A LONG-LOST *EAGLE* ARTICLE PUTS WALT AND JEFF ON THE MAP

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While researching annotations for an NEH-sponsored grant for the *Walt Whitman Archive* that focuses on the poet's involvement with the *Brooklyn Daily Times*, I came across an intriguing article titled "Visit to Baisley's Pond" in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* from June 30, 1858. Even though this article appears in the pages of a direct, local competitor of the *Times*, it appears to be authored by Walt Whitman. The short piece is written in the style of a journalistic "peep," a specialty of the journalist Whitman. It focuses on a visit by an unnamed reporter to see the progress on the construction of the Brooklyn Waterworks and the engineers—including Walt's younger brother, Thomas Jefferson Whitman. These men were responsible for the system of pipes and conduits that would carry the water from supply ponds, like Baisley's, to the citizens of Brooklyn. Walt, as we now know, was heavily involved in advocating for the project in the pages of the *Times*. This advocacy, it appears, also extended into other papers.

Published nearly ten years after Walt Whitman was allegedly "fired" from the *Eagle*, and while he was editing the rival *Times*, this discovery raises several questions. Why did this article appear in a competitor's paper to which Whitman seemed to hold no official editorial connection? And why was Thomas Jefferson Whitman mentioned here, yet never in any of Whitman's numerous *Times* editorials on the same topic, the Brooklyn Waterworks? By making a case for Whitman's authorship of "Visit to Baisley's Pond," I will briefly demonstrate how this discovery complicates previously accepted ideas about Whitman's editorial tenure at any paper, his supposedly long-standing feuds with former bosses, and his trajectory from journalist to poet.

I found this piece in the *Eagle* mostly by chance. I had been annotating an editorial in the *Daily Times* that will soon be published on the *Walt Whitman Archive* as part of an endeavor to identify and edit Whitman's unpublished *Daily Times* editorials. The article I was annotating from April 17, 1858, mentions the discovery of mastodon remains in Brooklyn. I then began a search for earlier references to this mastodon in hopes of writing an annotation that provided updates on the find. It was then that I stumbled upon this piece in the *Eagle*

that follows the author's journey to the site where the mastodon was exhumed and to Baisley's Pond, guided by the engineers of the Waterworks. It was at the dredged Baisley's Pond, a pond created in the eighteenth century by damning three streams in order to accommodate a mill operated by David Baisley (1792-1875), where mastodon bones and teeth were found. The land that Baisley's Pond sat on was eventually acquired by the Williamsburg Waterworks in 1852. Baisley's Pond (known by various names during the nineteenth century, including "Jamaica Pond" and "Mill Pond") can now be found in Baisley Pond Park located in South Jamaica, Queens. [See Figure 1.]

Walt Whitman's earlier history with the *Eagle* is well known to scholars of his early journalism. From 1846 to 1848, Whitman edited this Democratic paper and his work coincided with the country's discussion about what to do with the land that the U.S. acquired during the Mexican-American War. This issue caused a rift in the Democratic Party over the extension of enslaved labor to the West. "Hunkers" wanted to maintain party unity and allow slavery in the newly acquired land, a benefit to Southern enslaving interests. However, "free-soilers," like Whitman, wanted slavery to be excluded from these territories. Traditionally, scholars have assumed that the proprietor of the paper, Isaac Van Anden, fired Whitman in 1848 because of his free-soil proclivities. Later, in 1848, Whitman founded his own newspaper to promote the free-soil cause, the *Brooklyn Freeman*.

Whitman's work as a journalist in the 1850s has been harder to trace. The *Archive*'s most recent grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities thus seeks to determine the extent of his contributions to the *Brooklyn Daily Times*. To this end, our efforts have initially focused on Whitman's longest, coherent corpus of writings for the paper: his lobbying for the Waterworks from 1856 to 1859, during which he penned many articles advocating for improvements to the Waterworks recommended by James Kirkwood, the project engineer. Thomas Jefferson Whitman, Walt's younger brother, was an employee of Kirkwood's, and likely provided Walt access to the engineer and to the plans, which Walt, in turn, used to publicly advocate for their recommendations for costly revisions to the project.

There are several different aspects of the *Eagle* article that point to it being written by Whitman. The first is the author's mention of Thomas Jefferson ("Jeff") Whitman. Whitman had not mentioned his brother in any of his *Brooklyn Daily Times* editorials, though scholars on the grant team had identified Jeff's close involvement with the project. In the *Eagle*, however, Jeff is noted as one of the tour guides on the visit to the Waterworks excursion.

