



The Architecture of Self-Isolation: Building Henry David Thoreau's Walden Pond House in the Maine Woods

by Tom Sieniewicz

This pandemic unfolds with a cruel unevenness: For millions, illness and tragedy. For millions more, inconvenience and tedium.

I have to admit, I have enjoyed this past year's enforced solitude at times. Those of us over 60 can take the long view. We know these days will pass. I have observed the effects on young people to be harsher.

By late April of 2020, trapped at home in Cambridge, our sons—Satchel, 19, and Jasper, 17—had watched every movie on Netflix and exhausted every possible topic of conversation with their ever-present parents. It was getting hard to keep the peace. Mercifully, our extended family has a summer house on a four-acre lot in Maine. So as soon as we could, my wife Martha and I retreated with the boys to these Maine woods.

One morning, tromping the far corners of the land, we were clambering over enormous fallen trees, windfalls from a harsh winter—and Satchel decided he wanted to build a tree house.

Our sons, now large, have been woodworkers since they were improbably small. And over the years, our home basement has accumulated a forest of tools. So this spring, when they saw a huge old fallen white pine, they also saw *timber*.

Satchel is at MIT, hence an engineer. While Martha and I looked the other way, he designed and constructed a mobile sawmill, built around a 32-inch chain saw. (What could possibly go wrong?)

Because it's my job as a father to worry, I feared not only random amputation but a jerrybuilt aerial structure that might ruin some perfectly good trees.

And then I remembered. On trips to Walden when the boys were young, we used to peer in the windows of the replica cabin and feel what everyone seems to feel: *That this is all a person needs*. To me that little house has always seemed nearly perfect in scale and detail. So I reached out to the Thoreau Society Shop at

CONTENTS

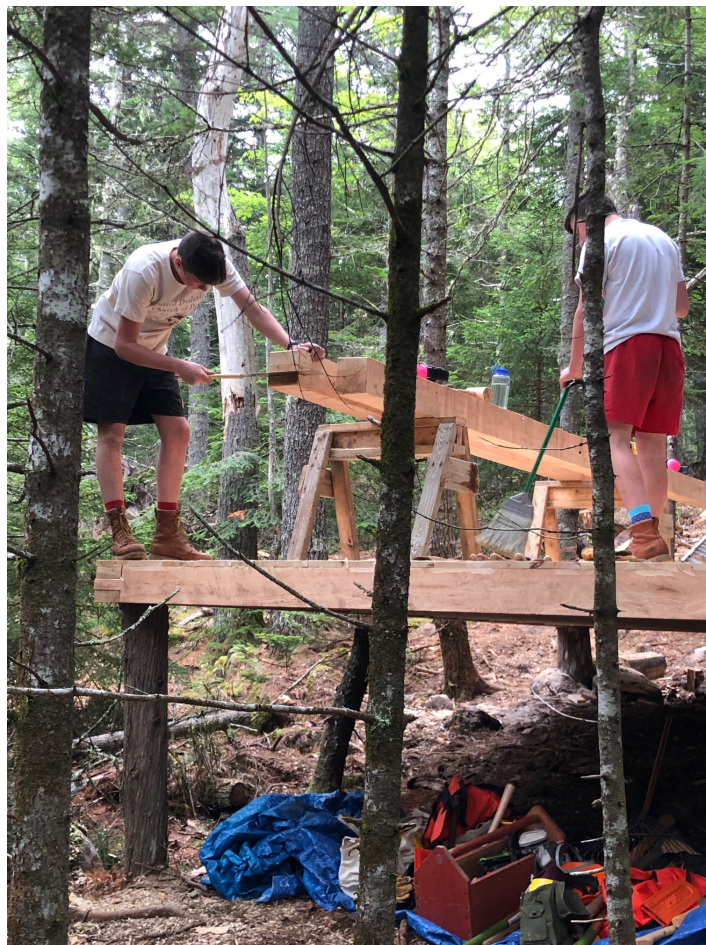
The Architecture of Self-Isolation: Building Henry David Thoreau's Walden Pond House in the Maine Woods	1
The Pedagogy of Thoreau's Essay "Walking"	5
Donna Marie Przybojewski's Books about Thoreau for Children: A Review	7
<i>All That Heaven Allows</i> (1955): Sirk's Thoreauvian Parable of	

American Home-Making	10
Additions to the Thoreau Bibliography	12
President's Column	15
Notes from Concord	15
2021 Thoreau Society Fellowships	16
Notes & Queries	16



Walden Pond—and there were the plans. Satchel and Jasper got inspired to try to follow them. And they did, pretty much to the inch.

We argued wood engineering by the fire in the evenings and together drew details in the morning, before the boys would go to the house site to build. My sons' drive to make a treehouse or at



least a house made of trees would change how I saw them and the Maine woods forever.

The house site was chosen for its proximity to a large wind-fallen tree. The house project transforms the woods from damp forest into a lumber yard of potential. Straight trees, fallen trees, the extent of decay in the wood all have new meaning to me.

Where we used to see windfall as logs ready to rot into the forest floor—uncooked duff—now we see board feet. House timbers stolen from carpenter ants (*Camponotus pennsylvanicus*)!





Don't worry: Only logs pushed down by the Atlantic gales will make the walls and roof. Recycled wood, like Henry's.

The boys have wood-working knowledge from furniture making, but these green timbers spit back as they are sawn and chiseled into giant dovetails and civil-engineering-scaled mortise-and-tenon joints.

We know for certain Thoreau did not build that house by himself. (He did not claim this—only implied it.) We have measured just how much labor, grunts, and songs in camaraderie he must have borrowed to get from a pile of second-hand wood to his ribbon cutting. Lifting beams, frame walking, and high-wire-balanced roofing require some society, at minimum three people.

Walden contains lots of references to the house—in a first read, no more than skimmed-over details giving atmosphere. But now we dwell on these passages, allowing us to imagine the carpentry details and know



that the spruce (*Picea glauca*) trunk's bark is our finish and should be joined and hoisted into place with care. Old man's beard (*Usnea longissima*) hangs from this ceiling's structural surfaces too—repurposed trunks.

The house becomes an Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) harpsichord which plays the sounds of silence, the same silence, through the rough openings, that Thoreau sought out and heard in the Walden woods in 1845. It now belongs to the boys.

A symphony of three-inch nails being thunked into the frame, echoing out of the damp green canopy. The hammer and wooden mallet's tones change with each strike, from tentative and rapid ting to bass thud, and then after a moment repeated. Sometimes two hammers syncopate. Each nail and added piece of wood makes the frame

more sound and transports us back closer to 1845, a welcome place to be in the summer of 2020.

Shipped-lapped sheathing to keep out the drafts, bark left on the purlins making a baroque-like ceiling to stare at when you are in bed. And all the walls celebrate the swirling grain of knots.

The newly minted floor creaks and squeaks just as the first inhabitant heard it before his house was settled, used, and relaxed. The boys are certain that the floor music has the same exact sound that Thoreau heard when pacing.

No root cellar here in the Maine woods as solid granite is only 33 inches below the surface. Sticks of dynamite to move it? A concussive conjuring very appealing to boys. But “NOT Thoreau-ian,” Dad says.

Newly cut and gleaming white pine timbers, electric bright against the summer greens of the Maine woods, are full of compressive forces from wet green wood weight. The heavy timber frame is also an armature for spider-wires in perfect tension. Morning dew hanging on the catenary web strands, reflecting the sunlight, shows like Christmas lights draped in a December Concord living room.

It took all the wisdom and life experience of youth to so eloquently show how today’s society might be untangled. We can see things now that we have not seen for our whole lifetime, even though we have laid our eyes on them forever. To take what has always been discarded and make it into a place where new ideas are generated—this seems to be a perfect metaphor for what we are learning in the late summer of 2020.

Two New England brothers made use of their isolation to prove that antique observations have not grown old and that seemingly dead old New England books are perfectly alive.

• **Tom Sieniewicz** is an architect and environmentalist. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[Editor’s Note: Plans for building a cabin replica are available at the Shop at Walden Pond. Request it from Shop staff, or search the Shop’s online inventory for “Thoreau’s Walden House / Cabin, by Roland Wells Robbins, with book ‘Discovery at Walden.’”]



**THE
THOREAU
SOCIETY
SHOP**
AT WALDEN POND
shopatwaldenpond.org

**enter promo code WALDEN
and save 15% off your purchase
of books, apparel, and more**

Teaching Thoreau

The Pedagogy of Thoreau's Essay "Walking"

by Lynn Holtzman

"What does education often do!— It makes a straight-cut ditch— of a free, meandering brook."

—Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, after October 31, 1850¹

Thoreau's approach to teaching was unconventional for Victorian-era New England. He believed that a rote learning approach was too reductionist and far too confining, especially for subjects like natural history that require personal engagement and self-discovery. Holistic teaching involves the total self, using the intellect as well as the physical senses to uncover the mysteries of the natural world. Deep thinking about Nature requires deeper experiences with it. The traditional classroom, even today, typically does not provide these types of pedagogical opportunities.

Experiential education certainly makes sense when teaching students about natural history and ecology, but what about environmental ethics? Thoreau scholar David M. Robinson, in his essay "Thoreau's 'Walking' and the Ecological Imperative," describes Thoreau's "Walking" as an "essay in ethics."² I agree with this assessment. "Walking" is, I believe, Thoreau's exposition on how a person develops a sound environmental ethic. For Thoreau, walking or sauntering can be a means of experiencing Nature holistically. These aesthetic and intellectual experiences, especially if pursued consistently, can foster virtues like awareness, wonder, and empathy, which can lead to adopting and actualizing an environmental ethic.

