



*Passing Time - photograph by LaRue Spiker*

**Island  
Poets  
&  
Poems**



**Beth Straus  
Christian Barter  
Oliver Wendell Holmes  
William R. Huntington  
Jessica Smith**

## Winter Sonnet

The moon is full tonight, and on the snow  
The trees have scrolled a black calligraphy,  
Twig shadows on the empty page below.  
What are they writing? The winter of a tree?  
Of field-mouse labyrinths underneath the white?  
Of winter revels or deep quiet sleep?  
The changing moon will soon obscure its light,  
Erase the script and frozen silence keep.  
Meanwhile, beneath our quilts, we doze and dream  
The sometime dreams that winter dreams of spring –  
Of bird-songs, light and warming rains that seem  
To wake the waiting trees, and then to bring  
Their reassurance to a doubting world –  
Once more the surging sap, once more the leaf unfurled.

*Beth Straus*  
*February 18, 2003*

## The Fox 2005

The fox, we know, was here again last night.  
His passage written in the snowy light  
Decisive, cursive, on the perfect white.  
Like him, I write upon an empty page  
Hunting the scattered thought, elusive prey,  
Hoping my lines will have the strength to stay  
Now that new snow has hidden his away.

*Beth Straus*

## Weather Report

Our field lies, mowed, and neatly combed  
The crows patrol the windrows, where  
The neighbor's cat all summer roamed  
In grassy jungle, now laid bare.  
The seasons seem to pause and recollect,  
We, too, assess the passing of the year,  
Assuage our sorrows, let the joys collect,  
With summer gone and autumn not quite here.  
If we are wiser, time is shorter, too.  
And beauty's plenty tugs upon the heart  
The dark seems closer – will we wake to view  
An autumn glory that will never part  
From us, though hope and faith take flight  
And seasons slowly circle into night?

*Beth Straus*  
*September 29, 2002*



Beth Straus lives on Somes Meadow in a house that was once a part of the Somes House Inn. She grew up in San Francisco and later studied poetry at Stanford University with Ivor Winters. After marrying and moving to New York, she found that family life and service on the boards of the Museum of Modern Art and its International Council and the New York Botanical Garden left little time for poetry. For the last six years, she and her husband have lived year-round in Somesville.

## George Dorr's Abandoned Bicycle Path

They say it may have been—built  
in 1906—the world's first  
trail for mountain biking, now all  
the rage for the synthetic-garbed,  
the nuclear-bright, those young

as Dorr himself was then,  
and as rich. What's left of the loop  
is a few unflooded yards behind  
a beaver pool, as plain as Day-Glo,  
the massive stones along the sides

still cradling, a hundred years later,  
the old gravel. Forgotten  
by the glaciers first,  
it came from the hollow pits  
in the hillside where now

you might think meteors had landed,  
a wheelbarrow-push away, before  
there were backhoes and front-end loaders  
and excavators, and D-8 dozers.

I have seen the pictures,

the women in their layered, long dresses  
and flower-garden hats, standing  
with their one-speed bicycles, frowning  
as people in old photos do,  
as though they disapprove of what

we did with their lives, the landscape  
unrecognizable, before  
the fire, the Loop Road, the puffing  
laboratory now always in view. Only  
the path looks familiar.

a column in a long-gone, jungled  
wilderness into which they might have  
ridden away, had those bicycles  
had twenty gears and full suspension,  
had their legs been free.

*Christian Barter,*  
*from The Singers I Prefer*

### **The Abandoned Gurnee Path**

Both ends were blown off by  
blasting for the road below  
but the heart of this trail  
is as it was. All  
the carefully laid wall  
that keeps you safely going high  
along the cliff is still intact,  
still snakes in one smooth passage through  
the sky, as it always has. The ocean  
is a straight blue wall itself from there,  
dry-laid between two points of land  
on which clouds stride, puffing  
for the ends of the earth. And you  
can walk a while like that  
as though there were some place you might  
end up, some end to justify  
this row of hand-cut stones that pave  
the way through low pine bows,  
if that's the way you walk. Below,  
the half-awakened moans  
of cars rushing by  
on their new wide road.

*Christian Barter*





Christian Barter's first collection of poetry, *The Singers I Prefer*, was published by CavanKerry Press in June. His poems have appeared in a number of periodicals, including *The Georgia Review*, *North American Review* and *The American Scholar* and have been featured on Garrison Keillor's "The Writers Almanac." He is a trail crew supervisor at Acadia National Park.

