



Looking Back #22

Renowned Poetess Sara Teasdale in Charlevoix



by

David L. Miles, Curator
Museum at Harsha House
Charlevoix Historical Society



Sara Teasdale, 1884-1933

Summer resident in Charlevoix for 22 years



Will Hampton home next door to the Teasdales



Will Hampton, editor of the
Charlevoix Democrat newspaper

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1884, one of America's leading literary lights, Sara Teasdale began to write poetry at an early age. Her first published poem appeared in 1907. Seven years before that, she and her family had begun to summer in Charlevoix, and from 1901 until 1921 they stayed in their summer cottage located where the Dunes condominium is now on Michigan Avenue overlooking Lake Michigan. Earl Young, Charlevoix's master builder in stone who arrived here at age eleven in 1900, knew the family, and much of the following is based upon his recollections as related in his memoirs, edited for content and clarity.

"The Dr. George W. Crouters and their friends, the Hamptons, built two attractive homes on the lake side of Michigan Avenue in the second block north of the bridge. This whole area became known, and continues to be known, as the North Side.

"It was September of 1900, after summering here, that John Warren Teasdale, a wholesale food distributor from St. Louis, purchased the colonial-type Crouter home. [Mr. Crouter had decided to build a bigger house further up the street.—DLM]

"This property purchased by the Teasdales was particularly to their liking because of its unusual frontage on the lake and on the street. It had sufficient vacant area north of the home for building a stable as far back from the street as possible, with stalls below the ground level and ample space for a tack room and two or three beautiful carriages on the ground level and an apartment for their coachman above.

"The stable became a point of contention with the neighbors, the Will E. Hamptons, the adjoining property owners. On September 21, 1909, a Bill of Complaint was filed by Will that the keeping of horses in this location was objectionable to the neighborhood. Circuit Judge Frederick W. Mayne, whose home was directly across the street from the Teasdale and Hampton properties, a year-round friend of the Hamptons and a summer friend of the Teasdales, secured Circuit Court Judge Fred S. Lamb to hear the case. The court record reads as follows:

'Decision of the Court':

'This case is whether or not the barn in question as kept and used by the Defendants is a Nuisance and should be abated as such.'

'The gist of the testimony on the part of the Complainant is aimed at the right of the Defendants to maintain a barn there at all, regardless of how it may have been kept and used. Under the proofs submitted, the Complainant is clearly estopped from raising the question.'

'The testimony offered upon the question of Nuisance is so overwhelmingly in favor of the Defendant that I deem any discussion is futile.'

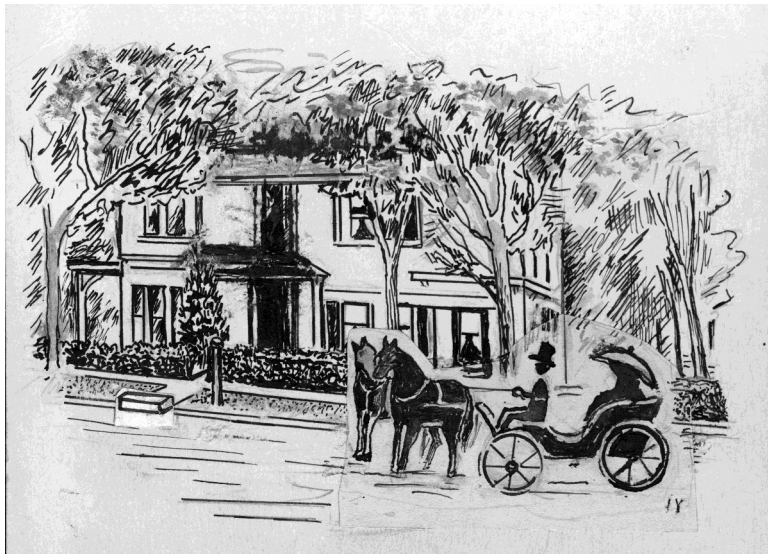
'Under the proofs submitted, the Defendants are entitled to a decree dismissing the bill with costs.'

'September 1, 1910 Decree granted'

'January 10, 1911 Costs taxed at \$50.00'



A summer gathering of family and friends, said to be taken during the World War I years. Mr. Teasdale is seated second from right, with the long flowing white beard.



Pen and ink drawing done by Irene Harsha Young, Earl's wife, for his memoirs. It shows one of the Teasdale carriages on Michigan Avenue, with Mrs. Teasdale under her always present parasol.

