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Franklin Leavitt's White Mountain Verse

DAVID TATHAM*

I went up in Tuckerman's Ravine and lay down to sleep,
Some spirit up to me softly did creep
And said, "Frank Leavitt wake up and print your rhymes
Everybody will buy them if it is hard times."

The 170 lines of verse written and published between 1885 and 1890 by Franklin Leavitt of Lancaster, New Hampshire, constitute his entire work as a poet and one of the most remarkable bodies of verse to reach print in nineteenth-century America. Titled collectively *Leavitt's Poems of the White and Franconia Mountains, N. H.*, these verses aroused little notice when they first appeared and have ever since remained virtually unknown except to a few collectors of White Mountainiana. Two reasons account for this long neglect: the extreme scarcity of printed copies of the poems and the peculiarity of the verse itself. Leavitt issued his poems in four lots, each in the form of a small broadside about five and one-half by eight inches, printed on thin paper in an edition of perhaps only a few hundred copies.¹

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¹Though the four broadsides carry copyright entry claims bearing the years 1885, 1885, 1888, and 1890, no record of copyright has been located at the Copyright Office, Washington, D. C. Impressions of the broadsides have been located as follows: 1885 (beginning "Eighteen hundred and eighty-five") — Harris Collection, Hay Library, Brown University; Lancaster (N. H.) Historical Society; New Hampshire Historical Society. 1885 (beginning "Eighteen hundred and fifty-one") — Harris Collection. 1888 — Harris Collection; Lancaster Historical Society. 1890 — Lancaster Historical Society. The size of the edition may well have varied from broadside to broadside.

The tourists, neighbors, and local townfolk to whom he sold these fragile sheets of verse found little reason to preserve them, with the result that exceedingly few copies have survived. The second reason for the neglect of the poems becomes quickly evident from a sampling of them. Abounding with strained rhymes, confused meter, crippled stanzas, awkward syntax, and some of the least poetic language ever to be cast as verse, Leavitt's poems seem at first glance to be devoid of all literary merit and consequently undeserving of serious attention. Yet it would be regrettable not to take a closer look at them, for woven into this clumsy doggerel are original observations, fragments of popular tradition, significant references to topical matters, and other things useful to the study of the development of the White Mountains as a tourist region in the nineteenth century. For readers with adventurous tastes in literature, the poems may also be entertaining.

The subjects of most of the poems are those which Leavitt assumed would appeal to summer visitors. He describes scenic wonders such as the Old Man of the Mountain, recounts disasters such as the Willey and Cherry Mountain landslides, and sings the praise of tourist hotels such as the Glen and Profile Houses. Beyond his unschooled writing, what distinguishes his treatment of these popular subjects from that of countless other writers who dealt with them in poetry or prose, is that he wrote as a life-long resident of the mountains rather than as a visitor. Though his outlook was provincial in the extreme, his knowledge of the region and its history was intimate and deeply-rooted in local folk culture. He doubtless expected that his poems would succeed not for any literary merit but for their author's authoritative knowledge, and also that his rusticity would, for some of his readers at least, be a virtue, attesting to the genuineness of what he had to say. The language of his poems is that of his everyday speech, the laconic, unmusical rural vernacular of northern New Hampshire, altered now and again in a vain attempt to achieve poetical expression. The subject of a few of the poems is Leavitt himself, and in all of them his presence is unmistakable. Indeed, one of the chief merits of this verse is the light it sheds — however unsteady and awkwardly cast — on its author, since for all his rustic

naiveté Leavitt was a man of notable, if rather unconventional, accomplishments, of which verse making was but one.

Franklin Leavitt was born on August 6, 1824, in Coos County, probably in or near Lancaster.² He was a descendent of Thomas Leavitt, a seventeenth-century settler of Hampton, New Hampshire, and a grandson of Peter Leavitt who moved from coastal New England to Stark, north of Lancaster, in 1790. In 1836, at age twelve, Leavitt went to work for Thomas J. Crawford at the Notch House, a country inn which stood at the northern entrance to the great defile that was then called the Notch of the White Mountains and was later named Crawford Notch. The main north-south wagon route from the upper Connecticut River valley to the Maine coast followed the Notch through the mountains. During the dozen years Leavitt was employed there, the Notch House was the favored stopping place for hardy travelers wishing to visit the heart of the mountains, including a small but steady stream of scientists, artists, politicians, and foreign visitors. Thoreau stayed there with his brother in 1839; in the same year Thomas Cole painted the inn's setting.³ In the 1840's the widely distributed engraving of W. H. Bartlett's view of the Notch House made the building and its locale a familiar image to many who would never set foot near it and gave the inn national fame.⁴ This capacity of printed pictures to establish a wide-reaching reputation was not lost on Leavitt, as we shall see.

