

Keeping Whitman's Memory Green

By DAVID FULTON KARSNER. in *New York Post*, May 27, 1916

On Wednesday, May 31, the anniversary of the birth of Walt Whitman will be celebrated in this city by his friends and admirers who constitute the Walt Whitman Fellowship, International.

For twenty-seven consecutive years Horace Traubel, Whitman's active literary executor, has made these celebrations possible. Speeches are made by prominent persons, after which each celebrant has the privilege of saying his say. Many of Whitman's first friends and admirers have passed away since the founding of the Fellowship, but a new brood of poets has sprung up, and among them are many who see in Walt Whitman and "Leaves of Grass" the fullest expression of freedom and democracy. Socialists, anarchists, communists, theosophists, freethinkers, business men, labor agitators, and mechanics are drawn together by this magnet.

Back in the late eighties, Whitman told Traubel that he was unalterably opposed to formal celebrations of great men. Traubel records the incident in the second volume of "With Walt Whitman in Camden." Some one had proposed the launching of a Walt Whitman Society. Whitman remarked: "What do they want of a Walt Whitman Society, anyway? Are they to dig a hole and close me in?" Traubel replied: "They are bound to come—Walt Whitman Societies." "Then God help me—I am lost." "That won't be because you are lost—it will be because you are found." Whitman was puzzled. "How do you make that out? Do you justify a Leaves of Grass creed?—boards of explicators?—this line means this, and that line means that . . ."

"No—for nothing of the kind—nor will the societies. They will go in for fraternity without a creed—love without a creed. Do you object to that?" "No—I don't; but can you hold societies together with no more than fraternity as the article of faith?" "Why not? If we can't, then I don't want Walt Whitman Societies any more than you do. If we can, I want to see Walt Whitman Societies all over the world." Whitman was silent for several minutes. Then he spoke: "I say God bless fraternity, Horace: what else could I say? I stand for that if I stand for anything—fraternity, comradeship: and I suppose that if you can make societies that stand for the same thing (if you can, do you hear? if,