

The THIRD FIG



*Herewith find the Millay House Rockland February 2020 Winter Edition
Newsletter for Edna St. Vincent Millay Poetry Fans*

Winter Night

Pile high the hickory and the light
Log of chestnut struck by the blight.
Welcome in the winter night.

The day has gone in hewing and felling,
Sawing and drawing wood to the dwelling
For the night of talk and story-telling.

These are the hours that give the edge
To the blunted axe and the bent wedge,
Straighten the saw and lighten the sledge.

Here are question and reply,
And the fire reflected in the thinking eye.
So peace, and let the bob-cat cry.

--from *The Buck in the Snow and Other Poems*,
Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1928.

Happy winter! Welcome to the *Winter Edition* of the Millay House Rockland newsletter. As with our previous letter, here at Millay House Rockland, we're still "pulling history forward to meet contemporary calls to understand and preserve our culture." Read on to see how those contemporary calls are manifesting locally, and for our most recent doings.

New Board Member. MHR welcomed new board member Matt Wellman to our poetic preservation efforts. Matt works at Fog Bar and Café in Rockland and now manages MHR's Poetry Slams there. He brings a wealth of knowledge about how to run a slam, and is a veteran poetry slam poet and winner. His guidance has been invaluable, and his enthusiasm at the slams is infectious, so come see us all and join in the fun. It is convivial and supportive, especially for the poets, as we welcome one and all. The Fog's crew are exceptional hosts, providing excellent food and drink with which to further enchant the evenings.

Fog Bar and Café Thursday Night Poetry Slams. MHR held our second Poetry Slam at Fog Bar and Café on Main Street, Rockland, on a bone-freezing night just before Christmas. Despite the weather, a festive crowd cheered on four very good poets, including the previous Slam winner, Francesca Maximo, who also served as our Featured Poet. Francesca hails from Portland by way of New York and uses a distinctive rhyme style to deliver the stories she shares at the mic. Local Rockland resident Paul McFarland participated in the September slam and was the first place winner of our Solstice Slam in December. Congratulations to Paul! Prizes were books donated by local poet Tom Moore from Belfast, a former MHR board member. The next Slam is Thursday February 13; see our events section for information.

MHR thanks Matt and Fog Bar and Café owner, Ashley Seelig, for their generosity and enthusiastic support in allowing us to use the space and preserve more culture, poetically speaking. We also thank Tom Moore for generously donating his books, and MHR board members and friends who created the ESVM-themed handmade Christmas tree ornaments that adorned Fog Bar and Café's tree.

Yay Millay! An upswing in local interest in Millay is evidenced at Camden Hills Regional High School, where the faculty and student members of *Yay Millay!* petitioned the school board to rename the school library in honor of their most famous graduate. The petition passed unanimously this January, with one member commenting that some of what previously made Millay so controversial now makes us support her even more. As you may know, Millay graduated from Camden High School in 1909, won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1923, the Frost Medal in 1943, and in 2015, was named by Equality Forum as one of LGBTQ History Month's 31 icons.

A gala celebration of Millay and the renaming of the library is being planned by the *Yay Millay!* Club for May 24th from 7-9 pm. A program will be presented in the Strom Auditorium and an Open House in the Library. The event is open to the community and should be one Millay poetry lovers won't want to miss.

In addition, Yay, Millay! is also working with a publisher on a commemorative edition of their yearbook, *The Megunticook*, containing all Millay's works from that era, some never before published. This edition will be available for sale at the Millay celebration. If you're on Twitter, see #mainelibraries #maineschoollibraries #CHILLsLibrary #ednastvincentmillay #MillayLibrary and #ESVMLibrary.

FEBRUARY EVENTS

Edna St. Vincent Millay was born on February 22, 1892 in the house MHR now owns, so Millay's birthday provides us with a great opportunity to celebrate her legacy in the depths of the cold, snowy Maine winter.

Fog Bar Thursday Night Poetry Slams. The next Slam is Thursday, February 13th. Come share the poetry and the fun! The event is free and open to the public. Poets, lyricists, writers, and any and all fans of written or spoken word, come on out! The evening begins with an open mic from 5:30-6:30 pm; the sign-up sheet is available at 5:00 pm. The event's featured poet Travis Gauvin reads from 6:30-7:00. Sign up for the Slam begins at 7:00, and the event goes from 7:30 to 9:00, with prizes provided by Cider Mill Press and North Country Press. We'll be rounding out our fantastic evening with an extended open mic from 9:15 to 10:15 pm. So come enjoy some of the best food, drink and talent on the MidCoast!