Early in his years at the Notch House he must have gained the feeling that he was close to the center of great events and great people, and understandably so, since he lived amidst the Crawford fam-

²Biographical information about Leavitt has been drawn from the Leavitt Papers, Lancaster Historical Society; a brief item about Leavitt, based on an interview, in the Mount Washington summit newspaper *Among the Clouds*, August 28, 1887; and Emily Leavitt Noyes, *Leavitt Descendants of Thomas Leavitt* (Tilton, N. H., 1953), 113.

³Cole's painting, *Notch of the White Mountains*, 1839 (National Gallery of Art) is reproduced in Howard Merritt, *Thomas Cole*, exhibition catalogue (Rochester: Memorial Art Gallery, 1969), 89.

⁴The engraving of Bartlett's drawing, *The Notch-House — White Mountains*, appeared in Nathaniel Parker Willis, *American Scenery* (1840, new ed. Barre, Mass.: Imprint Society, 1971), 192.

ily. That enterprising family of pioneers had made the Notch a habitable place and had built the trails and bridle paths that made the wilderness accessible. In one way or another they had been involved in most of the significant events of the region and would continue to be so into the 1850's. The patriarch of the family, Abel Crawford, and his son Ethan Allen Crawford, kept inns a few miles from the Notch House; well within their lifetimes both were legendary for their size, strength, deeds, and character. Ethan's brother Thomas, Leavitt's employer, was also well known, if perhaps not legendary. Ethan's wife, Lucy Howe Crawford, was the author in 1846 of the first authoritative history of the White Mountains, a book which she wrote in the form of an autobiography of her husband. To young Leavitt this extensive family of pioneers must have seemed to be not only the virtual proprietors of the mountains and the central figures in the dramas enacted there, but also, through Lucy, the chief chroniclers of those dramas. In 1850 Leavitt himself was the leading performer in a brief melodrama of his own making when he descended the cliffs of Mount Willard by rope to reach a hitherto inaccessible cave popularly known (from afar) as the "Devil's Den." His intrepid, or foolhardy, act was recorded by guidebook writers of the 1850's and also by Lucy Crawford for a projected revised edition of her *History*. There was always something of the show-off in Leavitt.⁵

In 1851 he was drawn to Gorham, at the opposite end of the Presidential Range, by the arrival from Portland of the Atlantic and St. Lawrence (later Grand Trunk) Railroad. This was the first rail line to approach the Presidentials, and its arrival, promising an influx of summer visitors annually, made 1851 a year of major developments to the east of Mount Washington, an area until then little-visited by tourists. Leavitt worked on the construction of the Station (later Al-

⁵For the Crawford family see Frederick W. Kilbourne, *Chronicles of the White Mountains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 70-100; F. Allen Burt, *The Story of Mount Washington* (Hanover, N. H.: Dartmouth Publications, 1960), 10-51; Stearns Morse, ed., *Lucy Crawford's History of the White Mountains* (Hanover, N. H.: Dartmouth Publications, 1966). For Leavitt's feat see John H. Spaulding, *Historical Relics of the White Mountains* (Boston, 1855), 83-84.

pine) House in Gorham and then in the same year helped build the bridle path to the summit of Mount Washington from the site in Pinkham Notch where the Glen House, another summer hotel, would be ready for guests in 1852.⁶ According to one of Leavitt's poems, its construction also began in the busy summer of 1851.

For some years thereafter Leavitt spent each summer as a mountain guide, escorting parties from both the Station and Glen Houses up the bridle path to the top of Mount Washington. Like any guide, he led the way, pointed out views, coped with weather and emergencies, explained something of the history of the region, and did what he could to fulfill expectations of the kind formed by tourists in long winters of reading Cooper's tales of Natty Bumppo and W. H. Murray's of John Norton — expectations that woodsmen and guides were not only wise in the ways of the forest but were also, because of their closeness to nature, both nobler and more innocent than city folk. Leavitt played this role with gusto. His long association with the Crawfords and his own colorful exploits made him seem an undoubted authority on mountain matters; at least one handbook of Mount Washington listed him in 1855 as among the best of available guides, past and present.⁷ He seems never to have been able to contain his great pride in his profession. Years later he explained in verse that once on a train pushing through a snowstorm in Crawford Notch he had not been afraid (though his fellow passengers were) "because I was the mountain guide."

In the off-season while he tended his farm in eastern Lancaster he devised two quite original ways to augment his income as a guide. The first of these schemes involved maps; the second, much later, verse. In the winter of 1851-1852, anticipating the influx of tourists the following season and knowing that no map of the White Mountains had ever been published, he drew what still stands as the first map of the region.⁸ He listed himself in the map's title as "Franklin

⁶*Among the Clouds*, August 28, 1887.

⁷Spaulding, *Historical Relics*, 28.

⁸The first "correct" map of the White Mountains was prepared by Professor George P. Bond of Harvard University and published in 1853.

