

NJ CENTER FOR BOOK HONORS WALT WHITMAN HOUSE IN NOV. 6 EVENT Bestows Literary Landmark status on poet's Camden home



CAMDEN - One of Camden's most famous residents, the celebrated poet Walt Whitman, resided for the last eight years of his life at 328 Mickle Street, a modest, two story house he purchased with the proceeds from his landmark publication *Leaves of Grass*.

A National Historic Landmark since 1962, the [Walt Whitman House in Camden](#) will now be honored by the [New Jersey Center for the Book](#), which will bestow "Literary Landmark" status on the house in a ceremony planned for Friday, Nov. 6.

The Walt Whitman House will become the fourth such site in New Jersey to receive Literary Landmark status from the Center for the Book, an affiliation of Rutgers University's [School of Communication and Information](#) and the U.S. Library of Congress. The Newark Public Library, the Paterson Public Library (the oldest continually functioning library in New Jersey) and the Joyce Kilmer Tree on the Rutgers University Campus in New Brunswick have also been honored with Literary Landmark status.

The Walt Whitman House ceremony will be held at 10 a.m., Friday, Nov. 6, in the multipurpose room of the Student Center on the Rutgers University -Camden campus. A press conference with photo opportunities will be held at the Walt Whitman House, 328 Mickle Street, prior to the ceremonies.

The celebration will feature an all-day event planned by Camden County Freeholder Riletta L. Cream and the Center for the Book. "The designation of the Walt Whitman House as a Literary Landmark widens the scope of the rebirth of the City of Camden to focus on its cultural history and promise," said Freeholder Cream. "This is an exciting time for the Camden County community, its residents and especially the young people, who will be exposed to one of America's literary giants."

"The Literary Landmark designation recognizes Camden's importance to our nation's literary heritage, and it adds to the ongoing renaissance of the city of Camden." said Center for the Book coordinator Renee B. Swartz. "Freeholder Riletta Cream has worked long and tirelessly for Camden to receive the recognition it deserves, and I commend her for all her efforts in putting together this celebration of the Walt Whitman House."

The program will include the awarding of prizes to students who have participated in an essay/poetry/art contest depicting Whitman and his literary works, musical performances by local school children, poetry reading by a local author, and readings of some of Whitman's work by Father Michael Doyle from the Camden Diocese.



Dr. Raymond Yannuzzi, President of Camden County College, will be the Master of Ceremony, with remarks given by Rutgers-Camden Chancellor Wendell E. Pritchett, and Assembly Speaker Joseph J. Roberts, (D-Camden). Robert recently helped obtain a \$2 million grant that will allow the existing structure of the Walt Whitman House, along with several of the adjoining properties, to be renovated to include a Visitor's Center, library and multipurpose room. The construction has just begun and will take approximately 18 months to complete.

The Walt Whitman House is maintained by the state of New Jersey and is also a State Historical Site. Whitman's original letters, personal belongings, the bed in which he died, and the death notice that was nailed to the front door have all been preserved.

"We are very fortunate to have so much rich history in New Jersey, and we take tremendous pride in our stewardship of the Walt Whitman House, as it is the only house the great poet ever owned," state Department of Environmental Protection Acting Commissioner Mark N. Mauriello said. "Our complete and meticulous restoration of his home has gone a long way toward creating an international destination for heritage visitors in Camden City."

Whitman worked as a newspaper editor, a Civil War nurse and a government clerk, all while creating a unique style of poetry culminating in the landmark *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman first came to Camden in 1873 and lived with his brother George on nearby Stevens Street. When his brother moved in 1884, Whitman chose to remain in Camden, and purchased the house at 328 Mickle Street with proceeds from the 1882 publication of *Leaves of Grass*. "Camden was originally an accident, but I shall never be sorry I was left over in Camden. It has brought me blessed returns," Whitman would say of his Camden home.

He remained on Mickle Street until his death in 1892. The house eventually passed to Whitman's niece, Jessie Whitman of St. Louis, and Jessie sold it to the city of Camden for restoration as a memorial to the poet in 1921. The house was then acquired by the state in 1946.

As a Literary Landmark, the Walt Whitman House joins other such landmarks on the Library of Congress' national map of significant sites for literature, and the designation should help draw more visitors to Camden, according to Swartz.

The New Jersey Center for the Book's mission is "to celebrate books, reading, libraries, and the diverse literary heritage of New Jersey." Formed in January 2002, the Center has undertaken:

- Sponsorship of programs designed to celebrate New Jersey's unique literary treasures.
- Designation of literary landmarks that inspire both young and old with the state's rich literary heritage.
- Recognition of talented authors from the state – both past and present – to encourage children and teens to become writers of the future.

The home of the New Jersey Center for the Book is currently at the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University at <http://njcenterforthebook.org>.

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