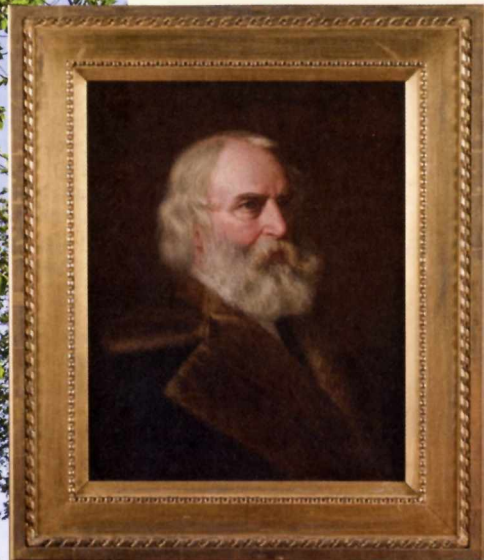




Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
portrait by Ernest Longfellow, 1876
Left: The Longfellow House today

The Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote “all houses wherein men have lived and died are haunted houses.” If we could summon the ghosts of the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House, we would find people who have given shape and substance to our world. For 200 years this was a family home and a celebrated gathering place for singers and soldiers, poets and politicians. Its story encompasses slavery and emancipation, efforts to create a national identity through literature, and a family’s endeavors to preserve and share the treasures of many nations.

When Henry and Fanny Longfellow became the owners of 105 Brattle Street in Cambridge in 1844, they were already well-acquainted with its history. The Georgian mansion looking over the Charles River was built in 1759 for John Vassall, a sugar-plantation owner and future Loyalist. The Vassalls enslaved hundreds on their Jamaican plantations and at least seven here: Cuba, Dinah, Malcolm, William, and three children. The house stood among other magnificent estates owned by fellow elites, many of whom were slaveholders. In 1774 the Vassalls and their neighbors fled the insurgency preceding the American Revolutionary War; the people they had enslaved seized the opportunity for freedom.

In July 1775 Gen. George Washington arrived in Cambridge to command the fledgling Continental Army, which was laying siege to British-occupied Boston. He chose the large, strategically located Vassall house as his headquarters. Here, Washington received dignitaries and fellow revolutionaries, strategized with American generals, and celebrated the British Army’s evacuation of Boston in March 1776.

The House Through the Years

1759–74 Built for Maj. John Vassall. Tony and Cuba Vassall petition the court in 1780 to stay on the property.

1775–76 Home and headquarters of Continental Army commander Gen. George Washington.

1791–1819 Estate of Andrew and Elizabeth Craigie. Andrew dies in 1819.

1819–41 Widow Elizabeth Craigie rents out extra rooms. Henry W. Longfellow boards here 1837–43.

1843–82 Home of Henry and Fanny Longfellow and family. Fanny dies in 1861; Henry in 1882.



Fanny Longfellow—and perhaps Martha Washington—used the home’s elegant parlor as a drawing room.

Andrew Craigie, the Continental Army’s first apothecary general, bought the house in 1791, aiming to increase its grandeur and size. He and Elizabeth Shaw married in 1793. Lavish living and failed investments plunged them into debt, leaving Elizabeth to take in boarders after Andrew’s death. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a young Harvard professor and up-and-coming poet, began renting two rooms in 1837. “They were once George Washington’s chambers,” he marveled. The house again became a social center, this time for Henry’s circle of colleagues and friends. In July 1843 Longfellow and Fanny Appleton married. Fanny’s father Nathan, a wealthy textile manufacturer, presented “Castle Craigie” to the couple as a wedding gift. The Longfellos thrived in the stimulating



Lady Washington’s Arrival at Headquarters, Cambridge by Howard Pyle, 1896

environment of Cambridge. Henry left his teaching position at Harvard, then devoted his time to writing and scholarship. Fanny was a gracious host and perceptive critic of art and literature who shared in Henry’s many activities. The Longfellos and their children—Charles, Ernest, Alice, Edith, and Anne (their third child, Fanny, died at 18 months)—cherished their piece of tangible history all their lives. They filled their days with learning and their home with evidence of travels, personal interests, and intellectual pursuits. In 1913 the children established the Longfellow House Trust to preserve their family home and open it to the public. The trust donated the site to the National Park Service in 1973. Explore this extraordinary house and meet the people whose indelible spirits remain.

*Once, ah, once, within these walls,
One whom memory oft recalls,
The Father of his Country, dwelt.
And yonder meadows broad and damp
The fires of the besieging camp
Encircled with a burning belt.*

—From “To a Child” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1845

1882–1950 Henry and Fanny’s daughter Alice and other Longfellow family members occupy the house.

1883 Longfellow Park is created on family property as a public park and memorial to Henry W. Longfellow.

Washington’s Home and Headquarters

Even at the height of his fame, Longfellow never felt slighted when visitors came to his door asking to see “Washington’s Headquarters.” He took pride in his home’s legendary status. The decisions and alliances Washington had made here ultimately led to freedom from Great Britain and the beginnings of the new nation.

