April 2016

Jerome Gardner Witham Correspondence

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Jerome Gardnet Witham 1898-

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WITHAM, Jerome Gardner

Carmel, April 10, 1898
Dear Miss Fuller:

Thanks very much for your complimentary comments upon my work. I should be pleased and proud to have you keep the entire lot of clippings, magazines, etc., for your Maine Author files, inasmuch as I have copies of nearly all of them. In answer to your request for my birth date, I was born in Carmel, Me., April 10, 1898.

I wonder if I dare ask as a favor if you will keep an eye on the Current Poetry page of the Literary Digest during the next few weeks and let me know if one of my subjects should appear thereon? I sent them some printed subjects twice within the last month but have difficulty in getting hold of copies to check up on them.

Thanking you again for your kind interest.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]
My dear Miss Fuller:

As you showed so kind an interest in my work, last summer, I thought perhaps you would like to see a copy of the enclosed: "Quatrains from 'The Second Book of Roses'" which appeared in today's Brooklyn Eagle. You see, I sent them to the columnist, Art Arthur, last week and asked him to hold them over and print them today, as April 10 is my birthday and I thought it would be a nice observance. He has been friendly to my poems for years, and he readily complied.

Another set of "Quatrains from 'The Second Book of Roses'" appeared in the January-February issue of "Bozart and Contemporary Verse" published early in March, at Oglethorpe University, Georgia. I regret that I haven't a copy at hand to send you, but I thought that perhaps the Maine State Library received copies of that magazine as issued.

With kindest regards, believe me

Most sincerely yours,

Jerome G. Witham
Miss Hilda McLeod,
Maine State Library,
Augusta, Maine.

Dear Miss McLeod:

Thanks very much for your letter about my literary work. I shall be only too pleased to send you a signed copy of my book, "The Birth of a Legend" as soon as it appears in book form. I have a completed book of verse, entitled "The Book of Roses"—a paraphrase of the 1859 Fitzgerald Rubaiyat— which I hope to have published by next fall, and if so, I will see that a copy with my signature is sent to you immediately it comes from the presses.

I am enclosing a clipping of my verses, "To Marie Dressier" which were printed in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, on Sept. 23 last. I thought you might like to add them to your files.

I am enclosing on a separate sheet the brief summary of my life which you requested. I was sorry to learn of Mrs Fuller's illness— please convey to her my best regards and wishes for her speedy recovery.

With much gratitude for your interest in my work, I am

Most sincerely yours,

Jerome G. Witham

P.S. A fresh chapter of "The Birth of a Legend" is scheduled to appear in the Bangor Daily Commercial within the next day or two.
Jerome Gardner Witham

Born of American parents at Carmel, Maine, April 10, 1898.

Parents——Jerome Witham and Mrs Elizabeth (Dinsmore) Witham.

Education——Carmel district schools, Pittsfield Grammar School and Maine Central Institute. Graduated from M.C.I. in 1915. Took a special literary course at Columbia University, New York City, in 1939.

General Summary——Shortly after leaving M.C.I., I went to New York City in pursuit of my literary ambitions and stayed there, except for occasional sojourns at home in Carmel, for nearly eighteen years. Followed many varied occupations to earn a living, while spending my every spare moment and endeavor striving to perfect my style and to achieve literary recognition. First broke into print in the New York press in 1931——have since had many serious poems printed in various New York newspapers and in national poetry magazines. Nearly half of the seventy-five quatrains in my "Book of Roses" have appeared in the New York Evening Journal, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, and in "Bozart."——likewise several groups of quatrains from "The Second Book of Roses," a sequel volume now in course of preparation. Some forty-odd of my humorous verse subjects have appeared, illustrated, in Ted Cook's nationally-syndicated column in the New York American. My book of humorous verse, "The Adventure of the Heckled Band" was published in New York City in 1932.

Have been living at my home in Carmel during the last two years, engaged in various poetic efforts and in working on the manuscript of "The Birth of a Legend," a yet-unfinished book of political essays.
TO MARIE DRESSLER

Dear friend, good bye—the very phrases clog
Our throats—yet you who lie at shadow's end
Will understand the well-familiar blend
Of tears and laughter in this epilogue.
For who has tribute more than tears to bring?
Or less than laughter for remembering?

We think it is not sacrilege that we
Should fancy on your final night of Earth
That stars grew brighter with expectant mirth,
A new name blazed on Heaven's high marquee,
As, star to star, the laughing winds in flight
Bore joyous tidings: "Marie comes tonight."