Leavitt, guide," and paid the Boston lithographer John H. Bufford to reproduce it. After entering it for copyright, he published it in the spring of 1852 and that summer sold single copies to individuals, probably at a dollar each, and quantities to hotel proprietors at a reduced rate.⁹ The fact that he was neither trained in nor understood much about the conventions of cartography did not deter him in this challenging task, though it gave a special character to his product.

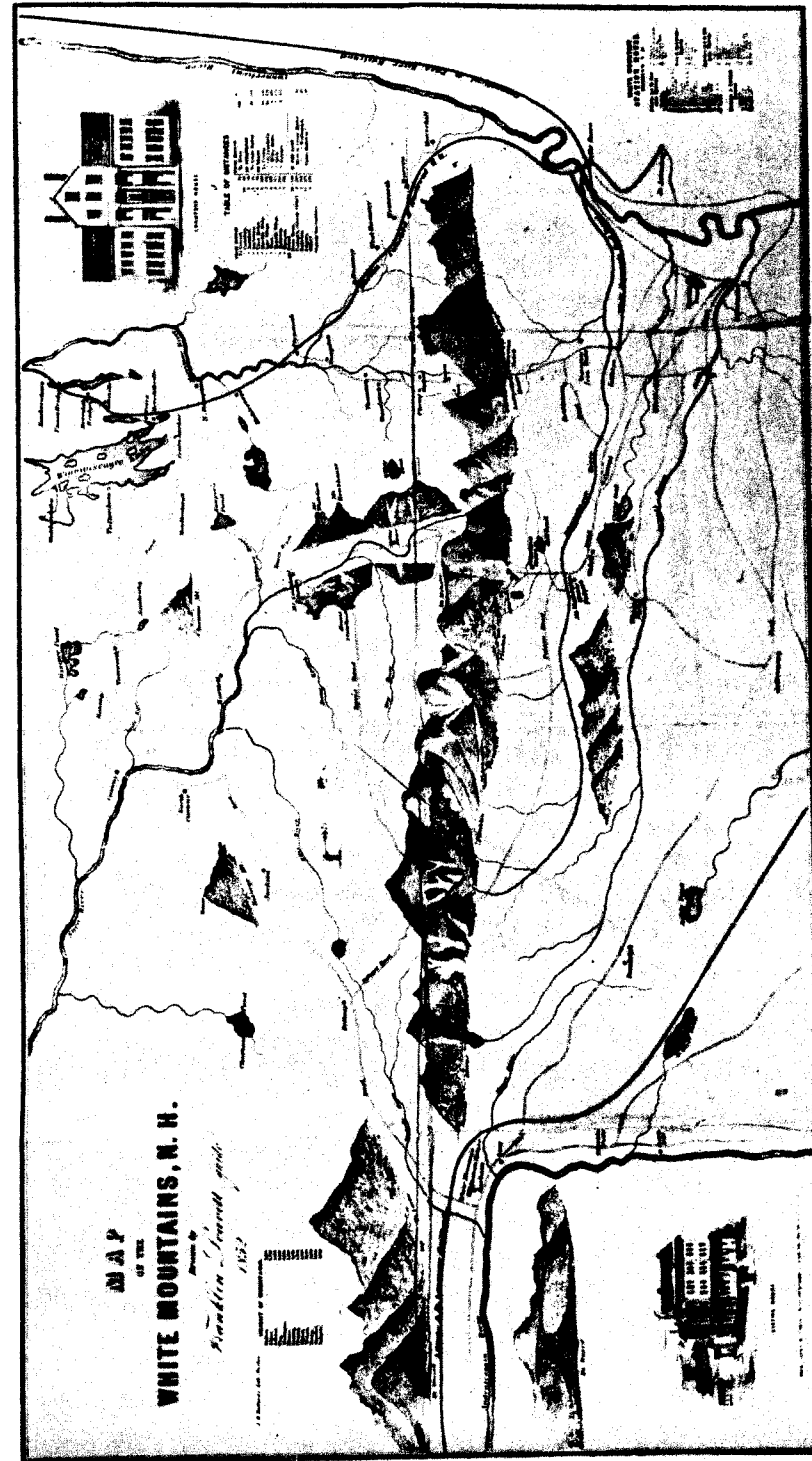
The map is an unmeasured, inconsistently oriented picture of the area from the Carter-Moriah Range in the east to Cannon Mountain and Mt. Moosilauke in the west, showing Lake Winnepesaukee to the south and the town of Lancaster to the north. It combines certain features of a bird's-eye view with those of a route map and identifies hotels, major scenic views, and historic sites, all shown according to Leavitt's own perfectly consistent logic. The map was of little use for traveling, but it made a distinctive souvenir of the mountains, and for some tourists it was also a memento of their guide, the extraordinary mapmaker himself. The map succeeded so well that Leavitt reprinted it and then followed it with entirely new and different designs in 1854, 1859, 1871, 1878, and 1882. All of the maps include pictorial matter, much of it relating to the Crawfords, and is original with Leavitt in concept if not in execution. The six maps have claim to a prominent place in the history of American naive art.¹⁰