Gen. George Washington took command of the Continental Army in July 1775, shortly after the first shots of the American Revolution were fired. Arriving in Cambridge to set up headquarters, he encountered a bleak prospect: The mostly young and inexperienced army of nearly 20,000 officers and militia members had no tents, blankets, or gunpowder and lacked many

other necessary items. They faced smallpox, dysentery, and New England’s bitterly cold winter. “The reflection on my situation and that of my army produces many an unhappy hour when all around me are wrapped in sleep,” Washington wrote. “I have often thought how much happier I should have been if . . . I had taken my musket upon my shoulder and entered the ranks.” Washington and his officers were determined to right matters and met often in Longfellow’s future study.

Washington was busy consulting with many friends and dignitaries including Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Benedict Arnold, and the chiefs of several Native American Tribes. African American poet Phillis Wheatley was invited to visit after he received inspiring verse from her.



George Washington portrait by James Peale, around 1787–90

Martha Washington arrived in December 1775, after a month-long journey from Virginia and a political controversy while in Philadelphia. Her son, daughter-in-law, and several people the Washingtons enslaved accompanied her. Establishing a precedent for the rest of the war, Martha inspired soldiers and acted as a trusted advisor, confidant, and emotional support for the commander.

1913 Longfellow House Trust is established by surviving children. House opens to public in the 1920s.

1972 Site included in the National Park System. In 2010 the park name changes to include Washington.

*All that is best in the
great poets of all countries
is not what is national
in them, but what is
universal.*

—Henry W. Longfellow, 1849

Longfellow in his study,
early 1870s

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Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Poet and Scholar

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow achieved much in his life, but he was first and foremost a writer. “I most eagerly aspire after future eminence in literature,” he told his father in 1824; “My whole soul burns most ardently for it.” He became one of America’s most celebrated poets, offering the young nation heroes and stories of mythic shape and dimension.

Longfellow was born in 1807 in Portland, Maine, the second son of a prominent lawyer and grandson of Gen. Peleg Wadsworth, a hero of the American Revolution. After graduating from Bowdoin College, he traveled in Europe, immersing himself in its languages, literature, and history. “To my youthful imagination,” he said, “the Old World was a kind of Holy Land.” Proficient in eight languages, he spent his early career teaching language and literature at Bowdoin and Harvard colleges. His first collection of poetry was published in 1839; the popular *Voices of the Night* included “A Psalm of Life,” reprinted in newspapers across America.

His marriage to Fanny Appleton and their social life allowed Longfellow’s creativity to flourish. He retired from teaching in 1854 to devote himself fully to writing and was soon enormously successful. Longfellow was the nation’s first professional poet and gained an international reputation. His poetry collections were translated into dozens of languages and became instant best-sellers at home and abroad, enjoyed by laborers and scholars alike. Longfellow received honorary degrees from Cambridge and Oxford

universities in England and was posthumously honored in Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey. Composers Franz Liszt and Felix Mendelssohn set his works to music. A teacher and scholar, Longfellow was familiar with heroic themes in classical literature. His own stories and larger-than-life characters in epic poems like “Evangeline” and “The Song of Hiawatha” have been absorbed into American culture. In “Paul Revere’s Ride” Longfellow turned a virtually unknown Boston silversmith into an icon on par with national founders like John Adams and Benjamin Franklin.

*All are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.*

—From “The Builders” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1849



The spacious library held musical performances and other social gatherings.

After Fanny’s 1861 death in an accidental fire, he translated Italian poet Dante Alighieri’s monumental *Divine Comedy*. Longfellow found consolation in this epic tale of salvation and enduring love. He founded the Dante Club, which met Wednesdays in his study for supper and conversation. “I should have to think long if I were ask’d to name the man who has done more . . . for America,” said poet Walt Whitman after learning of Longfellow’s death in 1882—a fitting tribute to a person who moved the world with words and spoke the language of his country’s heart and history.

The World Within This House

Henry and Fanny Longfellow’s cosmopolitan and hospitable styles made their home a vibrant place. They enjoyed formal meals with friends and family, good conversation, and the occasional musical performance in the library. Henry’s growing fame brought a widening range of visitors to his door, from perfect strangers to the famous—and infamous.

Notable guests included writers Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Anthony Trollope, and Julia Ward Howe. At breakfast one morning Charles Dickens was here on his first trip to the United States. Controversial scientist Louis Agassiz came often to visit, and Emperor Dom Pedro II of Brazil met both Longfellow and Emerson here while traveling in New England. Singers, actors, and musicians made a pilgrimage to Cambridge, among them the “Swedish Nightingale” Jenny Lind and stage actress Fanny Kemble. One of Henry’s last visitors was playwright Oscar Wilde, who said, “Longfellow was himself a beautiful poem.”