Though other friends the coming days install,
Through them to you our tributes shall betake
Whenever on the screen the shadows wake
And merry scenes for merry laughter call.
O quiet-lying Comrade, have no fear—
The stars are not so far but you shall hear.

—JEROME G. WITHAM, Carmel, Me.
Mr. Jerome G. Witham  
Carmel  
Maine  

Dear Mr. Witham:  

Thank you very much for the helpful biographical outline which we received this morning. We are filing it at once.  

We appreciate your sending the poem "To Marie Dressler" and also your offer of the two books when published. We assure you we are anticipating them.  

We are very much interested in your work, and hope that success may attend the books now in preparation.  

Very truly yours  
Maine State Library  

Im  
Secretary
May 15, 1935.

Mr. Jerome G. Witham  
Carmel  
Maine

Dear Mr. Witham:

We have received the package which you sent, containing newspaper clippings, magazines and a copy of Mardelia Dee. We are indeed delighted to have these bits of your work, and hope that you will continue your interest in our Maine Author Collection as we continue our interest in your work. Thank you for sending this package.

We hope the book is nearing completion, and that it will soon be published and on our shelves.

Very truly yours,  
Maine State Library

hm  
Secretary
P.S. My essay, titled "The Fall of the Bastille," for the research on which I borrowed the above books, will appear in the Bangor Daily News on Tuesday, July 14th, inst. I would be very much obliged if a copy of the issue containing that essay could be filed away with the collection of my writings which you now have on file in your Maine Authors' Dept. May I ask if you have a copy of my essay on the Greely Arctic Expedition, titled "A Saga of Starvation," which appeared in the Bangor Daily News on Thursday, Oct. 17th last?
July 16, 1936

Jerome G. Witham
Carmel
Maine

Dear Mr. Witham:

Thank you for calling to our attention your two articles in the Bangor Daily News. We do not have a copy of your essay on the Greely Arctic Expedition, entitled "A Saga of Starvation." We hope you have an extra copy that you can send us for including in the Maine Author Collection.

We have ordered a copy of the Bangor Daily News for July 14, and will clip the essay, "The fall of the Bastille."

Your interest is very much appreciated, and we trust it will continue, as do our best wishes in regard to your work.

Very truly yours

hm

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY
Miss Hilda McLeod,
Maine State Library, Augusta.

Dear Miss McLeod:

I am enclosing a copy of my essay, "A Saga of Starvation" to which I referred in my last letter—also a copy of my latest poem, "The Laughing President," which appeared in the Bangor Commercial on June 23d last, together with a "Note" or foreword.

Concerning my latest essay, "The Fall of the Bastille," please accept my apologies for making a somewhat premature announcement. At the end of some weeks of labor and research, the essay was finally finished and mailed to the Bangor Daily News on Saturday, July 11th, with a request that it be printed in the issue of July 14th, if possible. But it seems that the great extra volume of special news and advertising—due to the President's arrival, Mr. Hamilton's speech at the Republican rally and the extraordinary bargain-sale* events which called for many full-page ads—crowded my essay temporarily aside. But I have every reason to believe that it will appear soon, as the News has always been very appreciative of my offerings and they would have notified me before this time if any reason existed why they could not print this latest contribution. As soon as it appears, I will immediately secure an extra copy and forward it to you.

Please be sure that I am grateful for your past and present interest in my work.

Most cordially yours,

Jerome G. Witham

[Signature]

Jerome G. Witham
July 20, 1936

Jerome G. Witham
Carmel
Maine

Dear Mr. Witham:

We have received your letter with its enclosures from the Bangor Daily News, which we are placing with your material in the Maine Author Collection.

We are very glad to have these clippings, and will be pleased to receive a copy of your essay of the Bastille when it is published.

Very truly yours

hm

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY
A Saga of Starvation

By JEROME G. WITHAM

(A Tale of the Greely Arctic Expedition, 1881-1884)

The bones of dead heroes have strewn the paths to glory in Arctic exploration. Drowning, freezing and starvation have made major contributions to the appalling register. But deaths by the quick obliteration of drowning, or the slower anæsthesia of freezing, are merciful compared with the agonies of protracted famine during which the mind until the very last is able to grasp to the full the horror and hopelessness that lie ahead.

