

3 *Epictetus*, trans. W.A. Oldfather (London, 1921), 2:471. Oldfather's version: "You are a little soul, carrying around a corpse, as Epictetus used to say."

4 *Encheiridion*, trans. with notes by T.W.H. Rolleston (London, 1881). Whitman's copy, containing his notes, is in the Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress. For more on Whitman's debt to Epictetus, see George B. Hutchinson, "'The Laughing Philosopher': Whitman's Comic Repose," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 6 (Spring 1989), 172-188.

5 *Correspondence*, 5:205.

6 I am grateful to Ed Fox of the Camden Historical Society and Doug Winterich of the Walt Whitman House in Camden for this and other historical details in this essay.

7 *Correspondence*, 5:226.

8 "Walt Whitman's Birthday," *Lippincott's Magazine* (August 1891), 229-239.

AN UNKNOWN 1879 PROFILE OF WHITMAN

While he "loafed" in St. Louis after his September, 1879 western excursion, Walt Whitman was the subject of two articles in the town's major newspaper, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The first, titled "Walt Whitman: His Ideas about the Future of American Literature" and published on October 17, 1879, is an important document because the poet discusses the state of American literature, as well as the future of politics and religion in America. Whitman used part of this interview in *Specimen Days*, and the whole article has been reprinted before, most recently in Walter H. Eitner's *Walt Whitman's Western Jaunt*.¹ Exactly two months later, the *Post-Dispatch* ran a follow-up piece, which has escaped notice by Whitman scholars. It is reprinted below, its first appearance since the original publication on December 17, 1879.

Unlike the first article, this second one does not contain an interview. Still, it is apparent from its obvious familiarity with Whitman that the reporter (anonymous, unfortunately) had followed the poet on his ramblings through the city. The bridge mentioned in the middle part of the article is the Eads Bridge over the Mississippi River; built between 1867 and 1874, it still stands today. A photograph of the bridge, circa 1874, is reprinted in Eitner's book (74).

The reference to "Gamaliel" in the last paragraph of the article is an allusion to the Pharisee who gave prudent advice in the Sanhedrin regarding the treatment of the followers of Jesus. It is clear from this allusion, and from the tone of the entire article, that Whitman was a very well-respected man during his sojourn in St. Louis between September 27, 1879, and January 5, 1880, when he departed for Camden.

WALT WHITMAN

What the Poet Does and How He Lives in St. Louis—Loafing and Inviting His Soul.

Walt Whitman, the poet, has become for the time being a denizen of the city of St. Louis. Readers of the *Post-Dispatch* will remember an interview that was had with him, some months ago, on his first settlement here, and since that time his kind and venerable face, with its snow-drift of flossy beard and hair, has become a familiar feature of the West End.

He is the guest of his brother, Mr. Whitman, of the Water-works, and has been in poor health since his arrival in St. Louis—at times suffering very much, and again being almost well.

Since he has come here Mr. Whitman has learned to love the city—he has explored every part of it in long, solitary walks—rambling along the dusty thoroughfares, and keenly watching the tide of life and commerce ebbing and flowing up and down, and again he seeks the solitary deserted back streets, whence life has fled, and rambles musing onward ministering to his poetic soul.

“Loafe” is a word which Walt Whitman has appropriated into the English language, as one of the features, rather, of the growing American language, and he uses it to describe his idle sauntering through the throbbing heart of the city.

His favorite resort is out upon the bridge, where he can see the immense volume of water running by beneath him and feel one of the grandest achievements of modern, and, what is more to him than modern, American, machinery beneath him.

A *Post-Dispatch* reporter has often seen him in his favorite stand upon the bridge looking steadily to the north, to where the river unfolds itself about the Horse Shoe Bend. The keen breezes blowing his hair, the old man looks like the Genius of the bridge.

He is most approachable to any one who wishes to talk with him, and many of the passers-by on the bridge stop to exchange a greeting with the fine looking old gentlemen [sic] whom they do not know but whom they all like. He is especially fond of children, and they come to him naturally, delighting in the stories he tells them, and feeling that he is somebody they want to know.

His love for children finds expression also in his constant visits to the kindergartens in the different schools about his house, where he is always received with open arms by the children. On his entry the exercises are usually suspended, while a crowd of little ones clamber upon his knees and surround him tumultuously, demanding unconditional surrender and a story.