Celebration Millay's birthday at the Farnsworth! *MHR* and University of Maine professor and poet, Kathleen Ellis, are co-hosting a poetry reading "Naturally Vincent: Millay as Eco-Poet" in the Farnsworth Museum's auditorium on Sunday, February 23 at 1:30pm. To celebrate Millay, thirteen Maine poets will read letters and poems that focus on her evolution from a Romantic to an eco-poet. Poets will also read their own poems about nature, as well as the poetry of Abbie Huston Evans, Millay's Sunday school teacher.

Millay published her first poem, "Forest Trees," at 14. From her girlhood excursions on Penobscot Bay, hikes in the surroundings hills, nature walks with Evans, and later stays on Ragged Island in Casco Bay, she came to see nature as a constant, separate from the romanticism, escapism, or philosophy that humans might superimpose upon it. Poets and attendees are invited to gather at Fog Bar and Café following the poetry reading for informal conversation and no-host drinks and dinner.

The Unexplorer

There was a road ran past our house
Too lovely to explore.
I asked my mother once – she said
That if you followed where it led
It brought you to the milkman's door.
(That's why I have not traveled more.)

--from *A Few Figs from Thistles*
by Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1922.



A BURNING QUESTION

We field a number of questions as board members, but none more pressing than this one: What is the purpose of restoring and maintaining the birth home of Edna St. Vincent Millay?

Historically speaking, the house itself has received recognition as a good example of the double houses built in Rockland in the late 1800s to provide affordable housing for the working class, and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the “Singhi Double Cottage.”

From a literary vantage point, the homes and spaces in which American artists have been born, raised, lived and/or worked are taking on greater significance as our country matures and our culture realizes and assigns greater importance to the impact place has on artists’ creative endeavors. Millay’s upbringing by a single mother in reduced circumstances in small, rural seaside Maine towns had an enormous effect on her life and poetry. Throughout her life, she used imagery from those years in her poems. The house and the community that surrounds it also symbolize and represent some of what Millay had to encounter and overcome to become the great literary success she did. The house enables us to recognize the distance she traveled and gives a nod to her native intelligence, creativity, and hard work. She made the most of opportunities that came her way. She was able to get there from here. And finally, the house provides a place and space in which to honor her legacy as the much beloved and highly acclaimed Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay of midcoast Maine.

The Mission Statement of Millay House Rockland is: *To preserve the birthplace of Edna St. Vincent Millay and celebrate her legacy through education, the literary arts, and significant collaboration within the Maine community and beyond.* Once the double house is restored, we will proceed with and expand upon the exciting programs we envision for this center in which poets, writers and the public can explore and engage in creative literary pursuits while preserving, celebrating and carrying on Vincent’s legacy.

Our board-member volunteers continue to write grants and contribute our own funds to preserve Millay’s birthplace and make it a vital center that actively supports creating art and poetry in Rockland. Our vision for the house is to provide space for artists and poets to work and interact with the community, such as with poet and artist-in-residence programs. We’d like to complete the Millay House renovations and continue to provide annual poetry festivals, but need working capital to do so. Millay House Rockland is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and contributions are tax deductible. Checks made out to ‘Millay House Rockland’ should be mailed to: P. O. Box 831, Rockland, ME 04841. Or...



You can contribute to our GoFundMe campaign! These funds are earmarked to finance the Millay House interior renovations. A funder has given us a challenge: they will provide a grant of \$20,000 if we raise \$100,000. Please go to our GoFundMe campaign; it is fast and simple. Click on the green Donate Now button. The next screen provides a place to enter the amount, your information, and select a payment option. Then we get notified by email and in return, send you heartfelt thanks with the hope that you join us for one of our events. Watch our progress on our website (www.millayhouserockland.org) and on the GoFundMe website. We have extended our campaign to continue our quest. Please have a look at our campaign site using the link, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/millay-house-rockland-renovations> and if possible, contribute whatever you can, as every little bit helps.

[O moon, draw not aside]

O moon draw not aside thy hem from this green moss
Ever, ever.

O droning Weird, let now thy busy spindle be at rest,
And do thou sleep awhile,
Thy shaggy head fallen forward upon thy breast.

O deep wood, unstill with small sounds,
Be kinsman to our love,
Nor let the chilly frost with his hoar rime
Creep up, creep up upon the drowsy summer
For yet a little time.

-- from *The King's Henchmen*,
Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1927.

GIVE A FIG FOR MILLAY

Here is our Wish List:

First Fig: *Anecdotes.* Have an Edna St. Vincent Millay anecdote, brief poem, original photo, story or item handed down to share? We'd like to share those that are newsletter-appropriate with our readership. Reply to this newsletter.

Second Fig: *Input.* Participate; come to our February events; visit our website; tell us what you like; and if you participated in this year's Millay Arts & Poetry Festival, we'd love to have your observations and suggestions for the coming year's. You can reach us at info@millayhouserockland.org. Many thanks to those of you who do participate, who enjoy, and who contribute to our regular events.