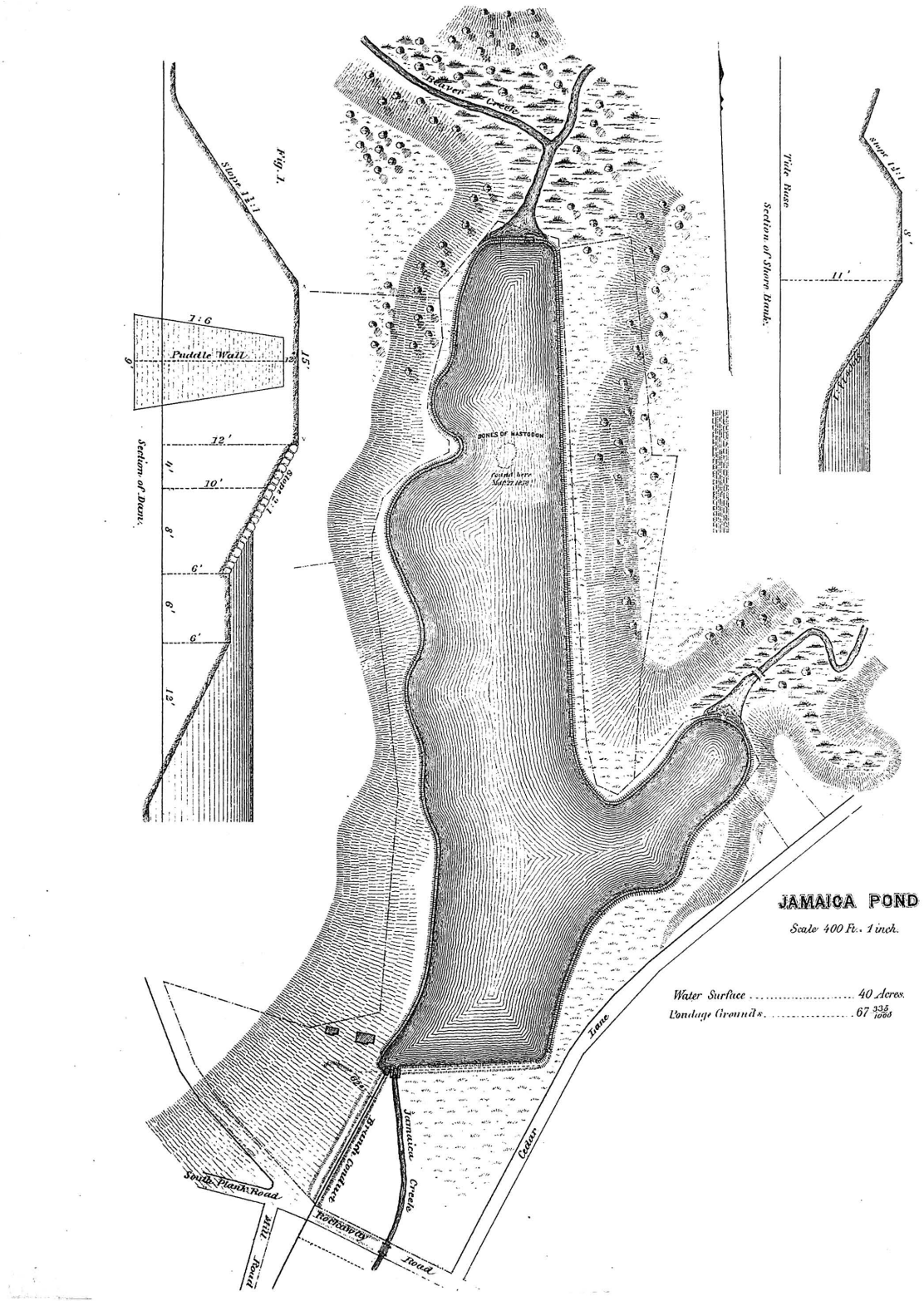

Figure 1: Map of Jamaica [Baisley's] Pond, showing where mastodon bones were found; from *The Brooklyn Water Works and Sewers: A Descriptive Memoir*, prepared by the Board of Water Commissioners (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1867).

Perhaps Walt worried that mentioning his brother or referencing Jeff's engineering work in his *Times* editorials would reveal his familial bias for the project. However, the *Eagle* editorial, published anonymously in a paper that had famously (and quite publicly) parted ways with Whitman, offered plausible enough deniability of any connection between Jeff's boss and arguments in favor of the Waterworks coming from the rival *Brooklyn Daily Times*. It also allowed the *Times* itself, whose publisher was the official printer for the city of Brooklyn, to maintain a more objective tone and bracket how personally implicated in the project one of its main editorial voices at the time really was. Jeff was, of course, providing financial support to Walt during these years.

