHS).

⁴On October 4, 1807, Zilpah wrote to Stephen from Hiram, "[Henry] fatigues everyone in the house with tending him. ... Nothing will do for but jumping and dancing." W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁵Zilpah Longfellow to Alexander Wadsworth, October 4, 1807, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁶In a letter to Alexander Wadsworth on October 4, 1807, Zilpah wrote, "Lucia begins already to sigh for the pleasures of town. ... You know she was never fond of the country."

⁷On December 3, 1804, the *Portland Gazette* carried a notice that Stephen Longfellow had moved his office to a "chamber over the store of Abijah Cheever, No. 2, Mussey's Row." No other information has come to light to indicate that his office was elsewhere until January 31, 1815, when it burned. (See Stephen Longfellow's note to this effect in the *Portland Benevolent Society's Records*, Vol. II, MHS.)

⁸Stephen Longfellow to William Sullivan, March 21, 1814, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁹Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, January 13, 1814, W-L Papers, LNHS.

¹⁰Stephen Longfellow to Zilpah Longfellow, January 23, 1814, W-L Papers, LNHS.

¹¹For this and all other details about the household during the winter of 1814 see Zilpah's correspondence at Craigie House.

¹²Stephen Longfellow to Zilpah Longfellow, January 30, 1814, W-L Papers, LNHS.

¹³Details about the fire can be found in William Goold, "General Peleg Wadsworth," William Goold Scrapbook, p. 127, MHS. A receipt for the services of Rebecca Ridlon between April 9, 1814, and January 1, 1815, is in Collection 185, MHS.

¹⁴Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, October 7, 1814, W-L Papers, LNHS.

¹⁵Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, October 15, 1814, W-L Papers, LNHS.

¹⁶A receipt dated June 11, 1816, for work done by Daniel Fogg, Collection 185, MHS, may be for this work. It lists bricks, two blinds, one chimney piece, and two four-panel doors. The new brick entryway would have necessitated

the installment of two doors and one window. The mantel or "chimney piece" in the office-sitting room dates from about this time. Another receipt mentions brick and work on a store.

¹⁷William Goold describes Stephen's sign in his 1882 paper for the Maine Historical Society on "General Peleg Wadsworth." Receipts for Stephen paying \$200 a year for rent and repairs on "Peleg Wadsworth's house" from 1816 to 1826 are in Collection 185, MHS.

¹⁸For these details and others see Zilpah and Stephen's correspondence July and August 1815, W-L Papers, LNHS.

¹⁹Stephen Longfellow to Zilpah Longfellow, August 1, 1815, and Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, August 6, 1815; W-L Papers, LNHS.

²⁰Stephen Longfellow to Zilpah Longfellow, August 15, 1815, W-L Papers, LNHS. Nathan Goold quoted the children's ditty in *The Wadsworth-Longfellow House: Its History and Its Occupants* (Portland, Me. [Maine Historical Society], 1908), p. 11. No doubt it was shared with Goold by one of the family, perhaps Anne.

²¹Stephen Longfellow to Parker Cleveland, November 7, 1818, W-L Papers, LNHS.

²²In 1838, upon sending Mayflowers to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Anne Longfellow Pierce wrote, "I think they will revive in your recollections of the days of yr. childhood, Deerings woods & the Wind Mill pasture." Lawrence Thompson, *Young Longfellow* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 294.

²³On October 13, 1822, Stephen wrote to Zilpah that he was reading "Finelon on the education of daughters." On January 23, 1825, he expressed his concern that Anne "study her arithmetic and not just tend to her amusements." W-L Papers, LNHS.

²⁴A newspaper clipping with no date and no source, which concerns a visit by the writer to Anne Longfellow Pierce in the house, mentions the "French clock that Mrs. Pierce saw in her father's arms when she was 10 years old [1820]. ... Mr. Longfellow took it in lieu of pay from a client, a Frenchman." Longfellow Vertical File, MHS.

²⁵Samuel Longfellow, ed., *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 3 vols. (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886-1887), 2:145. Also, "Father of Famous Poet Was Notable Man of His Time," clipping from the *Portland Telegram*, July 2, 1906, Collection 16, MHS.

²⁶Herbert G. Jones, *The Amazing Mr. Longfellow: Little Known Facts About A Well-known Poet* (Portland: The Longfellow Press, 1957), p. 22. Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow named one of his daughters Lucia.

²⁷Zilpah Longfellow letters, November 23, 1830, October 5, 1843, and January 22, 1844. On October 6, 1820, Zilpah wrote, "[The] family [is] very quiet and orderly. I think they do very well under Lucia's management." W-L Papers, LNHS.

²⁸See Stephen Longfellow to George Wadsworth, January 31, 1812,

THE LONGFELLOW FAMILY

Miscellaneous Box 42, Folder 19, MHS; Zilpah Longfellow to Mrs. Bartlett, October 21, 1835, W-L Papers, LNHS.