Students taking environmental ethics at the upper high school and university level could benefit significantly from studying "Walking." For today's student, however, "Walking" can be difficult to access and understand. Thoreau's archaic terms,

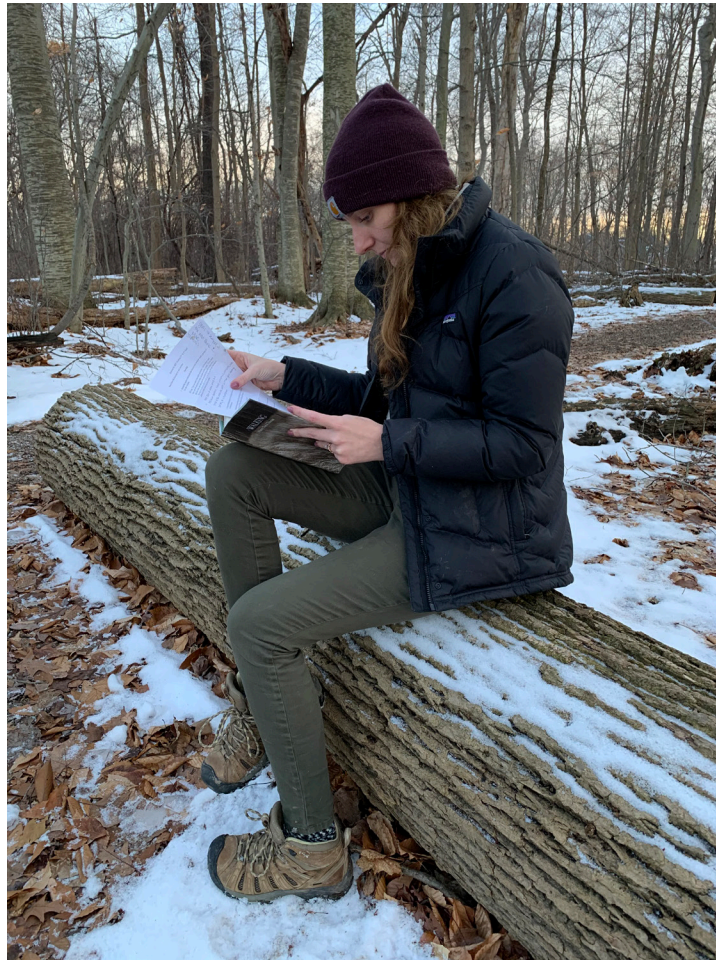
metaphors, and historical references make "Walking" a challenge for many. One effective way of making "Walking" accessible to students is to apply Thoreau's method to Thoreau's essay—have the students walk in Nature and read portions of the essay at points or stations placed along a hiking trail.

In my environmental ethics class, we study Thoreau's "Walking" as a treatise on how to adopt an environmental ethic or, if you will, develop a "Green" character by acquiring individual attitudes and values towards Nature. These attitudes and values are best acquired through an ongoing experiential relationship that brings a person in direct contact with Nature as subject and not merely as an object of scientific study or potential material resource for human utility. Thoreau remarked, "I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright. It is not indifferent to us which way

we walk. There is a right way."

The "right" way to walk is to be drawn to Nature without preconceptions of what it is, but open-minded to what it will reveal to us about itself. To be present body and soul, without distraction or pre-conceived notions.

To do this, I set up a walk with reading and reflection stations at a natural area near the college. I provide a copy of "Walking" and a booklet-journal that contains a map and set of questions to help students interact with the text as well as the natural world. Students pair up and at each station they observe and write a description of the site, and then read out loud the selected portion of text to each other, discuss it, and answer the questions. They walk and repeat the process until they have completed all three stations. The following week, we gather in class to share thoughts, compare notes, and deliberate upon Thoreau's essay. This is followed by a seminar called "Walking, Thinking, and Journaling." This seminar draws from Thoreau's *Journals* and *Walden* as we further discuss



Courtesy Jenna Lawlis

Student reading Thoreau's "Walking" in the forest

the importance of the relationship between walking in nature, reflective meditation, and qualitative journaling as a means of cultivating an environmental ethic.

For the most part, students have responded positively to this approach. It has provoked lively and profitable discussions about some of the major insights that Thoreau sets forth in his essay. Students particularly benefit from grappling with the following sorts of Thoreauvian questions:

Excerpt from Environmental Ethics Field Assignment

“Being Mindful” Station A

1. Provide a description of the natural area
2. Read paragraphs 1-14 of “Walking”³ and answer the following questions:
 - What does Thoreau mean by the “art of Walking”? How should we walk?
 - Thoreau believes that you should be physically and spiritually in the woods. What do you think he means?

“Being Mindful” Station B

1. Provide a description of the natural area.
2. Read paragraphs 33-45 of “Walking”⁴ and answer the following questions:
 - How do you think Thoreau would define “Wildness?”
 - What does Thoreau mean by this statement? “I would have every man so much like an antelope, so much part and parcel of nature...”
 - Thoreau said; “The most alive is the wildest.” Do you agree with him? Why or Why not?

“Being Mindful” Station C

1. Provide a description of the natural area.
2. Read paragraphs 74-88 of “Walking”⁵ and answer the following questions:
 - Why does Thoreau say that “we cannot afford not to live in the present?”
 - Thoreau speaks of “sauntering towards the Holy Land.” What do you think he means by the “Holy Land?”
 - How would you describe Thoreau’s environmental ethic? Try to apply one of the ethical theories that you have learned in class.

Closing Question:

What have you learned from Thoreau concerning our relationship with the natural world? Do you believe that Thoreau has something to say to us today about how we ought to value and interact with Nature? What do you think he would say to us?

- What is the relationship between Nature, freedom, and wildness?
- What does it mean for us to live in the present?
- What does Thoreau mean by wildness and the preservation of the world?
- How can a human be “part and parcel of Nature?”
- How does a person reflect on their relationship with Nature?
- How should those thoughts change how we live with Nature?
- What does Thoreau believe is a “right” relationship with Nature?

As a teacher, my goal in studying Thoreau’s “Walking” is to open a student’s mind to the ideas and possibilities of Thoreau’s musings and their implications for the formation of an environmental ethic. And to inspire them to follow in Thoreau’s footsteps—as he writes so eloquently, “to saunter toward the Holy land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever he has done, shall perchance shine into the minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives with a great awakening light.”

Above is a sample of the booklet/journal that I designed for use in class. The readings are identified by paragraph number.

• **Lynn Holtzman** is the Wildlife Resources Management Program Manager at Hocking College, where he also teaches environmental ethics and law.

Notes

1. Henry David Thoreau, *Journal, Volume 3: 1848-1851*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer, Mark R. Paterson, and William Rossi (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1990), 130.

2. David M. Robinson, “Thoreau’s ‘Walking’ and the Ecological Imperative,” in *Approaches to Teaching Thoreau’s Walden and Other Works*, ed. Richard J. Schneider (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1996), pp. 169-174.

3. This is from “I wish to speak a word for Nature” to “It will never become quite familiar to you.”

4. This is from “Linnaeus said long ago . . .” to “Front-yards are not made in, but, at most, through, and you could go in the back way.

5. This is from “My desire for knowledge is intermittent . . .” to “. . . bank-side in Autumn” (the end of the essay).

Donna Marie Przybojewski's Books about Thoreau for Children: A Review

by Dianne McConville Weiss and
Victor Curran

Donna Marie Przybojewski, *Henry David Thoreau, Author, Philosopher, Naturalist*. Cleveland, Ohio: Streamline Publishing, 2016, 48 pp.

Donna Marie Przybojewski, *Henry David Thoreau, Who Can He Be?* Cleveland, Ohio: Streamline Publishing, 2016, 32 pp.

Donna Marie Przybojewski, *Henry David Thoreau Loved the Seasons of the Year*. Cleveland, Ohio: Streamline Publishing, 2017, 56 pp.

Donna Marie Przybojewski, *Born in the Nick of Time*. Cleveland, Ohio: Streamline Publishing, 2017, 84 pp.

Donna Marie Przybojewski, *If Henry David Thoreau Traveled the Southwest: An Imaginary Saunter*. Cleveland, Ohio: Streamline Publishing, 2018, 36 pp.

Donna Marie Przybojewski, *Henry David Thoreau: Bell Ringer for Justice*. Cleveland, Ohio: Streamline Publishing, 2019, 58 pp.

Donna Marie Przybojewski, *A Life of Joy: Childhood Memories of Henry David Thoreau*. Cleveland, Ohio: Streamline Publishing, 2020, 32 pp.

We met Donna Marie Przybojewski in 2016, after she accepted the Thoreau Society's invitation to become a Thoreau Bicentennial Ambassador. For her Ambassador's project, Donna Marie created "Saunter the Year with Henry David Thoreau," a year-long, interdisciplinary curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grade students at St. Benedict Catholic School in Garfield Heights, Ohio. (In the classroom she often appeared in character as Henry, beard and all.) Resources for such an ambitious curriculum were scarce, so Donna Marie began writing and illustrating books for elementary and middle school readers, presenting vignettes of Thoreau's life and describing his ideas in age-appropriate ways. Her intent (per an email exchange we had last year) was "not just [to] introduce Henry to children, but to help them develop a relationship with him."

Since 2016, Donna Marie, a 36-year veteran Language Arts teacher and self-taught illustrator, has completed seven children's books about Thoreau. These books aren't a series in the sense of a sequential narrative, but separate paths of discovery that invite children to enter into Henry's world at their own pace. The purposes and age ranges vary from book to book; they also vary in theme, textual style, and media.

The first book, published in 2016, is *Henry David Thoreau, Author, Philosopher, Naturalist*, a discussion starter coloring book



C is for Henry's CABIN in the wood.
Close to the shore of Walden Pond it stood.

Courtesy Donna Marie Przybojewski

A page from *Henry David Thoreau, Who Can He Be?* (2016)

for Kindergarten through Grade 3. Each spread features a black-and-white scene from Henry's life. On the facing page, there are open-ended questions ("Have you ever taken a hike in the woods? What kinds of things did you see?") and a space for children to draw a picture of a suggested subject ("Draw a picture of an animal you watched in your back yard"). We see Henry's boat and cabin, his animal and bird friends, his enjoyment of ice skating in winter and watermelons in summer, and even his epic pursuit of his father's runaway pig. Donna Marie doesn't shy away from difficult discussion topics, such as Henry's helping refugees from slavery and Henry's death.