He tells his tale to some particular Bright Eyes in the group, and his romances are always immense successes. The favorite tale, which they always demand first, is “The Two Cats Taking a Walk,” and their adventures furnish a never-ending fund of fun to the wee audience of the poet. He is a great improvisatore, and the ready applause and evident interest which each fable brings out lead him still further into the recesses of his imagination.

Mr. Whitman has lived very quietly in St. Louis, not extending the circle of his acquaintance, and, in fact, rather avoiding notice. He wants to be let alone and he likes his present careless life. He likes to “loafe” and invite his soul.

Mr. Whitman does not know how long he will remain in St. Louis, nor has he any definite plans. Many of the young men who have been sitting at the feet of Gamaliel will regret his departure extremely when he does go.

Jerome Loving has recently discovered a manuscript in the University of Texas Humanities Research Center that indicates Whitman may well have had a hand in the writing of this article (see Figure 1). As with many of the newspaper pieces published about Whitman during his western journey, this one seems at least in part to have been in the nature of a press release; he no doubt offered his notes to the *Post-Dispatch* reporter. The manuscript, reprinted here with permission from the Humanities Research Center, reads as follows:

Under *Personal* [*?Men & Things*] head—any day

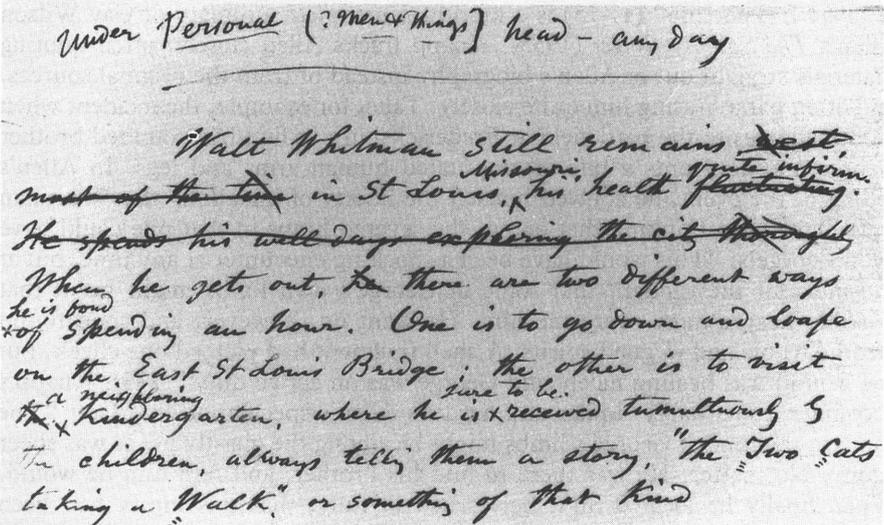
Walt Whitman still remains [*deleted*: west most of the time] in St. Louis, Missouri, his health [*deleted*: fluctuating] quite infirm. [*Deleted*: He spends his well days exploring the city thoroughly] When he gets out, [*deleted*: he] there are two different ways he is fond of spending an hour. One is to go down and loafe on the East St Louis Bridge; the other is to visit [*deleted*: the] a neighboring kindergarten, where he is sure to be received tumultuously by the children, always telling them a story, "the Two Cats taking a Walk," or something of that kind.

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NOTES

1 See "An Interviewer's Item," *Specimen Days*, in Floyd Stovall, ed., *Prose Works 1892* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 1:224-225; Walter H. Eitner, *Walt Whitman's Western Jaunt* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), 82-85.



Under *Personal* [*?Men & Things*] head—any day

Walt Whitman still remains ~~west~~^{Missouri} most of the time in St. Louis, his health ~~fluctuating~~^{quite infirm}.
He spends his well days exploring the city thoroughly.
When he gets out, ~~then~~ there are two different ways
^{he is fond} of spending an hour. One is to go down and loafe
on the East St Louis Bridge; the other is to visit
a neighboring kindergarten, where he is ^{sure to be} received tumultuously by
the children, always telling them a story, "the Two Cats
taking a Walk," or something of that kind

Figure 1. Whitman's manuscript press release for his St. Louis trip. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.