Within the last century, three official Arctic expeditions have met with shattering disaster. On June 8, 1845, Sir John Franklin, commanding one hundred and thirty-four officers and men, set sail with two ships from the Orkney Islands in an attempt to discover the fabled Northwest Passage—and no living word was ever heard of them again. Many searching parties scouring the bleak Arctic wastes during the next two decades found only scattered bones, unidentifiable skeletons, personal relics, and a few pages of incomplete records—silent spokesmen of the impossible and such supplies as their craft could accommodate—their boats consisting of a twenty-seven-foot steam launch, a salvaged ice-boats, and a check-up of their depleted stores warned them of the impossibility of spending another winter at "Fort Conger." Preparations for departure were begun in latter July, and on August 9th, the party embarked with their records and such supplies as their craft could accommodate—their boats consisting of a twenty-seven-foot steam launch, a salvaged ice-boats, and two whale-boats. Greely's hope was to reach Cape Sabine, three hundred and fifty miles to the south, where he expected to find stores awaiting him, before the Arctic winter set in.

Now the misfortunes which had thus far held aloof seemed to rise at every turn to harry the progress of that tragic hegira. Hemmed in by ice-packs which formed around them, restricting their movement to the turtle-speed of the drifting floes, they won clear only to find themselves steering past sheer walls of ice fifty feet high on either side and a scant twelve feet apart—immemorial fear of being ground to powder between these split fragments of a giant berg. Beyond was another brief stretch of open water—then once again, and finally, the ice-fields closed in around them. On September 10th, hopeless of further progress by water, the party abandoned the launch and set out shoreward over the treacherous ice, dragging the two whale-boats after them. Fierce weather now descended upon them, and it was only by dint of battling every step of the way that the exhausted members at last gained the shore, with one whale-boat, their sleeping-bags, and such food as remained—some forty days' rations. All other equipment had been left behind.

No time was lost them now for lengthy debate as to the best course to pursue. The cold hourly grew intense, the storm more menacing; utter necessity demanded the erection of some immediate shelter. Stones were hastily collected and walls thrown up around an enclosure about sixteen feet square; these walls, three feet high, were roofed by placing the inverted whale-boat across them, supplemented by strips of tarpaulin. In the whole piled high with snow. Inside this shelter, which could only be entered on hands and knees, there was barely room for the twenty-six men to sit, or lie, clock-wise side by side in their sleeping-bags, their feet extending towards the center. And within that rude and inadequate hut was destined to be staged as a Stirring a drama of staunch courage, wasting death and incredible endurance as any to which the relentless Arctic tempests had ever howled unwilling applause.

All possible resources to increase their stores were invoked before the long Polar night set in. Hunters secured the frozen barrens for game; a party was sent to Cape Sabine in search of supplies believed to be stored there. Yet here again, luck turned a frowning face upon the efforts of the trapped adventurers. The only game that the hunters could discover was a few blue foxes...
and the amount of the stores brought back from Cape Sabine was far less than had been counted on. Greely and his subordinates held a sober council of war. Winter was now upon them, with the prolonged Arctic night close at its heels. Any attempt to make the long trek to the nearest Eskimo settlement in the teeth of merciless blizzards and paralyzing cold would be the sheerest folly, a road to suicide—nor could any relief ship be looked for earlier than the following May or June. Only one course was left to them—a bitter but inexorable alternative. This was to remain in virtual hibernation through the winter months, with the daily ration of food per man restricted to the lowest possible amount necessary to sustain life—this amount was fixed at fourteen ounces. By such calculation, there would be ten days' rations remaining on March 1st, when the return of sunlight would make possible a desperate dash to reach the nearest outpost of Etah Eskimo.

On October 26th, the darkness came. Between them now and that slenderness chance of escape lay four unbroken months of an ordeal of unparalleled rigor. Fourteen ounces a day—a few mouthfuls per meal with the edge of hunger stripped so keen that each man, on receiving his daily dole, was racked by a temptation to eat it all on the spot, thus purchasing an hour's solace from the hunger-pangs at the price of the twenty-three hours of misery to follow before he would be given his next allotment. Yet none did this—with heroic restraint, each man divided his daily share into three equal parts, to be consumed at regular hours. And throughout that siege of protracted torment, the spirit of cheerful generosity and consideration for others prevailed. If one man, due to the cramped space in which he moved, accidentally upset his meagre portion of tea at meal-time, others contributed from their own scantiness, so that the luckless one should not go wholly without. If the commander called for volunteers to brave the murderous cold outside in an attempt to reach a certain cache of food known to be stored less than fifty miles distant, his problem was merely to select the stoutest and most able, since the entire party would volunteer in a body. Each man vied with his neighbor in service to the group—the whole history of that weary winter is a shining revelation of the heights of humanity to which men can rise when bound together in the close cameraderie of doom.