Henry David Thoreau, Who Can He Be? (2016) is an alphabet book for Preschool through Grade 3. Donna Marie used biographical details to introduce Henry as a nature lover, but also as a lover of good food and even, sometimes, good company. The book is written in rhymed verse (e.g., "P is for POPCORN Henry did make. The children enjoyed it better than cake"). Her illustrations are done in an exuberant style, reminiscent of folk art, with rich colors and bold brushstrokes. She puts in some Easter eggs for Thoreauvian parents and grandparents to find, like Henry's green desk and his cabin as portrayed on the title page of *Walden*.

In *Henry David Thoreau Loved the Seasons of the Year* (2017), the cycle of the seasons provides a framework for Henry's experiences of nature and glimpses of his daily life at Walden (swimming, gardening, cleaning house). It's told in simple, age-appropriate language (Grades 1-4), though the effort to fit the text to meter and rhyme occasionally produces an odd phrase. Donna



Courtesy Donna Marie Przybojewski

Illustration from *Henry David Thoreau Loved the Seasons of the Year* (2017).

Marie's development as an artist is evident in these illustrations, with their notable detail and refinement, and brilliant color. An image of Henry walking in a November rain recalls Daniel Ricketson's 1855 sketch of him "returning to his shanty from Concord." Another illustration, of Henry leaning into the wind as snowflakes eddy around him, is an impressionistic gem.

Born in the Nick of Time (2017) is a discussion starter coloring book for readers in Grades 1-5. This is a thoughtful, detailed biography, and at 84 pages it is the longest of the series. In a series of episodes, we see Henry in the company of his family, neighbors, and colleagues. Emerson is there, of course, and Margaret Fuller, the Hawthornes, the Alcotts, Joe Polis, and Sam Staples. As a bonus, we learn something about the accomplishments of these other individuals too.

If Henry David Thoreau Traveled the Southwest. An Imaginary Saunter (2018) is a full color picture book in landscape format. Like the previous picture books, the text is in rhyming verse, but there's much more text per page, suitable for Grades 1-4.

It opens with the quote where Henry famously calls for the creation of parks, "a common possession forever," to be used "for instruction and recreation."¹ Donna Marie imagines Thoreau visiting National Parks in Arizona, Colorado, and Utah, places where she had her own transcendent experience of nature. She uses the subjunctive to convey the idea that, although Thoreau was a real person, the story in this book is fictional. ("The sight would be a feast for Henry's eyes.") While this distinction might be lost on some young readers, children don't need to know about the historical Thoreau to enjoy the nature-themed rhymes and pictures bursting with color. These illustrations may be among her best, alive with the dramatic forms and hues of the Southwest landscape.

Henry David Thoreau: Bell Ringer for Justice (2019), written

in prose, is for Grades 4-8. Donna Marie tells the story of the Thoreau family's participation in the Underground Railroad and Concord's Anti-Slavery Society, and of Henry's famous act of civil disobedience and the essay it inspired. She includes profiles



Courtesy Donna Marie Przybojewski

Illustration from *If Henry David Thoreau Traveled the Southwest. An Imaginary Saunter* (2018).



Courtesy Donna Marie Przybojewski

Illustration from *Henry David Thoreau: Bell Ringer for Justice* (2019). Cato Ingraham lived in Walden Woods years before Thoreau and planted walnut trees there for his own use.

of some of Concord's enslaved and formerly enslaved residents, as well as national figures in the abolitionist movement. The broader imperative of civil rights is apparent in the stories included about other marginalized groups, such as native peoples and—in Henry's time—Irish immigrants. Thoreau's lasting influence on social justice is presented in profiles of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi. This book features full-page color illustrations in Donna Marie's trademark style, but more serious, as befits the subject. Each spread includes open-ended discussion questions, such as, "Have you ever been judged unfairly because of who you are? Have you ever judged others wrongly? How did it make you feel?"

The latest in the series is *A Life of Joy: Childhood Memories of Henry David Thoreau* (2020), a color picture book for Grades 2-5 that shows Henry through the lens of loving family relationships. Each two-page spread tells something about the adult Henry—his boating, for example—and relates it to a formative experience in his childhood, such as fishing with his brother John.

Donna Marie's effort to create resources for teaching young children about Thoreau was a remarkable challenge to undertake, one that involved considerable creativity and research. Her commitment to accuracy is obvious throughout the text and illustrations. In the artistic process, she has evidently taken her own journey of joy, discovering herself as an author/illustrator and

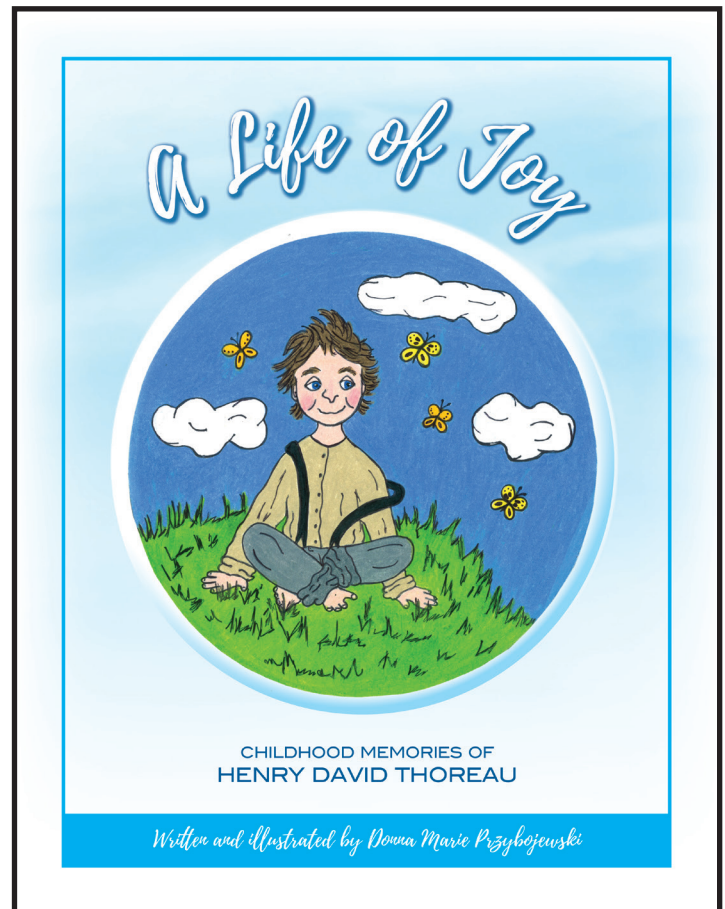
inspiring a new generation with her love of Henry. She has been a presenter at several Annual Gatherings. Three of her books were featured as Story Walks™ at Walden Pond State Reservation. The books are available through The Thoreau Society Shop at Walden Pond (www.shopatwaldenpond.org).

Notes:

1. Thoreau, Henry David. *Journal XII: March 2, 1859 – November 30, 1859*, ed. Bradford Torrey (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 387; October 15, 1859.

• **Dianne McConville Weiss** is on the Planning Committee of the Transcendentalism Council of First Parish in Concord; she was the lead organizer for Concord's Margaret Fuller Bicentennial. She served on the Board of Directors of The Thoreau Society. A Developmental Psychology specialist, Ms. Weiss conducted program evaluation research through Tufts University and for the State of Vermont Child Care Services Division. She has also published creative writing.

• **Victor Curran** teaches courses in Concord history, works as an interpreter at the Concord Museum and the Old Manse, and gives history tours for the Concord Visitor Center and Concord Tour Company. He is a contributing writer for *Discover Concord* magazine.



Courtesy Donna Marie Przybojewski

The latest title in the series: *A Life of Joy: Childhood Memories of Henry David Thoreau* (2020).

All That Heaven Allows (1955): Sirk's Thoreauvian Parable of American Home-Making

by Keegan O'Connor

One of the first of all American literary impacts on my thinking, when I was thirteen or fourteen, was a book my father gave me: Walden by Thoreau. This is ultimately what [All That Heaven Allows] was about—but no one recognized it.

—Douglas Sirk¹

In an astute and loving tribute to the films of Douglas Sirk, the author James McCourt says that *All That Heaven Allows*, Sirk's great melodrama of doomed intergenerational romance, is the moon-side of Thoreau's *Walden*. It is the book's conditional mood: in its sad, wistful note, it says "would that it were" and pictures "America, had she listened to Thoreau."² But is this elegiac film not also awash with the sense of loss and deficit that *Walden* precisely accounts? Little chance of a home would *Walden*'s ready-lost hound, bay horse, and turtle dove have in "Stoningham," the film's glossy, sterile, suburban neck of New England. Is the film's indicative-mood vision of America (to the extent that it has one) not also Thoreau's? In ways familiar to *Walden*, *All That Heaven Allows* locates itself in a saturated world, an embarrassment of riches, and asks what to do with all this inherited waste, what to make of our impoverished perspectives.

Widowed housewife Cary Scott (Jane Wyman) is as much a Thoreauvian character as is the object of her affections, the young arborist Ron Kirby (Rock Hudson). She knows she is alone and that she is not "at home." But she is riddled, to the

point of paroxysm, with tameness and domesticity; her paltry home-language paralyses and alienates her. Ron, on the other hand, has a gentle brutishness, the sort that Thoreau admired in the French-Canadian woodchopper Alek Therien in *Walden*. He is versed in things and has a homely familiarity with the outdoors. He can make his grass say beans, and his tongue say "silvertip spruce," with an ease unmatched by Cary's laboured enunciations. And yet, to us, he feels somehow hollow, incomplete—perhaps, like Therien in Thoreau's rendering, too innocent. He lacks the desperate dissatisfaction that comes from being in the belly of the beast. This is Cary's masked wildness. Ron has some cherub scorn, but Cary is heavy, owlish, burdened with inexpressible thought. This is also a reason why—in addition to the inversion of society's romantic mores—it is important that she is older.

History and society and conformity weigh heavily in Stoningham. The town will brook no whim. The undercurrent of animal desire in the coupling of Cary and Ron is a threat to

its polite façades and its rigid schedules of leisure—all the uppity, wannabe Englishness that bedevils these small minds of New England. Even Ron, archetype of all-American ruggedness, is hazardous to their barren world—though, of course, it is a fresh sense of sexual jealousy, and not just stubborn old tradition, that leads to the condemnation of Cary by the country-club set.