²⁹Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, October 17, 1822, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³⁰Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, October 20, 1822, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³¹Zilpah Longfellow to Alexander Longfellow, December 11, 1835, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³²Stephen Longfellow to Zilpah Longfellow, September 20, 1823, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³³Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, December 29, 1823, and January 9, 1825, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³⁴For this exchange see Stephen and Zilpah's correspondence, February 11 through March 4, 1824, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³⁵Stephen's difficulties are detailed in Thompson's *Young Longfellow* as well as in his parents' correspondence during the winter of 1824, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³⁶Stephen Longfellow to Mary Longfellow, March 13, 1824, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³⁷For these and other details about the Charles Bird King portrait of Stephen see Stephen and Zilpah's correspondence from February 29 to May 16, 1824, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³⁸Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, February 13, 1825, W-L Papers, LNHS.

³⁹Zilpah Longfellow to Stephen Longfellow, February 1, 1824, April 18, 1824, and May 10, 1824, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁴⁰For Stephen's concern about his health, see his letters to Zilpah in 1824, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁴¹*Anon.*, "A Sketch of The Life of General La Fayette," *Collections of The Maine Historical Society*, Second Series 3 (Portland: Maine Historical Society, 1892): 71.

⁴²Stephen Longfellow to Zilpah Longfellow, December 24, 1824, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁴³Gora Lusanna Pike, *General Peleg Wadsworth* (Privately Printed, 1912), p. 33.

⁴⁴On May 29, 1824, the following notice appeared in the *Portland Advertiser*: "Mr. Longfellow, Representative in Congress from this District, arrived in town last evening." Stephen Longfellow of Gorham died on the morning of the 28th.

⁴⁵Zilpah Longfellow to Mrs. Bartlett, May 13, 1837, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁴⁶Zilpah Longfellow, Diary, May 5, 1829, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁴⁷Samuel Longfellow, *Life*, 1: 72.

⁴⁸For these locations for Stephen Longfellow's offices see his insurance policies which are with his business papers, Collection 185, MHS.

⁴⁹Ella M. Bangs, *An Historic Mansion: The Wadsworth-Longfellow*

House, Portland (Portland, Me.: The Lamson Studio, 1903), p. 14.

⁵⁰Goold, Goold Scrapbook, p. 83, MHS.

⁵¹For these and other details concerning Anne see Zilpah's diary for 1830, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁵²On July 21, 1832, Zilpah wrote to her relation and friend, Mrs. Bartlett, "[My husband] has not yet built his country house in Gorham, but the plan of it is made, and next year is fixed on as the time for building." On April 23, 1835, Zilpah wrote to Alexander that Stephen had given up the idea of the Gorham move, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁵³Stephen Longfellow to Samuel Longfellow, November 6, 1835, to January 27, 1836; Zilpah Longfellow to Mrs. Bartlett, November 25, 1835, W-L Papers, LNHS. The cause of George Pierce's death is given in *The Diary of Clara Crownshield: A European Tour With Longfellow, 1835-1836*, Andrew Hiler, ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1956), p. 204n.

⁵⁴On December 12, 1835, Zilpah wrote to Samuel, "It is Saturday evening, nine o'clock. Mary has been playing her evening hymns." On June 17, 1839, she wrote to Mary in Cambridge, "The piano is entirely silent. I think your father misses his evening hymns." W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁵⁵Samuel Longfellow, ed., *Life*, 1: 302.

⁵⁶Zilpah Longfellow to Samuel Longfellow, December 12, 1835, and June 17, 1836; Zilpah Longfellow to Anne Pierce, May 25, 1845, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁵⁷Zilpah Longfellow to Anne Pierce, May 31, 1845, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹Zilpah Longfellow to Mrs. Bartlett, August 7, 1843, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁶⁰Zilpah Longfellow to Mary Greenleaf, September 28, 1844, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁶¹Zilpah Longfellow to Mrs. Bartlett, April 19, 1831, and to Alexander Longfellow October 5, 1843; Edward Wagenknecht, ed., *Mrs. Longfellow: Selected Letters and Journals of Fanny Appleton Longfellow* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1956), p. 90.

⁶²Zilpah Longfellow to Mrs. Bartlett, January 3, 1834, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁶³Zilpah Longfellow to H.W.L., December 12, 1845, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁶⁴Zilpah Longfellow's will is with her papers at Craigie House. Zilpah Longfellow to Mary Longfellow Greenleaf, February 2 and December 12, 1850, W-L Papers, LNHS.

⁶⁵Zilpah Longfellow to Mary Longfellow Greenleaf, March 10, 1850, W-L Papers, LNHS. This letter was followed by only one or two brief notes from the pen of the remarkable and appealing woman who chronicled the lifestyle, the joys and sadness, the most intimate thoughts of the Wadsworths and Longfellows who lived in the house now held in trust by the Maine Historical Society.

⁶⁶Samuel Longfellow, ed., *Life*, 2: 204.