And of all the names on that heroic roster, none stood more glowing than that of Sergeant Rice. Here was grandeur itself, the sort of devoted courage which adds the last lustre to the human chronicle. Rice, always one of the first to spring to the fore when volunteers for some perilous service were needed, had several times led scouting parties through the freezing dark in efforts to relieve the straits of his enfeebled companions. On one venture, an attempt to bring back the store of 140 pounds of meat known to have been left at Cape Isabella, forty-odd miles away, by the Nares Expedition in 1876, the meat was actually secured and the return trip begun—but one of the members of the party became so badly frost-bitten that he collapsed, and the others were compelled to abandon the precious supplies in order to carry their comrade. On another sortie, a plucky effort to reach Littleton Island where an Eskimo outpost might be found, after five days of guelling progress, Rice's companion, the Eskimo Jens, could go no farther and Rice was forced to assist him to return to camp.

March 1st came, and with it a mortal disappointment—the great effort which had been planned for that date, the sole chance of escape to which all had looked forward through the gnawing months of semi-starvation, must be abandoned—the ice had broken, and an impassable stretch of open water blocked the road south. The problem of food, by this time, had become acute; the meager daily ration, supplemented only by a few blue foxes and prairigan, was reduced still farther. April came, and within the first few days, two men were found dead in their sleeping-kit—not the first to go, as one man had died on January 18th. All were by now so weak that they could barely turn over in their sleeping-bags. Only a few days' supplies, even of starvation rations, were left—and now, Sergeants Rice and Fredericks volunteered to make a desperate sortie in an effort to bring in the sledge of meat with which the earlier party had been forced to abandon in order to save their freezing comrades.

A bitter wind beat about the starved bodies of the two men as they fought their way for hours through the swirling snow. But Rice's feet were striding their final trail—he, who had never spared himself from the first and had spent his strength so gallantly in service to others, had set too great a stint for his drained vitality to endure. Suddenly he began talking wildly and staggering; Fredericks seized his arm and sought to hold him up, but the cruel weight of cold and exhaustion bore too heavily. Rice made a vain attempt to pull himself together—then fell face downward on the snow, raving in delirium about the feast he fancied he was eating. His brave companion stripped off his own coat to wrap around the dying man, and sat holding him in his arms until the giant heart was still and Rice had gone on to take his place at the great banquet table that awaited him in the Heaven of Heroes. Fredericks, chilled to the bone as he was, would not leave till he had dug a shallow grave and reverently placed his dead comrade in it, covering him with snow—but the effort and exposure so exhausted him that he was nearly unconscious when he finally got back to camp with the grievous news.

Now the shadows of doom closed in thickly about the famished men and the gaunt but indefatigable commander. To those least able to bear it, the death of Sergeant Rice was a fatal shock—within the next two days, three or four expired, among them the brave Lieutenant
Lockwood. Another week or so, and the death-rolls would have been complete, but for a gleam of luck—a young bear weighing 400 pounds was killed, and its meat provided them a temporary reprieve. Then the Eskimo Jens succeeded in killing a small seal; but shortly afterward, while pursuing another seal, he was drowned when his kayak was crushed in the ice.

Mid-June saw them near to their final straits. No further fortune attended the hunting, the last of the meat was gone; their only subsistence was the thick skin of the seal; even this had been divided and apportioned, so that life might be maintained to the last possible moment in case of rescue. By June 20th, scarcely more than one-third of the twenty-six men were still alive; these survivors, mere living skeletons, lay inert and hopeless in their sleeping-bags, waiting their turn to die; so lost in a torpor of despair that it is doubtful if their dulled ears heard, or their sinking faculties comprehended the meaning of a shrill, peculiar sound which came faintly from the bay to the south.

It was the whistle of the "Bear", a relief steamer commanded by Captain (later Admiral) Winfield S. Schley, which had left St. John's on May 12, 1884, and shouldered its way northward through the ice, reaching Smith Sound six weeks later. A searching party, sent ashore to seek signs of the missing explorers, found on Brevoort Island a letter written by Lieutenant Lockwood which stated that Greely's food supplies were very low. As this letter was dated eight months earlier, the searchers gave up hope of finding any survivors of the lost expedition—yet they pushed on, in an hourly dread and expectancy of ending their quest by stumbling upon a nightmare of stark frozen bodies. This was on June 22d.

In the late afternoon of June 23d, the weary searchers, toiling across the snows, sighted an odd-looking mound among the ice-hummocks in the distance—and fateful instinct told them that the end of their search was at hand. As they drew nearer, the mound revealed itself unmistakably as hut built by hands; and when they came to a halt before the low entrance, incredulous wonder gripped them and looks of awe went the rounds as they heard a faint, mumbling sound from within.