So Ron opts to live outside the town, uncontaminated. But the quarantine cannot hold. His idealistic pastoral life needs to be recognised, loved, and so it must be ruined. It can only be inhabited, translated, and diminished by artful forces (whether via Cary, or Stoningham, or Sirk). In his way, Ron is as wilfully blind to his reliance on the town as the snobbish town is to its reliance on him. He needs comprehension and an economy—for this reason, he lives not totally outside but on the postcard-pretty threshold of corrupt modernity as it yawns ever wider. (Like Thoreau's, his "pastoral"



Source: Wikimedia Commons

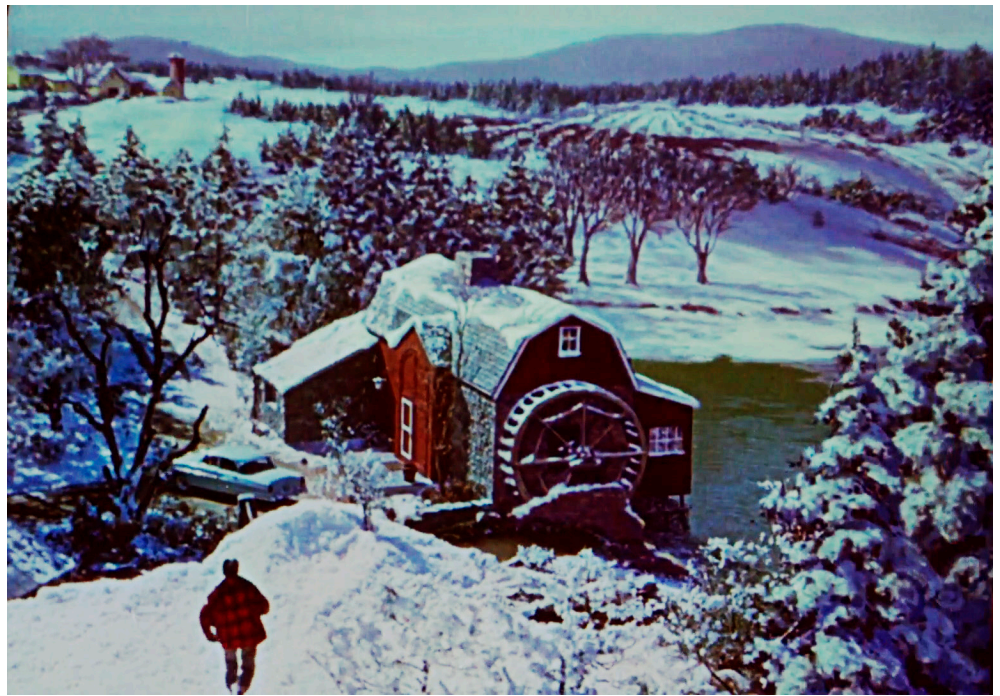
is informed by, made by, its proximity to the town.) While we believe that his romantic intentions are true, there remains something mysterious—perhaps even, in some very small measure, suggestively perverse—about what he needs from Cary.

Cary's thirsts are more familiar. Because not yet totally anesthetised against life, what does she want of Ron but a renewal—water on dry stones, a sloughing of the snakeskin that entombs her for more vital prospects? This, too, is not to be. In his New Atlantis she is a foreign invasion; she wreaks destructive havoc. Things are not easily reclaimed but made more distant, more out of reach. Cary encourages Ron to make a pretty home in the mill and then she proceeds to destroy it: first it's the pot and then, at the film's end, it's him. She brings all the small-town fashion, gossip, and highway dust into the woods with her. If she is estranged at home, she is even more so outside of it, on the fringes where Ron lives.

Cary is the thought of the film and, in a sense, she is right when most lost and most stiflingly conformist: their relationship does seem impossible. She breeds only conformity and duress—just look at her hideously regressive children. What makes her such a wonderfully tortured and appealing American hero is that she rattles her chains, she feels at her limits.³ She is so swallowed up by the town that the only real prospect available to her is her desperation, her displacement, her consciousness of how squarely she is yarded. Stoned-in, "walled-in," she presses against all that stuff—the chintzy furnishings, accessories, and language—that she is. The tragic and impossible road is the right one. So, steeped in life's autumn, she still sees the spring. After all, are there not reminders of elemental innocence (Ron, the spruce) right in her own manicured yard? Are they not also her inheritance?

The European émigré Sirk likely saw himself as, to some extent, the Cary to Thoreau's Ron: John Bunyan in Paul Bunyan territory. *Walden* the book appears in an early scene of the film. It was, we are told, the catalyst for Ron's happy-go-lucky friends to forsake the urban rat-race for a simpler rural life. Cary asks if it had also inspired Ron's solitude. No, replies the female friend, Ron probably hasn't read it, he just *lives* it. (We sense the belatedness and secondariness of the friends' rural living experiments.)

On putting *Walden* in the film, Sirk said in an interview: "With a picture like that your only saving point is to take a tree out of the garden and put it in a salon."⁴ (At the start of the film, Ron gives Cary a cutting of the *koelreuteria* [goldenrain tree] from her garden. So foreign does she think her own garden that she puts the cutting in a vase on her vanity table. She fast translates it into what the whole world is for her: metaphor, distance.) Regarding his own work, Thoreau said similar things. He filled his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, with excerpts from Renaissance poetry, and wrote that coming across such sentence-cuttings in the midst of the "false" and "florid" vanities of modern



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Scene from *All that Heaven Allows* (1955), with the converted mill.

writing—including, implicitly, his own—is like finding "greener ground": "It is as if a green bough were laid across the page."⁵ It is as if the garden were in the salon (and maybe even some wilderness in the garden).

In fact, what both Thoreau and Sirk seem to say is that all that we touch and all we survey is translated, salon-ified. Call it the Fall. So parable is doomed to be art (and the exquisite art of Thoreau and Sirk is perhaps equally doomed to be parable). And so we live metaphorically, ornamentally, bewildered, in pitches we cannot adequately sound. Our parlor room-worlds are densely forested—no more home to us than are the woods of Maine. That we sometimes find trees in the salon is part of our condition, our fall. It may be our richest poverty and our most feral hope.

• **Keegan O'Connor** is a Ph.D. candidate at Queen Mary University of London, researching Emerson's and Thoreau's engagements with writers of the English Renaissance.

Notes

1. Douglas Sirk, *Sirk on Sirk: Interviews with Jon Halliday* (London: British Film Institute, 1971), 99.

2. James McCourt, *Queer Street: Rise and Fall of an American Culture, 1947-1985* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 42.

3. In this sense, Cary is D.H. Lawrence's kind of American hero. He writes: "Men are less free than they imagine; ah, far less free. The freest are perhaps least free . . . The most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom . . . The shout is a rattling of chains, always was." In *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Penguin, 1977), 12.

4. Sirk, *Sirk on Sirk*, 99.

5. Henry D. Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl F. Hovde, William M. Howarth, and Elizabeth Hall Witherell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 104.

Additions to the Thoreau Bibliography

by Henrik Otterberg

Adams, Dick. "Portsmouth's 'Thoreau' a Rare Bird," *Seacoast Sunday* (November 8, 2020): D1-D2. [Adams profiles the eccentric Portsmouth polyglot John Langdon Elwyn (1801-1876) and his many parallels with Thoreau. While of independent means, Elwyn was also a proficient walker, disdaining the products and infrastructure of industrialization. He was furthermore of scholarly bent and a stern and forbidding character, often impatient with the inferior intellects around him. However, upon his death Elwyn saw fit to donate five acres of parkland near South Mill Pond in Portsmouth, and this nature reserve—named after Elwyn's father Langdon—remains a cherished green glade in the city to this day.]

Bowman, Joshua J. *Imagination and Environmental Political Thought: The Aftermath of Thoreau* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018). 183 pp. Hardcover (ISBN 978-1-4985-5902-7), USD 90. [Bowman, a political scientist at Heidelberg University in Ohio and a devout Catholic, in this compact study proposes that an environmentalism that is not based on anthropocentrism will fail. It will do so *negatively* by not acknowledging that anthropocentrism is hardwired into human thinking and action. Any attempt to speak on behalf of nonhuman nature as such will be unsuccessful because we humans simply cannot do so credibly. The *positive* aspect of anthropocentrism that Bowman sees, by contrast, is that a faith-based and preferably Christian environmentalism, embracing not only God's superiority but man's dominion over nature, will have a greater chance of succeeding as it proceeds from what Bowman sees as a fundamental spiritual and practical truth. He grants that anthropocentrism has been destructive to the nonhuman world in many ways, but nevertheless maintains that it is the only true foundation for remedial action. Thoreau's cardinal mistake, as well as that of his many environmentalist followers—Muir, Carson, and Næss are among those briefly engaged—in Bowman's view was that they embraced an individualist, Arcadian-idyllic and hence misguidedly heathen imagination: "spontaneous, 'wild,' unrestrained, and merely sentimental" (11). This made them blind to transcendent truth, as well as ineffective reformers in neglecting to work with and through Christian congregations

of their day. Bowman's favored outlook is instead collective and, for those attuned to the rhetoric, transparently denominational: the "moral imagination and the higher will," as he praises them, "strive for and express moderation, order, prudence, proportion, and the restraints of tradition and civilization" (11). Bowman has some interesting things to say about how Christian theology today can be reformed toward emphasizing more of necessary environmental stewardship, but some green-minded readers may find his faith in human superiority and his Christian ontology difficult to swallow.]

Coombs, Kate. *Henry David Thoreau in the Woods* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2019). Illustrated by Seth Lucas. 20 pp. Cardboard, USD 10. [Part of the publisher's "Little Naturalists" series, this appealing children's book with ligne

claire drawings by Seth Lucas—clearly indebted to Lois Lenski's *Mr. Small* books of the late 1930s and 1940s—gives a glimpse of Thoreau's activities whilst living at Walden Pond. The conceit of having a mouse as sidekick to the depicted goings-on also has a history, as witness Marilynne K. Roach's *The Mouse and the Song* (1974), describing a mouse enraptured by Thoreau's flute-playing during his Walden sojourn, and Bill Montague's *Little Mouse* (1993), giving a longer account of the co-habitation and events transpiring near the house and water.]