"From the very first year the Teasdales occupied their property, it was always interesting to see their beautiful black horses when Mr. and Mrs. Teasdale took their afternoon or early evening drive. Mr. Teasdale was a large, distinguished gentleman with a flowing divided white beard. Mrs. Teasdale invariably carried a parasol when riding in one of their beautiful open carriages. This custom continued, with the horses being brought from St. Louis every spring and returned in the fall, until Mr. Teasdale's death. Realizing that he would not be returning another year, Mr. Teasdale requested the horses be disposed of and shortly afterward the coachman, who had charge of the beautiful animals for so many years, died. The expensive carriages and harnesses were sold to people on Mackinac Island."

John Warren Teasdale died in Charlevoix on July 31, 1921, at age eighty-two. With both him and their coachman gone, the family never returned after that.

It is a little difficult to figure out Sara Teasdale's exact relationship with the Pulitzer publishing company awards. She did receive an award from them in 1918 for her fourth collection of poetry, published in 1917, titled *Love Songs*. This was made possible by a special grant from the Poetry Society. The official Pulitzer Prize for Poetry was not actually established until 1922, when the first winner was Vachel Lindsay, a close friend of Sara's and once a romantic partner. (Both died by suicide several years later.) Perhaps it can best be described by saying that Sara Teasdale did receive a Pulitzer prize for poetry in 1918, but not the first Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1922. It depends on who you ask.

"The Teasdales had a wooden lookout which had a wonderful view of the North and South Points and sometimes several islands. This was reached by a long, railed wooden walk. One day, I saw Miss Teasdale in the lookout writing. My mother had told me she was a poetess and had read to me a couple of Miss T's poems which I believe had appeared either in the *Atlantic Monthly* or *Harper's*. I wanted a closer look at a poetess so I quietly edged my way toward her. I stopped about twenty feet from her. I was disappointed. She had frizzy pale red hair and freckles and irregular features, a rather sharp face. She looked up and asked, 'What do you want, little girl?' I turned and ran. Later I bought every volume of poetry she published but I often wondered who were the lovers she referred to as she didn't look attractive enough to have lovers. Some of her poems I like to think were written on that lookout."

—Laura Jean S. Wulfman to Charlevoix author and columnist Edith Gilbert

One thing is certain. Sara Teasdale did write a poem called *Schooners (Charlevoix Harbor)*, perhaps written on that very lookout, inspired by the picturesque activity she witnessed in the channel and Round Lake harbor.

Schooners (Charlevoix Harbor)

*Here in the blue lake harbor;
I watch the ships steam in;
Up the clear wind of morning
Their smoke climbs black and thin.*

*Their whistles break the brittle air;
They beat an angry tack;
But ah, the gentle sailing ships
That never will come back.*

*Where is the gentle Rosabelle
That brot the mill its grain,
Her white sails dripping with the sun,
Or grayed against the rain?*

*Where is the Northern Lady,
With cedar logs weighed down,
Whose captain with a wooden leg
Went clicking up and down?*

*And the little Queen of England,
That had so fresh an air
When the captain's wife leaned on the rail
With the sunshine in her hair?*

*The Good Squaw and the Jasper B,
The Pearl, the Golden Bough,
O gentle ships, O quiet ships,
Where are you anchored now?*

"Schooners" was written by Sara Teasdale and published by Sara Teasdale and published by *Everybody's Magazine*, New York, New York, in Vol. XXXVII-A, July to Oct., 1917, p. 196.

In April, 2025, the Charlevoix Historical Society received a small rocking chair that had once been in the Teasdale house. Its contents were auctioned off in the early 1920s.

*"Where is the gentle
Rosabelle (right, un-
loading)*

*"That brot the mill its
grain . . ." (below,
the Argo Milling
Company beside
the lower channel
bridge, later trans-
formed into Earl
Young's Weather-
vane Inn)*



From left, tied up at the Antrim Street dock, schooners *Northern Lady*, *Rosabelle*, *Jasper B.*, *Good Squaw*, with the jib boom of the *Golden Bough* at upper right. Earl Young took this photo in 1906 and had the tiny negative enlarged and colorized for his new Weather-vane Inn restaurant in 1954. In a way, Sara Teasdale's five ships came back to stay, for almost half a century, at the exact site where the grain was unloaded.