In 1885, for reasons that can only be guessed, Leavitt abandoned mapmaking for versemaking. Though he was still vigorous — in 1887 at age sixty-three he climbed Mount Washington in three hours¹¹ — his activity as a guide had surely diminished, for with the opening on Mount Washington of the carriage road in 1861 and the cog railway in 1869, the use of guides had declined even though the number

⁹Though no evidence of the prices of the earliest Leavitt maps has come to hand, a retail price of one dollar a copy for the 1871 map is documented by an agreement drawn between Leavitt and A. Williams & Co., July 7, 1871, Leavitt Papers, Lancaster Historical Society.

¹⁰A full account of Leavitt's maps by the present writer is to be published in *Prints of New England*, forthcoming from the American Antiquarian Society.

¹¹*Among the Clouds*, August 28, 1887.



Neither accuracy nor scale are virtues of Franklin Leavitt's 1852 map of the White Mountains, but then it is not likely that his customers were concerned with such frills. Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society.

of tourists increased. Less and less, it may be assumed, was Leavitt's contact with tourists extensive enough to allow their interest in his curious map to develop. Further, a growing network of trails to serve a new generation of self-sufficient hikers had come into being, eliminating a need for guides and creating a demand for accurate, highly detailed topographical maps of a kind Leavitt was not remotely capable of making, but which came increasingly from the pens of expert cartographers in the 1880's, encouraged especially by the recently formed (1876) Appalachian Mountain Club.

In turning to poetry to supplement his income and keep his name before summer visitors he selected a medium of expression far more popular in his lifetime than it would be in the twentieth century. As all reading Americans who lived within reach of a mailbox, he had ample opportunity to see in newspapers, magazines, and books great quantities of other people's verse, most of it of no particular merit. He may even have been acquainted with Bela Chapin's fat volume *Poets of New Hampshire*, which was published in 1883 and included among its more than three hundred authors dozens of clergymen, lawyers, polite ladies, and other amateurs, as well as a few professional poets and two seemingly unconventional versifiers.¹² These last two were farmer Robert Dinsmoor (ca. 1757-1830), called the "rustic bard," who viewed himself as the American Robert Burns and wrote in close imitation of the Scottish master, and itinerant George Gordon Byron DeWolfe (1835-1873), called the "steam machine poet" for the speed at which he manufactured stanzas. Though in fact the poems of both Dinsmoor and DeWolfe reveal a thoroughly workmanlike understanding of the craft of writing verse — a quality quite absent from Leavitt's lines — the inclusion of both of them in Chapin's anthology reinforced the notion that anyone who put his mind to it could write perfectly acceptable poetry. That notion, one of the harmless results of the democratization of the arts in the nineteenth century, encouraged the publication of a vast amount of

¹²Bela Chapin, *Poets of New Hampshire* (Claremont, N. H.: Charles H. Adams, 1883), 780 pp.

appallingly bad doggerel. The verse of Britain's William McGonagall (1825-1902) is perhaps the best-known of this kind and has always had a following, though mainly a snickering one.¹³ New Hampshire's Thomas Randall (1778-1869), whose book of poems *The Farmer's Meditations* (1833) is unrenowned, has had a much smaller following, but one which has found his naive work both original and admirable.¹⁴ Chapin omitted Randall from his collection, perhaps through ignorance of his work. He doubtless would have omitted Leavitt also, certainly because of his ineptitude and probably also because of his unrefined language and bumptiousness.

Of course Leavitt must have realized that he was a bad poet. His very wretchedness astounded and entertained tourists, to his profit and to the satisfaction of his ego, we can suppose. But it is also possible that he wrote because he wished to say something about the mountains he knew other poets left unsaid. The White Mountains had been a popular subject in poetry since the 1840's, but only rarely were they treated as other than abstractions, often symbolic of religious belief, or as points of departure for reveries of nature, leaving the summits awash in a sea of similes and metaphors. Ludicrous as Leavitt's poems are by any literary standard, they at least possess a strong backbone of historical fact and local legend — the two sometimes contradictory — and a buoyant, even grinning vitality, qualities rarely found in the proper, often vapid poems collected by Chapin and the hundreds more like them that made their ways to print in newspapers and magazines.

But if Leavitt's poetry has little in common with the polite verse of his day, it has a clearer kinship with nineteenth-century popular verse, of which Leavitt is bound to have known many varieties. Through performance he must have been acquainted with ballads — both recited and sung — hymns, ditties, and those few pieces of serious verse that had entered popular tradition, including perhaps

¹³There are a number of collections of McGonagall's verse. His *Poetic Gems* (1890, new ed. London: Duckworth, 1934) provides an ample introduction.