### La Maison D'Or (Bar Harbor)

*In "Over the Teacups," written in 1892, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote:*

. . . I was requested to read a couple of verses written by me when the guest of my friends, whose name is hinted by the title prefixed to my lines.

From this fair home behold on either side  
The restful mountains or the restless sea :  
So the warm sheltering walls of life divide  
Time and its tides from still eternity.

Look on the waves : their stormy voices teach  
That not on earth may toil and struggle cease.  
Look on the mountains : better far than speech  
Their silent promise of eternal peace.

*Can you identify the "friends" Justice Holmes was visiting?*



Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. was professor of anatomy and physiology at Harvard as well as a poet, essayist, biographer and philosopher. He often wrote humorous essays, for example "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" (1858). In 1885, he authored a biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., his son, became a Justice of the Supreme Court.

## The White Squadron

Fair in the offing, sharp against the blue,  
Six firm-webbed, stately swans, they hold their way,  
Skirting Mount Desert of an August day,  
Cruiser and battle-ship in sequence due,  
On dress-parade, slow-steaming for review.  
Which destiny is theirs? Only to play  
At war? Or likelier, shall we say,  
For cause, at last, their long reserve break through?  
Yet should the guns of the Republic speak,  
I would they spake with judgment. Be their lips  
Mutely indifferent to the Jingo's nod,  
Stern towards the cruel, potent for the weak,  
Aflame to guard the honor of the ships,  
And shotted with the arguments of God.

*Wm. R. Huntington*  
*Sept. 11, 1897*



The Reverend William Reed Huntington (1838-1909) wrote this poem as the clouds were gathering before the Spanish-American War. His son, Frank, would serve in this war.

By 1897, the U. S. Navy had six battleships in active service. Five of these, *Maine*, *Texas*, *Massachusetts*, *Iowa* and *Indiana*, visited Bar Harbor at the end of August 1897. Then all steamed south to Hampton Roads.

Huntington summered in Northeast Harbor in "Inchcape," a cottage given to him by a grateful and wealthy parishioner. He often led services at St. Mary's by the Sea, where there is now a Huntington memorial window. In the winter he was rector of Grace Church in New York City and a leader among liberals in the Episcopal Church.

He was elected Class Poet, Harvard College, in 1859.

— With appreciation to Victoria Murphy, his granddaughter,  
for sharing this poem.



## Deer Gourmet

Hey, this garden's familiar, I've been here before  
When the vegetables were ripe, must be two years or more.  
Such tomatoes and peppers, with basil for flavor!  
I was then just a kid and not a good neighbor.

I'm now more restrained, more selective and discerning.  
Marigolds and nasturtiums are too peppery, I'm learning.  
The lilac's a bit acid and not to my taste,  
But the crabapple needs pruning; I do abhor waste.

Now didn't I take a turn here in spring  
And eat all the phlox buds (and a few other things)?  
Mmmm, so milky and nutty, they've managed to blossom,  
Purple's my favorite; ain't nature awesome?

For dessert, the magnificent lily, oriental.  
So tall, so exquisite, not just ornamental.  
First Stargazer's sampled (a slight hint of spice),  
What a velvety texture; the bouquet is so nice.

I browse down the bed; Casablanca's prolific.  
The flowers are huge, the flavor's terrific.  
They're not easy eating, the stamens stick out.  
I'm afraid there is pollen all over my snout.

Oh dear, greedy me, I've beheaded the lot.  
Well, this time I'll shun the vegetable plot.  
Instead, hosta salad, crunchy and sweet.  
I'll just trim this edge. There, isn't that neat.

*Jessica Smith*

## Brilliant Day at Otter Cliffs

I crouch in the snow and wait for the curling wave.  
A skein of eiders unfurls on the shining sea.  
Striated granite tilts toward my lens,  
The mass of ancient glaciers scored across the lee.

My grandsons tumble and slide, weightless as thistle-down,  
Careless of ice and cliffs; I hold my breath  
And freeze them forever as they snag on a rock.  
Then off through the sparkle they dash, defying death.

*Jessica Smith*



Jessica Smith tolerates the deer in Hall Quarry, where she has lived for nine years. Originally from England, she has now been a North American for 50 years. She is a member of "Footloose Friends," and very fond of literature, art, and entertainment. "Deer Gourmet" first appeared in the *Bar Harbor Times*.