The style in the *Eagle* piece bears some compelling similarities to Whitman's style in *Leaves of Grass* as well as the journalistic voice he was known for during his *Eagle* days. For example, consider a famous short catalog from Whitman's 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*—"And limitless are leaves, stiff or drooping in the fields, / And brown ants in the little wells beneath them, / And mossy scabs of the worm-fence, heaped stones, elder, mullein, pokeweed"—and its stylistic similarities in the *Eagle* editorial: "The quiet of the country—the birds singing in the trees—the low gurgle of the brooks—the fresh smell of the water and the swamps." In both cases, there is a use of vivid natural imagery organized in a successive order. Both moments focus on celebrating nature not atop mountain peaks or in mighty woods but in the liminal and abject: in decaying leaves, mosquito-ridden swamps, and muddy ponds. "To the shallow and too hasty glance, these things may afford little or no material," the author of "A Visit" notes, "But we think that even our crude and rapid report . . . will suggest to the reader that there is a vast fund of interest, fact, reminiscence, sentiment, etc., even in a small part" like Baisley's Pond.

And, of course, this is not Whitman's only known editorial in the *Eagle* at the time. Only a few days after "A Visit" appeared, a reminiscence of the "Old Times in Brooklyn" was published in that paper, signed "W," which has been convincingly attributed to Whitman. "Old Times," in turn, echoes language from a Whitman-authored piece in the *Times*, a year prior. An unsigned follow-up piece of sorts to "Old Times," from 1862, also subtitled "Old Times in Brooklyn," has likewise been identified as Whitman's. (It almost seems to retroactively turn "Old Times" into an *Eagle* series.) Noticeably, both late 1857 *Eagle* pieces, "A Visit" and "Old Times," are laid out as "external features" with similar, four-level titles highly atypical for in-house reporting at the *Eagle* (see Figure 2). In the weeks surrounding their appearance in print, we could locate no similarly laid out articles, suggesting that Whitman, a trained printer since his youth, may even have had a hand in the process.

Visit to Baisley's Pond.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS POND.

Its Present Condition.

SOMETHING MORE ABOUT THE MASTADON.

OUR CITY JUST 33 YEARS SINCE.

Fourth of July 1825—Visit of Lafayette—
The Apprentices' Library.

OLD TIMES IN BROOKLYN.

The Village Fathers—Elias Hicks, &c.

The Levinthan.

The taste for eccentricity is amusing when confined within moderate bounds, but when it involves large capital its results are more vexa-

Figure 2: Second-page title formatting of "A Visit," Whitman's "Old Times," and a typical *Eagle* piece.

The recovery of "Visit to Baisley's Pond" and the case for it as a Whitman-authored piece expands and complicates our understanding of Whitman's writing life during these years, a period when he was revising *Leaves of Grass*, perhaps tinkering with "Manly Health and Training," and seemingly publishing in multiple newspapers about the Brooklyn Waterworks. Clearly, the *Eagle* continued to serve as a "go-to" publication for Whitman well past his editorial employ and is ripe for a scholarly reassessment. Recent discoveries have similarly complicated our assumptions about the stability of Whitman's work at one particular place during these years. "A Visit to Baisley's Pond" also presents opportunities for future research by raising significant questions about Whitman's journalism: Why might the *Eagle* publish an article by Walt Whitman, an active contributor to a rival paper? Why were editorials identified as Whitman's in the *Times* so stylistically different from this one piece in the *Eagle*? But what this

discovery does make clear is that we need to re-think Whitman's involvement and relationship with the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in the late 1850s, as well as what it meant to be an editor and a journalist during this period.

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From *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 30, 1858:

Visit to Baisley's Pond.
THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS POND.
Its Present Condition.
SOMETHING MORE ABOUT THE MASTADON.

The pond above named is of direct and deep interest to the people of Brooklyn just now, because from it, commencing this fall, will be drawn exclusively, for a while, and very largely, for all future time, that long-wanted supply of pure water we make so much reckoning of. Perhaps it is not generally known that when our water works take their practical commencement—when the mighty basin at Ridgewood is duly puddled, stoned, grated and locked—the conduit finished from Jamaica to the pump well—the steam got up—the huge pumping machinery in motion, and the water forced up through the pipes—the mains and laterals laid through all the avenues and streets of the city, and everything put in connection, we are to rely then for the real article of all, for the daily 3,500,000 gallons flowing down to us from Baisley's pond—and on that, as we have said, exclusively for a time. The ponds beyond, (Nostrand's, Simonson's Clear Stream, P. Cornell's, Pines and Hempstead,) will not be in order for perhaps a year yet, and, indeed, are not likely to be so much needed at first.