Davis, J.R. "Social Distancing in Solitude: What Thoreau's Experience of Isolation can Teach Us," *Philosophy Now* 138 (June/July 2020): 25-27. [Davis outlines a number of strategies, gleaned from Thoreau's *Walden*, for coping with loneliness and the circumstance of being more or less cooped up during the COVID-19 pandemic. With Thoreau, Davis encourages us to admit that we are all ultimately alone with ourselves, regardless of the social context in which we move. Such an insight should be a prompt toward increased self-knowledge and self-possession. Following Thoreau, Davis argues for the importance of

mental and physical immersion, and he recommends to us meditation and engaging in practical projects. Both types of immersion will be most felicitous in natural settings outdoors, to whatever extent the latter prove available.]

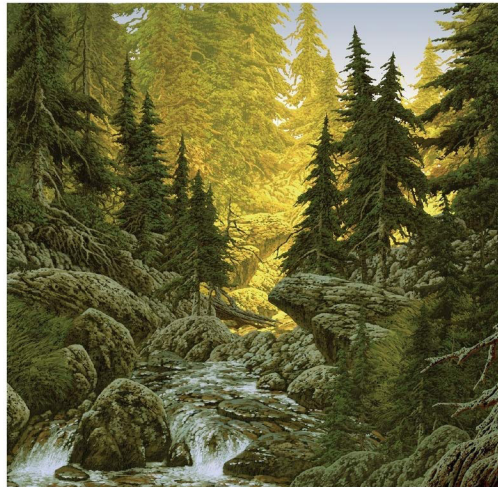
Faflik, David. *Transcendental Heresies: Harvard and the Modern Practice of Unbelief* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020). 246 pp. Softcover, USD 35. [Includes chapter on "Henry David Thoreau, Village Atheist" (49-92).] Reviewed by Stephen Hahn in *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall 2020): 9-10.

Fox, Dorian. "The Farthest Edge: Chasing Solitude—and Thoreau—on the Outer Beach of Cape Cod National Seashore," *National Parks* 95, no. 1 (Winter 2021): 46-54. [Fox chronicles his mid-autumn hiking and driving trip to the

IMAGINATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICAL THOUGHT

The Aftermath of Thoreau

JOSHUA J. BOWMAN



back shores of Cape Cod, in the footsteps of Thoreau's and Channing's first trip there during the same season, in 1849. Fox had the opportunity to rent a refurbished shack at Peaked Hill Bars in Provincetown, just before the winter closing. Originally intended as temporary shelters for stranded seamen, lifesaving patrols, and local fishermen caught in inclement weather, these once-rustic shacks have long since been modified and complemented to accommodate modern-day "bohemians and others seeking isolation" (51). Over the years, as Fox relates, these latter have included artists and writers such as Eugene O'Neill, Mark Rothko, Henry Beston, and Jack Kerouac (51). Fox enjoys the solitude and natural beauty on offer—he supplements his article with several stunning photographs, giving glimpses of what he saw—but also wonders, "even in such a charming place, how does anyone adapt to so much solitude?" (53). As Thoreau observed, the landscape of dreary ocean and windswept sandy expanse one experiences on the Cape during the harsher seasons is essentially the convergence of two deserts. Happy at length to return to civilization, the author found his room a shell, where the sea roared for a good week afterwards.]

Frederick, Michael J. "Notes from Concord," *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall 2020): 18. [Frederick testifies to Thoreau's generosity in encouraging us to find our own paths and meanings from our readings, environments, and fellow creatures. This while bearing witness to our fundamental symbiosis: "we are not really separate—only thinking makes it so. We are, in fact, part and parcel of the world and its web of interrelationships. The sun is as essential to my circulatory system as is my heart."]

Gionfriddo, Michael. "Thoreau, Tuberculosis, and the Outdoor Life," *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall 2020): 1-3. [Author discusses Dr. James J. Walsh's early twentieth-century attempt to wrest the narrative of Thoreau's final illness, which was until then commonly attributed to his frequent and supposedly unwise exposure on his regular walks, into one of heroic if unknowing foresight. Walsh was a "genial polemicist with an eye toward advancing the open-air cure"—so purported—of tuberculosis (2). Gionfriddo shows that Walsh's 1908 article on Thoreau in the *Journal of the Outdoor Life*, under the heading of "Heroes of Tuberculosis," proved influential, and at least some in the medical community viewed Thoreau as one who actually subdued his latent tuberculosis and extended his lifespan, despite his precarious health, by habitually braving the elements.]

Hulme, Alison. *A Brief History of Thrift* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2019). 140 pp. Hardcover, USD

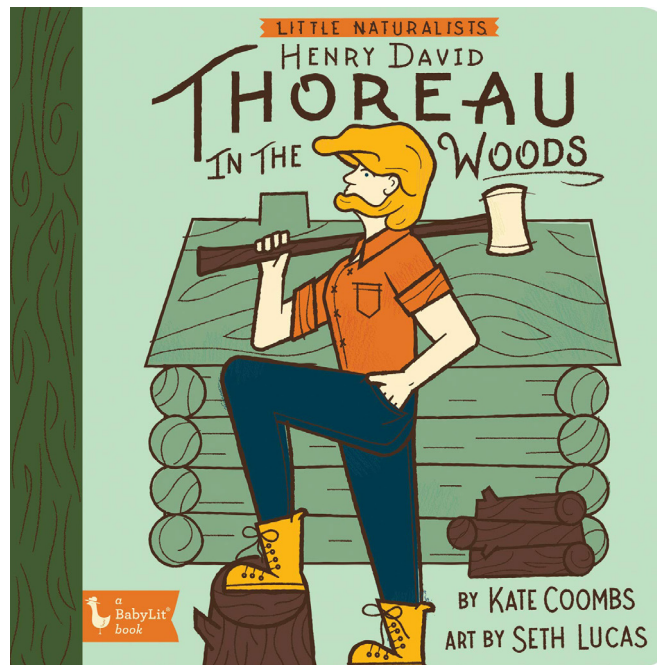
90. [Includes chapter "Spiritual thrift: simplicity, sensuality and politics in Henry Thoreau" (53-68). University of Northampton political scientist and historian Hulme offers a sweeping history of thrift in this wide-ranging study, including an intriguing background discussion of Puritan, Quaker, Methodist, and later reform-minded conceptions of personal and communal economy. These lead up to a central section on Thoreau, while she also continues her narrative to engage current contexts and challenges, not the least of which she sees as ecological. On the individual level, Hulme helpfully distinguishes between thrift as a choice for the affluent and a necessity for those of lesser means. This latent tension has of course played out differently in various religious and political contexts, all in the context of a burgeoning capitalist Western civilization often at odds with older ideals and practices. In her discussion of Thoreau, Hulme highlights the etymological connection between thrift and *thriving*. Thoreau's well-known tendencies toward frugality were means to achieve a relative freedom from economic liability and worry, and more time

to pursue spiritual enlightenment through a deeper knowledge and appreciation for the natural environment. She also argues that Thoreau successfully avoided the snare of narrow self-preoccupation that threatens, as she sees it, the protagonist of *Walden*. His pleas later in life—as evinced by his *Wild Fruits* manuscript—were that nature's bounties should be made available to everyone, not only to enlightened individuals. There are admittedly some infelicities of dating and detail in Hulme's chapter (Emerson was not Thoreau's senior by 27 years; nor did Stanley Cavell write about Thoreau in the 1920s; neither to my knowledge did Thoreau make his own clothes or grow beans mainly for his own aliment at Walden Pond), yet she marshals a wealth of

sources that re-contextualize Thoreau's economic concerns, broadly considered, in invigorating ways. According to Internet booksellers, Hulme's study is shortly to be released in paperback, at considerably less expense than the clothbound version here reviewed. Cf. also the entry under Westacott in this section.]

Johnson, Rochelle L. "President's Column," *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall 2020): 17. [Johnson describes the Thoreau Society's various activities throughout the fall and early winter, burdened as these months have been by the COVID-19 pandemic and various forms of social unrest and protest. She highlights how the Society has taken full responsibility for awarding the respected Thoreau Prize for Literary Excellence in Nature Writing, looking ahead into 2021.]

Lombard, David. *Techno-Thoreau: Aesthetics, Ecology and the Capitalocene* (Macerata, Italy: Quodlibet, 2019). 96 pp.



Softcover, USD 15. Reviewed by Rachael DeWitt in *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall 2020): 10.

Price, John T. "Thoreau's 'The Bean-Field.'" *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 195-200. [A mildly self-deprecating and poignant memoir by Iowan ecocritic and teacher Price, on his first encounter with Thoreau's chapter some thirty-odd years ago, and on how he has come to engage with it since. At the time Price had recently abandoned studies in the natural sciences for the humanities, while having become adept at skimming voluminous materials for kernels to relate to in his previous studies. Thus with the imposing *Walden* he chose to plunge straight into "The Bean-Field," having grown up in central Iowa's farm belt "'down in the valley of the Jolly Green Giant'" (196). What he came to appreciate were Thoreau's frankness regarding the toil as well as the joy of cultivating. Price also found Thoreau's early critique of the harshness of the agribusiness sector foresighted, as in his own vivid experience poverty, destitution, and even suicide often trailed the ebbs and flows of the industry in his home state.]

Princeton University Press. "PUP acquires Robert D. Richardson's *Three Roads Back: How Emerson, Thoreau, and William James Responded to the Greatest Losses of Their Lives*." Posted online on November 11, 2020, at <https://press.princeton.edu/new/robert-d-richardson>. [Princeton announces the forthcoming publication, early in 2022, of a book by the late Thoreau biographer and scholar Richardson. In its preface as quoted, Richardson reflects that during troubled times "there are many ways to fight back against what is going wrong. One way I have found helpful is to re-examine the lives and works of figures I have already spent many decades with. Emerson, Thoreau, and William James all made lasting contributions to modern life, and their personal triumphs over disaster and loss and defeat are further contributions. . . . Think of them as fellow human beings, facing losses and troubles much like ours."]