They entered to find a bearded, emaciated man kneeling beside a wasted figure which lay motionless in its sleeping bag. It was Greeley, muttering a prayer for the dying over one of his comrades. The gaze which he bent on his rescuers was dulled and uncomprehending—and it was only in answer to the swed and joyous query: "Greeley, is this you?" that he finally muttered the historic response: "Yes—seven of us left—here we are—dying like men. Did what I came to do—beat the record."

Seven there were—and some of these too far gone to be aware of the presence of their rescuers. But these seven, by careful administration of stimulants, were restored to life and brought back from their living tomb to civilization and the reward of national acclaim.

Fifty-one years have passed. Last March, a delegation from Congress visited a certain bent nonagenarian at his home in a quiet Massachusetts suburb, and pinned upon his coat the insignia of the highest award within the power of the United States government to confer. He was General Adolphus W. Greeley, retired, of the United States Army, who thus belatedly received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Bangor Daily News, October 17, 1935
Ringing Defense of New Deal Policies In Letter Of Forum Contributor

Editor of the Forum:

NOTE: It is frequently charged by President Roosevelt's enemies that he is very free with other people's money. That is an utter truth. He is so extremely free with the people's money that, for the first time within the memory of any living American, those same people are getting a generous share of their own money paid back into their own hands to serve their hour of need.

Other asininity of argument: that he is seeking to regiment and restrict the people from their natural liberties—when every power he possesses was granted him by enactment of duly elected representatives directly responsible to the people; or that he is plunging the nation toward insolvency—when the cold figures prove that America, under his guidance has already added to her national income an amount nearly equivalent to the entire sum of her national debt—are too childish for serious consideration.

But it is for their final fallacy of abuse that posterity will reserve its most Ironic laughter—namely, the charge that President Roosevelt's policies aim at abandonment of the Constitution. One needs no poet's vision but only a head to think and a heart to feel: to appreciate the stupendous fact that the New Deal President, in accepting the Constitutional provisos as mandates to demolish the bitter barriers which wealth and privilege have builded between the people and their government, and in bringing that government into close personal touch with the people in their distress, has brought to its finest realization the democratic ideal of the founding fathers.

Such was their high objective and true dream—and for us of this generation who are privileged to stand contemporaneous to the blazing birth of this legend to fail in proper tribute to its great author is only to invite upon our own heads the scorn of the ages first shall hail; Till with our history's proudest page is blent The Legend of the Laughing President.

Carmel JEROME WITHAM

The Laughing President

Hark how Recovery's anthem high and clear Is rife with riot where his foes convene
To doctrinate the parables of spleen And mouth alarums of ignoble fear;
While Privilege applauds with open till And Greed scents power as the hound the kill.

Lo, all the tongues whose eloquence is spent To swell Plutocracy's embittered wall,
And every pen whose passion is for sale To mourn the death of gilded precedent,
Are strident with insurgencies: "Take heed— Rank Socialism dogs the Roosevelt lead."

"Beneath his gay and careless hand is rent The fabric of all thriftiness. Like rain The nation's wealth is scattered." And again: "Do we desire a laughing President? A jesting Captain for our Ship of State Who bandies wit with each subordinate?"

And such, O lords of rancour, are your rods His prodigies to measure. Fools and blind—Think us too dull of eye to peer behind His laugh that matches laughter with the gods? Too dull of ear to catch the note that glads The grateful chorus of the myriads?

Go seek among the long-forgotten host On striken farm, in city's rancid slum, And tread no path his footsteps have not come, Nor find a threshold he has left uncrossed.

Aye, 'mid the shabby purlieus of the poor Seek where you will—but he has been before. For him who shaped a staff for Age, set free The toiling child—this Captain staunch in gale Who brought our Ship to port with crowded sail— Sounds there no echo out of Galilee?

When lo, before his hunger-harried crowd The loaves and fishes multiply anew.

What would you, dark dissenters, in his stead, Who hurl Greed's iron gauntlet for your gage?
You who would quote our Constitution's page And leave its vast humanities unread.

Knights of the shortened sail—would yet you blench And parrot still the pallid creed: "Retrench?"

Take heed, today's America, lest hence In fitting meed of homage you shall fail; Lest to your shame the ages first shall hail The glory of his brave beneficence;
Till with our history's proudest page is blent The Legend of the Laughing President.

Carmel

Jerome G. WITHAM

Bangor Daily Commercial
June 23, 1936