¹⁴Nella Braddy Henney, "The Eaton Poet, 'Curiosity of Nature,'" *Historical New Hampshire* 19 (Fall 1964), 3-32.

Longfellow's *Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* along with its parodies. Further, he must certainly have been familiar with some of the funeral elegies and versified descriptions of murders and other sensations that were printed as broadsides and circulated in New Hampshire during his lifetime. His own verse shows a distinct family resemblance to the broadside genre in format, in its attention to catastrophes, and in its use of the vernacular.

Leavitt apparently hawked his broadsides wherever he could sell them. He may have begun on a rail-siding platform built in Jefferson not far from his farm, peddling them to the crowds that flocked by special trains in the summer of 1885 to view the aftermath of the Cherry Mountain landslide. It is easy to suppose that this catastrophe and the crowds it drew sparked in Leavitt the idea of publishing a broadside of verse. With a leading poem describing the slide, the broadside was a distinctive souvenir for day tourists. Whatever the inspiration and circumstances, it sold well enough to warrant successors. None of the poems mention or allude to the Crawfords, probably because by the 1880's they were, to tourists, part of an indistinct past. Leavitt's subjects are rigorously topical, with the exception of his account of the Willey disaster, by far the best-known event in White Mountain history.

Though all four of the broadsides are titled *Leavitt's Poems of the White and Franconia Mountains*, the contents of each is at least in part different from the others. Of the two published in 1885, one broadside, here presumed to be the first, contains sixty-six lines of verse set in double columns, beginning with the line "Eighteen hundred and eighty-five." The other, presumed to be second in order, introduced thirty-nine new lines and repeated thirty from its predecessor; it begins with the line "Eighteen hundred and fifty-one," and is also set in double columns. The third broadside appeared in 1888 and contained twenty-eight new lines with fifty-six taken from the earlier sheets; it begins "I suppose you have heard of the Androscoggin," and is set in two columns. In 1890 the fourth broadside was published, devoted entirely to a single new poem of thirty-seven lines, *The Kilkenny Smashup*, set in a single column. It is conceivable that Leavitt published other poems, as yet unlocated, but none later

LEAVITT'S POEMS

— OF THE —

*White and Franconia Mountains, N. H.**Published by Franklin Leavitt, Lancaster, N. H.**Entered according to act of Congress in the year of our Lord 1885, by Franklin Leavitt in the office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington District*

Eighteen hundred and eighty-five
Cherry Mountain down did slide,
Past Bordrow's house with a lightning flash
Give Stanley's house and barn a smash.

It buried all his cattle, horse and hogs,
And cover'd his farm all over with mud and logs
It buried Walker under the slide,
They took him out, four days he died.

Now people are coming far and wide
To see that great and wonderful slide.
To Stanley it want much of a loss,
He saved the cow, and saved the horse.

Great loss to Walker, he lost his life,
If he had lived one day longer he would married
Stanley's girl for his wife.

The Boston & Lowell Railroad line
Brings up a big load every time;
And on that road you will have some fun,
They will carry you up to the top of Mt. Wash-
ington.

When I got up to Winnipiseogee Lake
There I was wide awake
At the upper end of the Winnipiseogee
There the ground is awful rocky,
And about that Lake there is something queer,
There is as many islands as days in the year.

General Wentworth's Castle in the air,
Greatest castle you can find anywhere;
He's got a fireplace that is ten foot wide
With three windows in the chimney side.

The Tuckerman's Ravine,
The most wonderful place that ever was seen.

Glen Ellis Falls
Pitches over two mighty walls.

I just come up through the Pinkham Notch
And to the Glen House I did stop.
They have built a new house and called it Glen,
And it is kept by C. R. Milliken.

The top of the house is painted green
And is the most wonderful house that ever was
seen;
And Solomon's Temple did not begin
With the finish of the Glen.

And if you want a pleasant ride
Come on the Jefferson Railroad to the Slide;
And then come up to Jefferson Hill
You will find them hotels all well filled;
And if you want to know the rest
Just come up to Jefferson and they will feed you
on the best.

I went up in Tuckerman's Ravine and lay down
to sleep,
Some spirit up to me softly did creep
And said, "Frank Leavitt wake up and print your
rhymes,
Everybody will buy them if it is hard times.

Franconia Mountains are very high
You will find it so when you pass down by.
The Echo Lake, too, is in sight,
But it was so dark I couldn't see it in the night

When I got up to Echo Lake
There I had an awful scrape,
I hollered and hooted loud as I could yell
But the echo did not sound very well.

The Old Man of the Mountain will at you grin,
It is sixty feet from his nose to his chin,
And ninety feet across his face,
And it is quite a curiosity to see that place.

The Profile house is in Franconia Notch,
And is a good place to stop,
And when you see the Profile you will laugh,
And the house is kept by Greenleaf & Taft

This is the first of Franklin Leavitt's poetic broadsides, published in 1885. Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society.

than the *Smashup*, in all probability, for according to tradition he died in 1890. His wife, whom he married in 1852, survived until 1909.