Richardson, Robert D. "Upstream with the Transcendentalists" in *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall 2020): 15-16. [The first print appearance of an address by Richardson given at the Concord Museum on July 31, 2019. Richardson humorously asks of the nineteenth-century Concord Transcendentalists: what, exactly, were they striving to transcend? He points out that conventional dictionary definitions of transcendentalism (with a small "t"), indicating a will to transcend the material world, hardly fit their outlook (with the possible exception of Bronson Alcott). Instead, Richardson argues, what they attempted to move beyond "was formal, abstract idealism of the sort generally associated with Plato and Kant"—in other words, "these Yankees were out to transcend transcendentalism itself. And thank god for it" (15). See also entry under Walls below.]

Roman, John. "Re-Thinking Thoreau: Between the Lines of His Life and Work," *Bangalore Review* 7, no. 11 (December 2019). [Roman's article about Thoreau's evident struggle with depression, which is available online at bangalorereview.com, is aptly summarized by Brent Ranalli in "Notes & Queries" (page 19) in *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall 2020).]

Sperber, Michael and Brent Ranalli. "Thoreau's PTSD and Posttraumatic Growth," *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall

2020): 4-8. [Recent scholarship (by Branka Ćrsic, Kristen Case, Audrey Raden, Laura Dassow Walls, and others) has emphasized how Thoreau's debilitating grief, following the sudden loss of his beloved older brother John in 1842, was profoundly formative of both his character and work. In these accounts, Thoreau's emergent vitalism, his sense of vulnerability and periodic anxiety, and his eventual embrace of the cyclic deaths and rebirths in the plenum of nature, all pivot from Thoreau's early fraternal loss. Sperber and Ranalli now provocatively add a posthumous diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to the discussion, pointing out from the available evidence that Thoreau appears to satisfy all the diagnostic criteria for this disorder. They also show how Thoreau intuitively learned to cope with and partly overcome the trauma of the loss. This by regular, introspective as well as nature-attentive journaling; a militantly positive outlook rather than a victim mentality; and a propensity toward downward comparison—in other words, counting his blessings—rather than striving to keep up with the Joneses. While admittedly socially retreating, Thoreau retained an openness to experience, maintained close familial ties, and held on to a fundamental sense of self-sufficiency. These factors all contributed to his recovery and growth, the authors argue. In their coda, they suggest that Thoreau's lessons in posttraumatic growth, as packaged in *Walden*, may be of crucial value for our own time and moment as well.]

Walls, Laura Dassow. "The Fire Within: A Tribute to Bob Richardson," *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 311 (Fall 2020): 14-15. [A moving and heartfelt tribute to the recently deceased eminent scholar and Thoreau biographer Robert D. Richardson (1934-2020). See also entry under Richardson above.]

Westacott, Emrys. *The Wisdom of Frugality: Why Less is More – More or Less* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). 313 pp. Hardcover, USD 20. [Westacott engages Thoreau as well as numerous other classical and modern philosophers to interrogate the pros and cons of frugality. Westacott's unabashed focus—contrary to that of Hulme (see entry above)—is squarely on the individual, where he conscientiously weighs the pros and cons of various forms of extravagance as well as frugality. Among the drawbacks of frugality, to counterweigh its oft-stressed merits, he identifies mercenariness, social ungenerousness, and stagnating creativity (142-147). On balance, however, Westacott does affirm the ample benefits of our striving to live more simply in solidarity with others, not least as such practices will improve the quality of our common environments both natural and social.]



We are indebted to Gordon Andersson, Brent Ranalli, Corinne Smith, Daniel C. Shively, Wilson Stahl and Richard Winslow III for their contributions to the present list of additions. Please send further tips to: henrik.otterberg@kagaku.se.

• **Henrik Otterberg** wrote his Ph.D. on Thoreau's aesthetics. He is a longstanding contributor to *TSB* and *The Concord Saunterer*, and serves on the Thoreau Society board of directors.

President's Column

by Rochelle L. Johnson

I type this column in January, days after insurrectionists swarmed the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Like many of you, no doubt, I am unmoored. What has the United States become, that armed men and women break into the Halls of Congress, pillage and steal from the offices of elected officials, and, brandishing Confederate flags, swastikas, and other symbols of hate, threaten harm to both our democracy and those who serve the nation? I keep repeating in my mind one particular sentence from Thoreau's "Slavery in Massachusetts": *At last it occurred to me that what I had lost was a country.*

On the morning after the attack, following a night of fitful sleep, I made my way to my computer, coffee in hand, uncertain of how I could possibly focus during the Zoom meeting that I was scheduled to attend, a meeting of the Thoreau Prize Committee. We would be discussing the work of contemporary nature writers, and, in particular, of nominees for the 2021 Henry David Thoreau Prize for Literary Excellence in Nature Writing. I think it is fair to say that we all signed into the meeting in a state of shock, sleep-deprived and stunned. We spoke for a few minutes about our distractedness, our deep fear and concern for the future of the nation. One participant confessed that she had been up all night. And then we dug into discussing the marvelous writings of the nominees.

Soon, we were moved by the wisdom and grace of the work we discussed, rivetted by words spoken for nature in hopes of celebrating wildness, the human connection to things much greater than ourselves. We admired writers who challenged romantic conceptions of nature, as Thoreau had, and those who attended to its minute details, as Thoreau also had. With so much excellent nature writing to appreciate, we felt lighter, more hopeful. One member of the committee said something like, "I felt awful when I started this meeting, but now I am reminded of other important



things—the devotion of writers to particular landscapes, the importance of knowing earth's nonhuman creatures, the solace of attentiveness." Henry David Thoreau had brought us there, and we acknowledged our gratitude to him—and to each other, of course, for the productive, refreshing communion we shared.

In the hours and days after that rejuvenating meeting, I returned to the news updates and stories, to concern and dread. A particularly arresting image gripped me, a photograph captured by Mike Theiler of Reuters and featured in a compelling article by Clint Smith for *Atlantic*. It shows one of the insurrectionists carrying a Confederate flag in front of two portraits, one of which depicts Charles Sumner. The image sent me back to Thoreau's letters. I recalled that Thoreau had connections to Sumner, having searched Fire Island Beach on his behalf for the body of Sumner's brother while also hoping to find the remains of Margaret Fuller. Over the ensuing years, Thoreau and Sumner exchanged letters. In 1854, Sumner wrote to apologize that he had not yet made his way through the entirety of *Walden*. But Sumner had read enough that he wanted to say, "you have made a contribution to the permanent literature of our mother tongue." Thoreau's success in writing made Sumner "happy."¹

In the wake of my meeting with the Thoreau Prize Committee, I feel grateful for so much, even amidst these deeply troubled times. For the company of warm and wise friends provided through the Thoreauvian community, for the bravery of women and men like Sumner, who work, in spite of being attacked personally, to make this nation what it might someday yet be. And I am grateful for Thoreau's nature writing, which continues to give gifts to our mother tongue and bring us some happiness—even as we fret, even as we grieve.

• **Rochelle L. Johnson** is the president of the Thoreau Society.

Notes

1. Charles Sumner to Thoreau, 31 October 1854, in *The Correspondence, Vol. 2: 1849-1856*, ed. Robert N. Hudspeth (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 267.

Notes from Concord

by Michael J. Frederick

Did you know that thoreausociety.org has several unique resources available to help you to learn more about Henry David Thoreau? We continue to add recordings to our program archive of webinars. You can find them under "Enjoy Our Events" from the top navigation menu by selecting "The Write Connection" or "More Day to Dawn" Webinar Series."

The Write Connection at Thoreau Farm offers an exciting program of lectures and writing workshops. Whether you are ready to submit your manuscript for publishing, looking to strengthen your voice, or searching for a community of writers, you will find a useful archive here of past webinars. You will also find upcoming programs that we continue to offer throughout the year.



The "More Day to Dawn" webinar series took place during the spring and fall of 2020. Faced at the time with having to postpone the Annual Gathering due to the global pandemic, the Board of Directors asked itself during its April meeting, what message from Thoreau's writings give us hope for the future? We decided we had an unprecedented opportunity to bring together our global membership in virtual conversation. Our spring webinar series focused on Thoreau's timeless message "There is more day to dawn" and featured conversations celebrating his enduring legacy.

Thoreau's writings emphasize the uniqueness of individuals and celebrate our capacity for making conscientious decisions for the benefit of ourselves, our neighbors, our nations, and the world, both human and natural. In *Walden*, he writes: "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?" Our fall "More Day to Dawn" webinar series explores diversity and inclusion. You will find recorded sessions that include offerings from a diverse lineup of contributors, reflecting the Society's desire to foster a more vital organization as well as a more vital world.

In addition to the events menu, the Thoreau Society has added a new top navigation menu item to the website titled “Learn with Us,” where you can select “Resources” to access information about Thoreau’s writings, including links to some of his manuscripts. As Thoreau scholarship has progressed over the last two decades, we now have a wealth of resources about his life and work.

The “Resources” page organizes information according to topics that interested Thoreau, including “Botany,” “Cartography,” “Ethnology,” “Pencil Making,” and “Surveying.” In this way we honor Thoreau’s comprehensive vision of the world that he endeavored to study so closely and through a variety of self-taught disciplines. Botany gave him an insect view of the world as well as an ecological one, as we can observe through his interest in the succession of forest trees. With cartography, he began mapping sites where Native peoples lived within the Champlain region of Vermont and New York, thus bringing together his interests in both maps and ethnography. The family pencil business gave him an opportunity to exercise his “strict business habits” and knack for engineering and design. Using surveying and scientific methodology, he sounded the depths of Walden Pond and, as Robert Thorson shows us in *The Boatman*, came to understand the dynamics of the Concord River.

Through the Thoreau Society website, we are proud to feature the good work of our partners, our members, and the communities that we serve. We will continue to share and promote scholarship that deepens our understanding of this American original, who had a genius for self-discovery within a world of infinite possibilities.

• **Michael J. Frederick** is the executive director of the Thoreau Society.

Notes & Queries

by *Brent Ranalli*

We are now twelve months into the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. What do we think of the enforced isolation, and how are we handling it? Regardless of the answer, Thoreau helps make the point.