As these are quite important considerations, we have just devoted a day to a visit and thorough examination of this nearest pond, gleaning much that will doubtless be of immediate interest to our readers. We had every facility and kindness from the Engineers, Messrs. Elseffer, Whitman, Bottsford, and Ward—the first-named gentleman having charge of this action. They are all pleasantly quartered at the farm house of Mr. Rider near the pond.

We would like to give the people of our city a more correct idea than they probably have of the cleanliness and sweetness of the supply of water from these ponds. Baiseley's especially, we should say, would satisfy even the most delicate and fastidious person. It is all pure, natural, clear water, free from taint, free from any obnoxious contact whatevever [sic], or from any mineral infusion. All over the bottom, where the workmen have cleaned it off, gush up little crystal springs. There are scores and scores of them.

Through the middle, and coming into it from various directions, are great brooks, deep, and of strong current. We stood by one towards the top of the Pond, and bending down to drink of it, found the taste peculiarly sweet and delicious. The brook in the middle is quite a little river, after wet weather. The 3,500,000 gallons before named as the daily outflow, is the lowest mark of this Pond; and a considerably greater supply may be generally relied upon. We have to add, that the Pond never runs dry. It is fed by those inexhaustible springs—a very curious part of the hydrographic character of Long Island.

In size this Pond covers nearly 40 acres, and when filled with water, it will have an average depth of about six feet. The greatest width across at any place is 1,800 feet. It has

quite an accession from a little inlet at the side of it—giving the whole very much the shape of an old-fashioned mitten, with a thumb to it.

It is curious to look on the heavy layers of muck, (peat, or turf bottom,) which the workmen have to cut and cart away. In nearly every direction these layers are from four to six feet in thickness—the accumulations of ages. They cart this peat away, and use it for enriching the fields.

The premises of what now forms Baiseley's Pond were granted, long before the Revolutionary War, to one John Cole, on condition that he would then and there forthwith establish a Mill to grind flour from the grain of the farmers of the neighborhood. From that dates the original title to the spot.

We walked up the bank on one side of the Pond and so around, across, and down the opposite bank. It was quite early in the morning. The scene was a pleasant one, and calculated to associate all future thought of our Brooklyn Water Works with very agreeable recollections. The quiet of the country—the birds singing in the trees—the low gurgle of the brooks—the fresh smell of the water and the swampbushes—the sight of the surrouning [sic] woods and fields—even little things, near at hand—the track of the mud-turtle on the wet mud—the bottom and sides of the Pond, in places, all gnarled with roots, the brown and green roots of the water-lilies, like stout ship-hawers [sic?]—the patches of white and silvery sand, where everything had been cleared away above—all these are indelibly impressed upon our memory.

Then the *Mastadon*! The young Engineers guided us to the spot whence the monster was exhumed and told us all about it. We stood upon a little sand-hillock, upon the identical ground where the ancient beast had lain, and like a faithful reporter, took notes!

It was about the 27th of last March that the Mastadon was found. The workmen were digging through the remains all the afternoon and part of the next morning, before the Engineers knew of the discovery. As soon as they learned it, they had the greatest care observed in the digging—and the earth that had been carried away was turned over; for it was possitively [sic] asserted by the men, when questioned, that part of a large jaw-bone, with a tooth in it, had been carted off. Unfortunately, however, the remains were in such a condition, and the shovels and picks of the laborers so effective that only a few relics were collected, as solid and lasting mementos of the Long Island Mastadon.

Still, they were enough. Four teeth were found, with other bones, (many of which we have since seen and handled.) The largest tooth is in a remarkable state of preservation, the enamel on it glossy and smooth, and black as ebony—in shape the usual tooth shape; in size it measures 17 1-2 inches around, and from 7 to 8 inches in length. One of these teeth is in the cabinet of J. C. Brevoort, one of the Water Commissioners, at his residence, Bedford. Mr. Elseffer, the Engineer in charge, has also a number of the relics, large and small, some of them, we understand, offering curious studies for the savan. Much that we learned, upon this subject, would need a scientific explanation and this would be out of place in a rapid article like this.

Last Friday there were two other teeth found, one very large one, in a perfect state of preservation, and one small one. The large tooth has the same black color and glossy enamel, as the others. The laborers who found them, still hold on to them, hiding them in their shanties, believing them to possess great value.

If the reader be of those who had some doubt, (as we had previously), about this L. I.

Mastadon story, he may dismiss such doubt; for the case is a real one, and deserving of very far more attention and examination than has been given to it. Had it occurred a great way off, we should very likely have heard more about it. We still hope that some competent Naturalist will devote time to the preparation of a memoir upon this deeply interesting subject.