The poems are printed below without correction of spelling or punctuation. The year of each poem's first appearance is given in brackets at its conclusion except in the case of *The Kilkenny Smash-up*, where the specific date at the close of the poem is part of Leavitt's text. With the exception of the *Smashup* the titles of the poems have been supplied by the present writer. For general background concerning Leavitt's subjects, the reader may consult Frederick W. Kilbourne's *Chronicles of the White Mountains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916).

THE CHERRY MOUNTAIN SLIDE

Eighteen hundred and eighty-five
 Cherry Mountain down did slide,
 Past Bordrow's house with a lightening flash
 Give Stanley's house and barn a smash.
 It buried all his cattle, horse and hogs,
 And covered his farm all over with mud and logs
 It buried Walker under the slide,
 They took him out, four days he died.
 Now people are coming far and wide
 To see that great and wonderful slide.
 To Stanley it want much of a loss,
 He saved the cow, and saved the horse.
 Great loss to Walker, he lost his life,
 If he had lived one day longer he would married
 Stanley's girl for his wife.

[1885]

The landslide occurred on July 10, 1885, from Owl's Head peak of Cherry Mountain. It ran through the farm of Oscar Stanley and resulted in the death of Donald Walker. Some indication of the number of tourists who came to see the slide's wreckage can be gained



Franklin Leavitt was not exaggerating when he wrote that the Cherry Mountain Slide of 1885 gave Oscar Stanley's "house and barn a smash."

from the *Lancaster Gazette* for July 31 and August 14, 1885, which report Sunday excursion trains of thirteen and twenty-eight cars. In the third stanza Leavitt's *want* is, of course, his pronunciation of *wasn't*. The stanza which follows is not an integral part of the poem as Leavitt printed it — it is separated on the broadside by other poems — but it concerns the same subject. It may have been included to encourage the sale of the broadside at Jefferson Hill hotels.

And if you want a pleasant ride
 Come on the Jefferson Railroad to the Slide;
 And then come up to Jefferson Hill
 And you will find them hotels all well filled;
 And if you want to know the rest
 Just come up to Jefferson and they will feed you on the best.

[1885]

THE WILLEY SLIDE

Eighteen hundred and twenty-six
 The Willey mountain down did slip,
 It missed the house and hit the barn
 If they'd all staid in they'd met no harm.
 It being in the dark of night
 The Willey family took a fright,
 And out of the house they all did run
 And on to them the mountains come.
 It buried them all up so deep
 They did not find them for three weeks,
 And three of them were never found
 They were buried there so deep in the ground.

[1885]

When this poem was reprinted on Leavitt's 1888 broadside, *hit* became *took* in the third line of the first stanza. The slide that descended toward the Willey's house was parted by a huge rock directly behind the building. The entire household of nine persons who had left the house for what they hoped was a safer location, probably the barn, was destroyed, while the house, ironically, was unharmed. Leavitt's account of this well-known disaster errs in saying that the bodies were not found for three weeks. Three days would be more accurate. The six bodies that were recovered were found in the rubble from three to five days following the disaster.¹⁸

¹⁸Jeanette E. Graustein, "The Willey Family," *Appalachia* 32 (December 1959), 488-501.

A TRIP TO VERMONT

I went over to St. Johnsbury the other day,
 I stopped so long I like to never get away.
 I walked into the Congregational Church, —
 The outside was stone the inside was birch, —
 I walked up in to the pulpit and made a speech,
 It sounded good as far as it would reach.
 I then went up the Passumpsic railroad line,
 It was the best railroad I ever did find;
 They took me up to Magog lake
 And there I was wide awake.
 And on that lake we had some fun
 Looking at the Yankees and Englishmen.
 I then went up to Beeby Plain —
 I should like to go there again —
 They had a campmeeting in the wood,
 Every word they spoke it sounded good,
 And the man that spoke his name was Hiram Monger,
 And when he speaks his voice roared like thunder.

[1888]

St. Johnsbury, Vermont, is about twenty-five miles from Lancaster. The church described is probably the North Congregational Church which still stands. Lake Memphremagog, sometimes abbreviated to Magog, straddles the border between Vermont and Quebec and was the locale of both fashionable resorts and religious camp meetings. Beebe Plain is just east of the lake in Vermont. Hiram Munger (1806-1902), not Monger, was a famed camp meeting orator in the Connecticut River valley. Strong of body, rough mannered, uneducated like Leavitt, yet full of country wisdom and frontier eloquence, Munger's remarkable powers of exhortation were scarcely diminished even in his eighties, as Leavitt here attests.¹⁹

¹⁹Jeremiah B. Munger, *The Munger Book* (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1915), 320-325. Hiram Munger, *Life and Religious Experiences of Hiram Munger* (Chickopee Falls: the author, 1856).