Garrison Keillor reflects: “We discussed this over Sunday lunch, whether we will, when the All-Clear sounds, return to our busy lives, fly hither and yon, attend meetings, eat at restaurants, and we all thought, ‘Maybe not. Maybe the raccoon life is what we wanted all along.’ . . . I think [Thoreau] could’ve done better in an apartment building with a doorman. In his cabin by Walden Pond, Henry was pestered by curious townspeople who wanted to know what he was out there for. A doorman guards against interruptions.” (From **Kathleen Spaltro**.)

New York Times columnist David Brooks, on the other hand, frets: “I miss big Christmas parties . . . It’s the quietude. I’ve taken Thoreau too far. I want to get off Walden Pond.” (From PBS Newshour on December 25, 2020, shared by **Rick Thompson**.)

Geoff Wisner authored a timely 20 March 2020 *Wall Street Journal* review of two recent books celebrating solitude: Stephen Batchelor’s *The Art of Solitude* and Fenton Johnson’s *At the Center of All Beauty*. “In the United States, the home of rugged individualism, more than 28% of households consist of a single person. Yet solitude continues to have a poor reputation.” The perennial “debunking” of Thoreau’s experiment in independent living may stem in part from (in Johnson’s words) “our need to savage solitaries who so emphatically and cheerfully break social norms, because they show how easily it may be done . . . perceiving

2021 Thoreau Society Fellowships

The Thoreau Society is now accepting proposals for its two 2021 fellowships. The Marjorie Harding Memorial Fellowship and the Thoreau Country Conservation Association Graduate Student Fellowship both offer \$1,000 to support projects that advance Thoreau studies or draw on Thoreau’s biography and writings to contribute to related fields (Thoreau’s circle, Transcendentalism, civil disobedience and social justice, environmentalism and conservation, among other topics). The Thoreau Society Fellowships Committee will give preference to proposals that target materials held at the Thoreau Institute Library in Lincoln, Massachusetts, including the Walter Harding Collection, the Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance Archives, and The Thoreau Society collections, or materials held in Boston-area archives that are not otherwise accessible. Because of the pandemic and the uncertainty as to when archives will open, the Thoreau Society welcomes proposals for archival work that will be undertaken when archives re-open. Applicants should email the following to Thoreau Society Fellowships Committee Chair James Finley (james.finley@tamusa.edu):

1. Proposal of no more than one thousand words. Please describe the project and its significance, situating the work

within relevant scholarship, detail the work you wish to undertake with the fellowship’s support, and outline your plan for sharing the results of your work. Please specify the resources you wish to consult at the Thoreau Institute or in the archives of the greater Boston area.

2. Projected budget. Please describe how you plan to utilize the award in support of your project.
3. Current curriculum vitae or resume.
4. For the *TCCA Graduate Student Fellowship*, a (short) letter of recommendation from a faculty member familiar with the graduate student’s work and proposed project (emailed separately to james.finley@tamusa.edu).

Applications are due by Thursday, April 1, 2021. The Fellowships Committee will contact the awardees by the end of April. The awards will be publicly acknowledged in July during the Thoreau Society Annual Gathering. Awardees are requested to present the fruits of their archival labors at a subsequent Annual Gathering. Please contact the Fellowships Committee Chair with questions.

For more information, please visit:

- <https://www.thoreausociety.org/news-article/2021-marjorie-harding-memorial-fellowship> and
- <https://www.thoreausociety.org/news-article/2021-thoreau-country-conservation-alliance-graduate-student-fellowship>.

them as ordinary folks might require us to question the cocoon of noise and artificial light with which we surround ourselves and that constitutes contemporary life.”

Kennebec Journal columnist Douglas Rooks is pessimistic about the long-term effects of pandemic isolation. “Perhaps—none too soon—we will begin assessing the extreme alienation that results from having contact only through ‘virtual reality.’” After all, “even Thoreau regularly had Sunday dinner at the Emersons’ while limning the natural world at Walden Pond, and when he went to the wilds of Maine, he always had a guide.” (From **Jym St. Pierre**.)

Historian Jill Lepore, in an August 2020 *New Yorker* article (“Is Staying In Staying Safe?”), quotes *Walden* on Thoreau’s simple, rugged living arrangements as a healthy contrast to the dystopian techno-future that our pandemic present foreshadows, “where only the poor go outdoors while the rich live in zones of personalized indoor health, each with its own temperature and moisture controls, earbuds and light visors and HEPA filters, its own customized light-diffusing curtains and dust-catching doormat.” (From **Henrik Otterberg**.)

Thoreau’s *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, though not technically a novel, figures in a BBC list of “the best early novels you’ve never heard of.” It was nominated by **Branka Arsić**, who comments: “It seems to me particularly relevant for our current moment of life in isolation: for the book is above all about taking leave of society at large to live in the company of two, but only in order to find a way back to living among others in a truly meaningful and responsible way” (from **Steve Wilson**).

Spotted by **Michael Berger** on social media:

Son: I just want to delete all my social media accounts, and go live in the woods.

Dad: You just can’t Thoreau your life away...

While the Sienieciewicz family has been creating a Walden cabin replica in the Maine Woods, **Woody Mills** of Cape Cod has



been riding out the pandemic and a contentious political season by sculpting Henry in his front yard.

First there was a painting, an “imaginative realism” depiction of Thoreau in the Naushon beech forest. “Thoreau was exploring Naushon Island on June 27th of 1856, and called it ‘a noble and primitive wood.’ The Naushon beech forest depicted in the painting is real, taken from a photograph of a former colleague of mine named James D. Lazell who was there in the mid-1970s.” Lazell, a herpetologist, had posed in the beech grove while researching his 1976 book *This Broken Archipelago: Cape Cod and the Islands, Amphibians and Reptiles*. “I had corresponded with him about my intentions to use the photo of him in his book as a likeness for Thoreau. Lazell was extremely flattered that I could use it and urged me to ‘by all means go.’”

The painting hangs in Woody’s living room. “Next to the dining table was a picture window which took in a partial vista of the lake and a cart path through the woods. Then one day I noticed that the curve of the path took the same bend and configuration as the woodland trail in the painting. Upon subsequent musings, I noticed that rounding the bend stood an equally similar cluster of trees. My muse stirred up an artistic epiphany that called for a life size statue of Thoreau to be placed on the corner outside, in a mirror image of the painting.” And so it came to be, with the crotch of a downed white oak tree for the body, beech for the head and shoulder and the left arm, and red oak for the right arm. The walking stick is a sturdy piece of pignut hickory. Chainsaw, hand tools, and sandpaper gave the head its shape before painting. Inclement weather does not deter Wooden Henry, and being knocked apart by a falling branch barely fazed him. One special advantage he enjoys over original Henry: the head is detachable and can be kept safe indoors when necessary.



Photos courtesy Woody Mills

Sculpture of Henry D. Thoreau



Courtesy Woody Mills

Detail from painting of Thoreau in Naushon beech forest.

How have you improved the nick of time in your own quarantine? If you too have been notching a Thoreauvian stick or gnawing a Thoreauvian bone, we want to hear about it—write to the email address on the back cover.

But let's be honest. However active and creative we may be, however sedulously we cultivate our upland and lowland farms, we also love our screens and devices. Here is a grab sample of Thoreauvian and Thoreau-adjacent audio and video content you might enjoy while sheltering indoors.

Some Beasts (2017), a feature-length debut film by Cameron Bruce Nelson, is advertised with the tag line: "The physical tolls and harsh realities of Appalachia force a modern day Thoreau to decide if he truly belongs." The film is moving and quite effective in evoking the homesteading life and isolation in nature. But don't expect any deeper connection to Thoreauvian themes. (From **Henrik Otterberg**.)

Walden: Or, A Life in the Woods (2017), directed by Alex Harvey, features excellent acting by the principals and breathtaking cinematography (shot entirely in Colorado), supplemented by an evocative score and visually arresting animation. But as a piece of story-telling the film disappoints. Billed as "a radical, Western re-imagining of Henry David Thoreau's classic," the film is mostly good for filling a Thoreau bingo card: here is a cabin; there is a pond (or several); there is quiet desperation; there is a direct quote from the book; there, apropos of nothing, is a crew of surveyors. Thoreau's quip about having three chairs in his cabin, for solitude, friendship, and society, forms the organizing principle of the film, which interweaves three storylines. That is fine as a conceit, but it is not an adequate substitute for dealing seriously with Thoreauvian themes. Furthermore, the three stories offer no catharsis. The viewer is left with (respectively) a sense of puzzlement, loss, and dread. To take the story with the most build-up, involving family man Ramirez: the plot revolves around a snowballing financial crisis, and the character arc requires Ramirez to find the gumption to be more self-assertive. The climax of this storyline checks two more squares on the Thoreau bingo card, but it offers no hope of resolution for the plot—quite the opposite. (Taking radical measures to start getting out of debt would have been a much more Thoreauvian resolution.) And the character arc is left dangling.

Is that assessment too harsh? Thoreauvians owe it to themselves to see the film and make up their own minds.

Happily, we still have *All That Heaven Allows* (1955). Douglas Sirk's masterwork tells a story with emotional depth that forcefully drives home a genuine Thoreauvian lesson, the necessity of being true to oneself regardless of public opinion or the approval of friends and family. Only 66 years late(!), the *Bulletin* is pleased to present a proper review of this quintessential American film, thanks to **Keegan O'Connor**. The film was initially brought to our attention by **Ken Moskowitz**. Ken points out that it is freely available for viewing on YouTube.

In a more educational vein: **Corinne H. Smith** is putting together a series of YouTube videos on "Studying Thoreau." In the guise of advising viewers on assembling their own Thoreau reading and research library (a sort of "narrated bibliography," supplemented by an annotated bibliography with links at Corinne's website travelswiththoreau.com), it provides a basic grounding in Thoreau historiography. The videos are chock full of insights and anecdotes about Thoreau and his family and friends and scholars and admirers across a span of nearly two centuries.