Born in the wake of the American Revolution, Longfellow witnessed momentous events of the 1800s: westward expansion, the social and political turmoil around slavery, and the US Civil War. These were subjects for his poetry and conversation. Charles Sumner, the fiery abolitionist and legislator, was a frequent guest and major influence on Henry’s anti-slavery beliefs. Other members of this influential circle were James Russell Lowell and William Dean Howells, editors of the durable *Atlantic Monthly*

*We have decided to let
Father purchase this
grand old mansion if he
will . . . how noble an
inheritance this is where
Washington dwelt in
every room.*

—Fanny Appleton Longfellow to
Thomas Gold Appleton, 1843

founded in 1857 as a platform for public opinion. Guests sooner or later found themselves immersed in family life. With five surviving children, a large staff of servants, and numerous pets, the Longfellow home was more than a shrine to the past or a scholarly ivory tower. Henry and Fanny’s children were full participants in the world within this house and grew up to embrace the world at large.

Over the years, the furnishings of the house came to match its history. Every painting, photograph, book, artifact, and piece of furniture seems to tell its own distinctive story—and the diaries and documents of the Longfellow family bring these stories to life. Altogether, there are 35,000 items including furnishings and decorative arts,



Henry and Fanny Longfellow with
Charles and Ernest, around 1849

a fine arts collection of paintings and sculptures, and an 11,000-volume library. The site’s archives hold roughly 750,000 pieces of archival material including photographs, extensive correspondence, and manuscripts collected for their association with George Washington and other famous figures.

Daughter Alice and grandson Harry Dana lived in the house until their deaths in 1928 and 1950, respectively. They carried on the family’s interests in history and education. Under their stewardship the house and its furnishings were preserved for future generations to enjoy. The formal garden became known as a work of landscape architecture in the colonial revival style.

A bronze copy (around 1850) of *Mercury* by Giambologna is part of the park collection. NPS / DAVID BOHL

Plan Your Visit

The house is open seasonally for guided tours. The grounds are open dawn to dusk year-round. Special events and activities are offered throughout the year. Call or visit the park website for current hours of operation and program listings. Tour registration and publications are available in the visitor center.

Getting Here The park is within walking distance of Harvard Square, which has parking garages. No onsite parking is available other than designated accessible spaces. Metered parking spaces may be available nearby. Consider using public transportation.

Public Transportation Via the MBTA Subway, take the Red Line to Harvard Square. Exit station on Church Street and follow Church Street to Brattle Street. Turn right onto Brattle Street and go past Mason Street. The house is on your right.

Safety and Regulations Be alert for traffic. • For firearms regulations check the park website.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, call, ask a ranger, or check the website.

Limited parking is available for visitors with disabilities. The grounds, visitor center, carriage house, and first floor of the house are wheelchair-accessible. Service animals are allowed.

Grounds These two acres are the core of the much larger 1759 estate. Many colonial-era features are still evident.

House Built in 1759, this premier example of mid-Georgian architecture, with its preserved view of the Charles River, is

considered the best of Brattle Street’s remaining mansions on “Tory Row” (as it was known). Furniture, books, artwork, ceramics, textiles, and archives that reflect the Longfellow family’s wide-ranging interests are displayed and stored in the house.

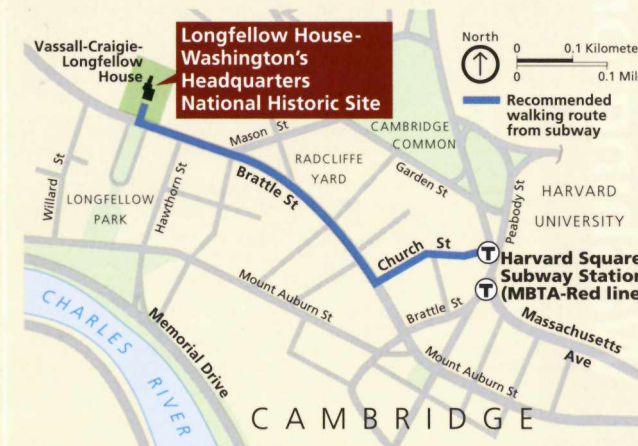
Carriage House Longfellow had this structure built in 1844. Carriages, sleighs, and sometimes horses were kept inside. Today, it is used as a meeting space for education programs, public lectures, and workshops.

For Inquiring Minds Together, the house and its contents, grounds, and archives tell the story of the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House. Researchers are encouraged to contact the park for information or to schedule an appointment.

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The Longfellow garden was renovated in the early 1900s by landscape architects Martha Brookes Hutcheson and Ellen Biddle Shipman.

More Information Longfellow House-Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site 105 Brattle St. Cambridge, MA 02138 617-876-4491 www.nps.gov/long

Longfellow House-Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more, visit www.nps.gov.