THE KILKENNY SMASHUP

Eighteen hundred and ninety has come,
 Frank Leavitt has made another poem and got it done;
 It tells you all about the Kilkenny railroad,
 And how they got smashed up with a big load.

Len. Crouch run the Mount Washington engine.
 Run over the Kilkenny railroad many a time.
 And on that railroad he always took down a big load.

And in the winter of eighty-nine,
 He run on this road all the time.
 And when eighteen hundred and ninety come,
 They gave him another engine to run.

And he went up and took a big load,
 And started down the railroad.
 He went up all right but coming back,
 Just below Rowell's farm the engine jumped the track.

And when the engine struck a stump,
 The fireman and brakeman jumped.
 And in a minute's time Crouch was smashed all up fine,
 With a carload of logs on top of the engine.

And when he was taken out his hand was on the brake,
 And he was burned in an awful shape.
 And he will be missed throughout the state,
 For running an engine he was great.

I went up to see that railroad wreck,
 I watched the other train when it came back;
 Such logging I never see before,
 Done in Kilkenny or Lancaster Gore.

Twelve cars all loaded to the top of the stakes,
 Come thundering along and it made the earth shake;
 They went like lightning down the hill,
 And in a few minutes all was still.

I want to see them engineers,
 And tell them not to have much fears;
 For if they run into a stump,
 Just toot the whistle and then all jump;
 And let the whole carload go,
 Down to the Lancaster depot.

January 31, 1890

This is Leavitt's last and most ambitious poem. The wreck occurred a few miles from his farm and was widely reported and photographed. Though the advice of the last stanza is apparently given tongue-in-cheek, it may also reflect some of the longstanding ill-feeling that seems to have existed between Leavitt and some townfolk and which is documented in a fragmentary way in the Leavitt Papers of the Lancaster Historical Society. Those papers also contain photographs of the wreck.

IN FRANCONIA NOTCH

Franconia Mountains are very high
 You will find it so when you pass down by.
 The Echo Lake, too, is in sight,
 But it was so dark I couldn't see it in the night
 When I got up to Echo Lake
 There I had an awful scrape,
 I hollered and hooted loud as I could yell
 But the echo did not sound very well.
 The Old Man of the Mountain will at you grin,
 It is sixty feet from his nose to his chin,
 And ninety feet across his face,
 And it is quite a curiosity to see that place.
 The Profile house is in Franconia Notch,
 And is a good place to stop,
 And when you see the Profile you will laugh,
 And the house is kept by Greenleaf & Taft

[1885]

Eighteen hundred and eighty-three
 The coldest summer I ever see,
 The Lafayette mountain down did slip
 And knocked that flume all to pieces very quick;
 Come down at eleven o'clock in the forenoon
 And knock that big rock right out of the flume.

[1885]



The famed Flume Boulder, here photographed from below, was one of the most popular tourist attractions in the White Mountains during the nineteenth century.

Echoes made with megaphones, horns, trumpets, shotguns, and cannon resounded regularly at Echo Lake; unamplified voices produced little by comparison. Grandiose dimensions for the Profile were sustained in oral tradition long after measurements by triangulation published in the 1870's established that the face was not more than forty feet high. The Profile House, a major hotel from 1853, was located near Echo and Profile Lakes at the northern end of Franconia Notch. The Flume House, located about five miles south in the Notch, stood near the Flume, a giant fissure at the base of Flume Mountain (not Lafayette, though Leavitt may have considered the entire Franconia Range to be an extension of Mount Lafayette, its highest and northernmost summit). A large boulder suspended between the Flume walls was a major tourist attraction until it was swept away by a landslide in June 1883. Though it has often been reported that the boulder was smashed to bits, contemporary accounts claimed it to be largely intact about a thousand yards downstream.¹⁷

TWO GLEN HOUSES

Eighteen hundred and fifty-one
 The Glen House was begun,
 They worked upon it 'till they got it done,
 'Tis the nearest house to Mount Washington.
 Thompson built it and named it Glen.
 And it is kept now by a man named Milliken.

[1885]

I just come up through the Pinkham Notch
 And to the Glen House I did stop.
 They have built a new house and called it Glen,
 And it is kept by C. R. Milliken.

¹⁷Douglas Philbrook, "In Search of the Big Boulder," *Outlook* 4 (Spring 1978), 19-20.

The top of the house is painted green
 And is the most wonderful house that ever was seen;
 And Solomon's Temple did not begin
 With the finish of the Glen.

[1885]

The Glen House, the major summer hotel in Pinkham Notch, was built in 1852 according to most accounts, but Leavitt, who certainly witnessed the construction, places it a year earlier, as does Moses Foster Sweetser in his authoritative *The White Mountains* (Boston: Osgood, 1876), page 106. Perhaps the building began in 1851, though it did not open to guests until 1852. The original building and its extensions burned in 1884 and were replaced by an entirely new structure in 1885-1887. This later Glen House is the subject of Leavitt's two-stanza poem. The color scheme of the new building, "painted in quiet tones that harmonize with the surrounding greenery," according to Sweetser, was enough of a departure from tradition to provoke a line from Leavitt. It burned in 1893.