On YouTube you will also find a February 10, 2021, lecture by **Dean Masters**, sponsored by Rochester Hills Public Library, on Calvin Greene of Rochester, Michigan. Greene, an exact contemporary of Thoreau who outlived him by several decades, was one of the first “fans” of Thoreau—a prototype for all the rest of us—and was an important link in the chain of early writers and scholars who documented Thoreauviana. Masters shares newly uncovered archival material that sheds light on Greene and his family and what Thoreau meant to them.

Also new on YouTube: The Concord Museum has assembled an “Emerson Family Barn Virtual Tour” to celebrate the barn’s restoration. The barn was built in 1828 and purchased by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1835. Emerson’s account books show that over the years he hired friends to work on restoring and improving the building, including Henry David Thoreau and Ellery Channing. Sophia Foord taught school in the barn, and Louisa May Alcott was a pupil there. One anecdote: The barn housed carriages owned by the Emerson family, including a large Rockaway carriage that was purchased at second hand in 1853. Shortly after the purchase, Lidian Emerson rode the new carriage to a meeting of the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society. Cynthia Thoreau, Henry’s mother, remarked (sniped?) that she recognized it as a carriage Sam Staples had formerly used to transport prisoners to the county jail.

Juliet Trofi passes along a tip from a French correspondent: Radio France’s “Les chemins de la philosophie” (“The Paths of Philosophy”) produced a series of episodes on Thoreau in 2017. The four episodes, about 50 minutes each, cover (in French) Thoreau’s place in American philosophy, *Walden*, “Civil Disobedience,” and the Journals.

Thoreau is a touchstone in Episode 53 of the “History of Fire” podcast series (50 minutes), which explores the life and thought of Diogenes, “the Punk Rocker of Ancient Greece.” Host Daniele Bolelli flattens disciplinary and genre boundaries like so many wooden fences. “In this episode, we’ll see [Diogenes] clashing with the father of Western philosophy, getting busted for manipulating the currency, being the recipient of the good graces of celebrity sex workers, planting the seeds at the roots of Stoicism, defying Alexander the Great, getting kidnapped by pirates, rejecting nationalism, and pushing forward ideas that were as outlandish in Ancient Greece as they are today. The Amazons, the Oracle at Delphi, *Game of Thrones*, The Clash, The Temptations, *The Princess Bride*, and Nicki Minaj also make an appearance in this episode. And before we wrap things up, we’ll consider the limitations of punk as a worldview.” **Henrik Otterberg**, who shared this tip, recommends pairing the podcast with John Kaag’s article “Thoreau’s Cynicism, and Our Own” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 19, 2017).

Tiffany Wayne points out that Thoreau has a cameo in the first few pages of the Pulitzer-Prize-winning epic novel *Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers. Thoreau also turns up in the reading material of other protagonists of the story as their lives

become thoroughly intertwined with those of the trees that pulse across the American landscape at their own slower pace.

Adrian Niemi shared with the Thoreau Society office a delightful short story on a bachelor-in-nature theme, called “Tree Hugger,” that is not about Thoreau but has Thoreau written all over it. A version is available online at HometownFocus.us.

The U.S. has a new Presidential administration! In an April 16, 2019, *Time* article, now First Lady Dr. Jill Biden fondly recalls “spirited discussions of Shakespeare, Dickens and Thoreau” during her stint as a ninth- and tenth-grade English teacher at a private Catholic high school. (From **Julie Trofi**.)

In an August 12, 2020, *New York Times* op-ed, “Why Kamala Harris Matters to Me,” Manisha Sinha—an Indian American scholar of African American history—reflects on the significance of the candidacy of Kamala Harris, with her Indian and Jamaican heritage, for the Vice Presidency. Thoreau gets a mention in this column, along with Garrison, Gandhi, and King. (From **Michael Berger**.)

“Made for This Time: Surprisingly, Emmanuel Church Was Engineered for COVID-19” is the headline of a January 21, 2021, article in *The Boston Sun*. For the past 15 years, caretakers of the Emmanuel Church in the heart of Boston have been trying to make the historic building more energy efficient, and the building has consistently defeated their efforts. The building is constructed in such a way that air is pulled in from the outside at ground level, warms up, enters the sanctuary via floor registers, and escapes through vents in the roof. “It’s more energy efficient and financially responsible not to blow hot air out the roof,” says Rev. Pamela L. Werntz. “We weren’t successful though [in stopping it]. We just couldn’t figure out how to eliminate all the fresh air vents.” Then COVID-19 hit. “And we said, ‘Oh my.’ We had a system in place designed perfectly for this. We reversed the few steps we had taken and spent some money to fix the attic fan and put the former system back in service.” Monitoring of particles and carbon dioxide shows



Source: Beyond My Ken / Wikimedia Commons

Emmanuel Church in Boston



Courtesy Donna Marie Przybojewski

Illustration from Donna Marie Przybojewski's *If Henry David Thoreau Traveled the Southwest: An Imaginary Saunter* (Streamline Publishing, 2018). See book review starting on page 7.

that air inside the building is as safe as outside air, or even safer, even when the building is in use.

There is a reason the building was designed this way. "In 1861, on the day that the Battle of Bull Run took place in Virginia, an enthusiastic membership laid the cornerstone for Emmanuel Church on Newbury Street, the first building in that area of the Back Bay. Along with the excitement for their new building was an enthusiasm for their faith and for serving those in need. . . . A key piece of the Emmanuel Movement was welcoming those with tuberculosis (TB), an airborne disease that spread fast and was devastating to those that caught it. Members of Emmanuel Church actually shocked the city and other religious counterparts by inviting those with TB into church services with them. Like COVID-19, the perfect antidote to TB was fresh air. Therein was born the ingenious heating and ventilation system." (See the cover article of *TSB* #311 on Thoreau, TB, and fresh air.) The church's Building Commissioner remarks: "This is a doctoral dissertation just waiting to happen for someone."

• **Brent Ranalli** is the editor of the *Thoreau Society Bulletin*.

**Please send your submissions
for the *Bulletin* to the editor:**
brent.ranalli@thoreausociety.org

Although exceptions will occasionally be made for longer pieces, in general articles and reviews should be no longer than 1500 words. Longer submissions may be forwarded by the editor to *The Concord Saunterer*. All submissions should conform to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The Thoreau Edition texts (Princeton University Press) should be used as the standard for quotations from Thoreau's writings, when possible. Contributors need not be members of the Thoreau Society, but all non-members are heartily encouraged to join.

The *Thoreau Society Bulletin* is a quarterly publication containing Thoreau Society news, additions to the Thoreau bibliography, and short articles about Thoreau and related topics. It is indexed in *American Humanities Index*, *American Literary Scholarship*, and *MLA International Bibliography*.

Editor: Brent Ranalli.

Editorial Assistant: Scott Norman Magnuson.

Editorial Advisory Committee: Ann Beebe, Dave Bonney, Ronald A. Bosco, James Dawson, James Finley, Michael Frederick, Mark Gallagher, Ronald Wesley Hoag, Brianne Keith, Kurt Moellerling, Wesley T. Mott, Henrik Otterberg, Richard Schneider.

The Thoreau Society

Honorary Advisors: James E. Francis, Sr., Terry Tempest Williams, and Edward O. Wilson, PhD.

Board of Directors: Rochelle Johnson, PhD, *President*; Michael Schleifer, CPA, *Treasurer*; Deborah Medenbach, *Clerk*; Ronald Hoag, PhD, *Previous Past President*; Phyllis Cole, PhD; Theodore David, JD; James Finley, PhD; Jayne Gordon; Robert A. Gross, PhD; Rebecca Kneale Gould, PhD; Richard Higgins; Dennis Nason, PhD; Henrik Otterberg, PhD; Geoff Wisner.

Staff: Michael J. Frederick, Executive Director; Chynna Lemire, Business Manager; Kevin Webb, Membership Coordinator.

Shop at Walden Pond Staff: Corinne H. Smith, Shop Supervisor, Jamie McCarthy, Buyer, Peter Alden, Richard Smith, Kevin Webb.

Established in 1941, **The Thoreau Society®**, Inc. is an international nonprofit organization with a mission to stimulate interest in and foster education about Thoreau's life, works, legacy, and his place in his world and in ours, challenging all to live a deliberate, considered life. The Thoreau Society™ has the following organizational goals:

- To encourage research on Thoreau's life and works and to act as a repository for Thoreau-related materials
- To educate the public about Thoreau's ideas and their application to contemporary life
- To preserve Thoreau's legacy and advocate for the preservation of Thoreau country

Membership in the Society includes subscriptions to its two publications, the *Thoreau Society Bulletin* (published quarterly) and *The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies* (published annually). Society members receive a 10% discount on all merchandise purchased from The Shop at Walden Pond and advance notice about Society programs, including the Annual Gathering.

Membership: Thoreau Society, 341 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742, U.S.A.; tel: (978) 369-5310; fax: (978) 369-5382; e-mail: info@thoreausociety.org.

Merchandise (including books and mail-order items): Thoreau Society Shop at Walden Pond, 915 Walden Street, Concord, MA 01742-4511, U.S.A.; tel: (978) 287-5477; fax: (978) 287-5620; e-mail: info@shopatwaldenpond.org; Web: www.shopatwaldenpond.org.

The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies: John J. Kucich, Bridgewater State University, English Department, Tillinghast 314, Bridgewater, MA 02325, U.S.A.; tel: (508) 531-2722; e-mail: jkucich@bridgew.edu.

Thoreau Society Bulletin: Brent Ranalli, 341 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742, U.S.A.; tel: (978) 369-5310; e-mail: brent.ranalli@thoreausociety.org.

The Thoreau Society Collections: The Society's Collections are housed at the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods, owned and managed by the Walden Woods Project. For information about using the Collections or visiting the Institute, please contact the curator at: curator@walden.org.

All other communications: Thoreau Society, 341 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742, U.S.A.; tel: (978) 369-5310; fax: (978) 369-5382; e-mail: info@thoreausociety.org.

The Thoreau Society® is a registered trademark of The Thoreau Society.

...

www.thoreausociety.org

Visit The Thoreau Society on Facebook and Twitter

©2021 The Thoreau Society®, Inc.



Printed on 100% recycled paper.