To give some idea of the size of the huge unknown we may mention there was pointed out to us, as we stood on the spot, the space of sixteen feet by thirty, where it had lain, and through which it had left significant traces of its decay.

Of course we cannot stop here to jot down the many reflections that must naturally arise out of these facts, which bring as it were the ancient world here again, tangibly present, to the doors, to the very senses, of us Brooklynites. The finding of these remains is a text from which just as much may be educed, and carried out to conclusions, as from those distant and significant facts, that the great books are made of, and which savans pore over in the famous libraries.

We will add to the foregoing that the "barrel conduit" connecting Baiseley's with the great conduit is now finished, and that it and the gate or junction at its terminus, are pieces of workmanship worthy of examination.

Much more might be learned and written of Baiseley's Pond, of the other Ponds, and of the Brooklyn Water Works generally. To the shallow and too hasty glance, these things may afford little or no material—nothing beyond certain figures, amounts, and dry statistics. But we think that even our crude and rapid report, (because a daily paper must both learn and write "on the wing,") will suggest to the reader that there is a vast fund of interest, fact, reminiscence, sentiment, etc., even in a small part of what concentrates about the office, up near the City Hall, of the Contractor for the Brooklyn Water Works.

Notes

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1 NEH Grant, "Walt Whitman's Journalism: Finding the Poet in the *Brooklyn Daily Times*."

2 Stephanie M. Blalock, Kevin McMullen, Stefan Schöberlein, and Jason Stacy, "'One of the grand works of the world': Walt Whitman and the Brooklyn Waterworks, 1856-1859" (forthcoming in *Technology and Culture*).

3 Dennis K. Renner, "Brooklyn Daily Eagle," in J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, eds., *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998); available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org).

4 The mastodon became a part of the historical memory of Brooklyn soon after. See Boston Society of Natural History, *Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Riverside, 1861), 287. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle Almanac* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Daily Eagle Book and Job Department, 1895), s.v. Animals of L. I., Extinct.

5 "Residents Struggle with Urban Blight," *Newsday* (June 24, 1990).

6 Scholarship on Whitman's journalism goes back nearly a hundred years with scholars such as Emory Holloway, Thomas L. Brasher, Herbert Bergman, and William White.

7 David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 114-118.

8 Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 111.

9 Jason Stacy, *Walt Whitman's Multitudes* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 100-101.

10 For Whitman's time at the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, see Emory Holloway, "Walt Whitman as an Editor Fought All, Including His Boss," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (January 27, 1924), sec. B, 4:7-8; Thomas L. Brasher, *Whitman as Editor of The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970); Herbert Bergman, "Walt Whitman as a Journalist, March, 1848-1892," *Journalism Quarterly* 48 (Autumn 1971): 431-437; William White, "Whitman's Years with The *Daily Eagle*, Before and After" *Calamus* 25 (October 1984), 5-33; Loving, 227-232; Karen Karbiener, "Reconstructing Whitman's Desk at the *Brooklyn Daily Times*." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 33 (Summer 2015), 21-50.

11 NEH Grant, "'One of the grand works of the world': Walt Whitman and the Brooklyn Waterworks, 1856-1859." Unpublished.

12 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn: Fowler & Wells, 1856), 11.

13 W, "Old Times in Brooklyn," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (July 3, 1858), 2; William White identified this article as Whitman's in *Walt Whitman's Journalism: A Bibliography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 28.

14 From "Old Times" in the *Eagle*: "Several gentlemen . . . began handing the children down to stand on convenient spots in the lately excavated basement; among the rest, Lafayette himself assisted. The writer recollects well the pride he felt in being one of these who happened to be taken into Lafayette's arms, and passed down." From the *Brooklyn Daily Times*: "Among those who aided ex tempore in handling down the children was Lafayette himself; and the writer recollects well the childish pride he experienced in being one of those who were taken in the arms of Lafayette" ("Henry C. Murphy," *Brooklyn Daily Times* [June 3, 1857], 2). For more on the *Times* piece, see Karbiener, 29-31.

15 Arthur Golden, "An Uncollected Whitman Article," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 64 (July 1960), 353–360.

16 "An Old Landmark Gone, An Interesting Reminiscence of Old Times in Brooklyn," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (October 9, 1862), 2. Each of these "Old Times" pieces details Whitman's oft-repeated childhood encounter with Lafayette.

17 Stefan Schöberlein, Stephanie M. Blalock, Kevin McMullen, and Jason Stacy, "Walt Whitman, Editor at the *New-York Atlas*," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 39 (Spring 2022), 189-204.