THROUGH CRAWFORD NOTCH BY RAIL

The Portland & Ogdensburg Railroad line
 Starts through the notch of the White Mountains about nine,
 And is the best railroad I ever did find.

They have good conductors and engineers too,
 When "all aboard" they'll put you through.

The White Mountain snowdrifts are very high,
 When the snow plow strikes them it makes them fly.

Sometimes they fly up in the air,

Then all on board it will scare.

But I, for such things don't stand aside

Because I was the mountain guide.

[1885]

The railroad built through Crawford Notch was a major feat of engineering. It was completed in 1875 and in season pulled open ob-

servations cars from North Conway to Fabyan House Station. At the Gate of the Notch the line passed within a few hundred feet of the site of Leavitt's early home in the mountains, the Notch House, which had burned in 1854.

AT BERLIN FALLS

I suppose you have heard of the Androscoggin
 Where Pingre & Coe have done a pile of logging?
 And then have you heard of the Berlin Fall,
 Where water pitches and foams through between
 two mighty walls?

On the opposite shore stands the Glen Corporation,
 The greatest paper mill in the nation;
 Thirty-nine feet head on the wheel,
 They can grind spruce logs as fine as meal.
 They take spruce logs into that mill soon as light
 And make them into paper before night.

[1888]

The falls at Berlin a few miles north of Gorham had long attracted tourists. Papermaking from wood pulp had been introduced in the 1870's, and Berlin was a major center of the industry in the 1880's and thereafter.

OTHER POEMS

Alfred Mudge's printing press
 I really believe is the best;
 He prints my maps and prints them neat,
 No. 32 on Scholl Street.

[1885]

Mudge was a printer on School Street in Boston. He printed, or reprinted, Leavitt's maps in 1875 and 1878.

When I got up to Winnipiseogee Lake
 There I was wide awake
 At the upper end of the Winnipiseogee
 There the ground is awful rocky,
 And about that Lake there is something queer,
 There is as many islands as days in the year.

[1885]

General Wentworth's Castle in the air,
 Greatest castle you can find anywhere;
 He's got a fireplace that is ten foot wide
 With three windows in the chimney side.

[1885]

Winnepesauke is the later, now standard, spelling of the lake described by Leavitt. General M. C. Wentworth's castle in Moultonborough has remained a tourist attraction.

The Boston & Lowell Railroad line
 Brings up a big load every time;
 And on that road you will have some fun,
 They will carry you up to the top of Mt. Washington.

The Mount Washington branch of the Boston & Lowell Railroad brought cars from near Littleton to the base station of the Mount Washington cog railway.

Glen Ellis Falls
 Pitches over two mighty walls.

[1885]

The Tuckerman's Ravine,
 The most wonderful place that ever was seen.

[1885]

I went up in Tuckerman's Ravine and lay down to sleep,
 Some spirit up to me softly did creep

And said, "Frank Leavitt wake up and print your rhymes,
 Everybody will buy them if it is hard times."

[1885]

The pair of couplets describing well-known features of the eastern flank of Mount Washington may have been contrived as fillers; they have the virtue of brevity. The quatrain that follows (and that is printed as a superscription to this article) is a stroke of genius. It shifts the responsibility — one might even say the blame — for the publication of the poems from Leavitt to an otherworldly entity, a daughter of Calliope perhaps, who has found a Helicon in Mount Washington, a Boeotian bard in Leavitt, and an excellence in his verse mere mortals might miss.

Leavitt's muse was overoptimistic in her expectation that there would be a rush for these rhymes, but she was not entirely misguided in sensing that she had discovered an original character. Although there is little art to be found in his poetry, the vivid glimpses he provides of people, places, and events in White Mountain history, and the record he provides of the language, attitudes, and popular knowledge of a rural laboring man in America are worth having. Not that Leavitt was a typical laborer; far from it. He was an uncommon common man, and well aware of it.

We might best think of him (and his poems) as an anachronism, a survival of Jacksonian robustness in a Gilded Age that had little taste for it, a woodsman in a Victorian parlor. A description of Ethan Crawford in the 1830's seems also to fit Leavitt in the 1880's: "his voice is stentorian, and his style is marked by a crude bluntness and an apparent consciousness that something original is expected of him."¹⁸ The kind of idiosyncratic creativity Leavitt represents has been a persistent strain in the practice of the arts at all levels in America; it is part of the individualism encouraged by a democratic society. Now that Leavitt is part of history and his poems are at last available to a wide audience, a place needs to be found for him in the pantheon of eccentrics whose originality has so greatly enriched American culture.

¹⁸Unidentified source, quoted in Willis, *American Scenery*, 194.