

JOHN MUIR'S YANKEE FRIENDS AND MENTORS: THE NEW ENGLAND CONNECTION¹



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New Englanders to the Fore

John Muir was his own man. He deserves full credit for what he accomplished during his long and productive life. He had many talents, great courage, amazing energy, commitment, devotion, and zeal. His genius was apparent at once to all who met him. I submit, however, that his multifarious virtues might have remained locked up far longer than they did, or even for good, had New Englanders not given him unstinting encouragement, guidance, and support over the course of many decades, and, beyond these specific good offices, a ready-made world view called New England Transcendentalism. Westerners and midwesterners may bristle at this bald assertion, yet I believe that there is much truth in it. This assertion is not based on any sense of New England chauvinism but on a close reading of the historical record.

John Muir was in his fifties by the time he set foot in New England, yet for decades he had been influenced by Yankees and by Yankee culture. Jeanne C. Carr, her husband Ezra Slocum Carr (a New Englander by marriage and brief residency), James Davie Butler, Asa Gray (a native of New York State but descended from Yankees), Charles Sprague Sargent, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Swett — all of these New Englanders helped to liberate John Muir's genius, and proceeded to nourish it for years thereafter. They, as well as other New Englanders — Yankees by birth, marriage, residence, or descent — gave Muir abundant support at crucial junctures in his life. Above all, they gave him the gift of Transcendentalism.²

The New Englanders who influenced John Muir were of several subtypes, the most conspicuous among them being Vermonters. But there were other subtypes of New Englanders among his friends and mentors. There are four, perhaps five, such subgroups:

Edmund A. Schofield, New England native, botanist and ecologist by training and poet by avocation, became interested in Muir and New England transcendentalists while working in San Francisco as a Sierra Club staff member. Currently residing in Thoreau's hometown, he serves as editor for the Arnold Arboretum, whose first director, Charles Sprague Sargent, was Muir's friend and colleague.

(1) the Bostonian, or Boston Brahmin; (2) the Harvard academic; (3) the Concord Transcendentalist; and (4) the Vermonter, or pioneer Yankee, the archetypal or quintessential New Englander. Perhaps we should include a fifth subtype — the first-generation descendant of Yankees, removed or exiled to the midwest or Far West.

Chronologically, Muir's intercourse with New Englanders came in almost the reverse order of that I have just given, and in inverse degree of significance. John Muir came first into contact with displaced or removed Vermonters — itinerant Yankees who introduced him to the writings of the Transcendentalists (and ultimately to "The Transcendentalist," in the flesh) — and only later to a Harvard academic or two. Eventually, Muir even got to know a Brahmin very well; by this time he had gained a national reputation — was "safe." And, at what was probably the turning point of his life, he was ministered to by a midwestern family whose immediate origins lay in New England.

Each of these subtypes of New Englander represents or symbolizes a certain aspect of New England culture, according to where they lived and — if they had to or wanted to — worked. First, in Boston. The Brahmin was (and is) the epitome of respectability. Born to wealth, family and high social status, he represented financial, political, and social power — the Establishment. He was (and is) secure and confident and serene. It was his wealth that pushed west the frontier, devastating the wilderness John Muir would devote his adult life trying to save.

Second, in Cambridge. The Harvard academic represented (and did so until not very long ago) intellectual authority. His predecessors had been the initial religious authorities of New England. The academic, especially if he were a scientist, both aided and benefitted from the Brahmin's financial schemes.

Third, in Concord. Over against Boston and Cambridge stood Concord's Transcendentalists, who spearheaded a cultural reaction to both Boston and Cambridge and to everything they stood for in heaven and on earth. For many Transcendentalists, Nature was sacred, not simply grist for some Brahmin's mill, but infused with divinity, the very divinity Harvard College once had presumed to define and (above all) to guard.

Fourth, in Vermont. Vermonters, whose state was settled by emigrants from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and New York, were perennial pioneers, apostles of or refugees from the New England of the Brahmin and the academic and occasionally of the Transcendentalist. Perhaps mentioning the names of Vermonters Joseph Smith and Brigham Young is the most telling way of making my point here. Vermont is of greatest significance, however, because it is the birthplace of both American Transcendentalism and the conservation movement in the United States. Only by understanding Vermont and Vermonters can we hope to understand John Muir.

Two birth-right Vermonters played key roles in liberating John Muir's genius from the shackles of Daniel Muir's Calvinism. They were Jeanne C. (Smith) Carr and James Davie Butler. Carr's husband, Ezra Slocum Carr, though a native of Upstate New York, lived in Vermont long enough, perhaps, and was married there, to earn the name Vermonter. (Upstate New York might with some justification be dubbed "New New-England.") A natural scientist, Carr specialized in chemistry and geology, but for convenience's sake I will place him squarely among the Vermonters, despite his obvious affinities for Cambridge.

Another Vermonter, George Perkins Marsh, influenced John Muir, but to exactly what degree is unclear. At the very least, Marsh's epochal *Man and Nature* (1864), which Lewis Mumford has called "the fountainhead of the conservation movement" in the United States,³ helped set the stage for John Muir's work in conservation by sensitizing



From James Davie Butler, Muir learned the classics and the importance of keeping a "Commonplace Book" as Emerson had done. As a result of Butler's teachings, Muir always kept a field journal on his wanderings. Today eighty-one of these journals still exist.



Ezra and Jeanne Carr played a most important role in John Muir's life. They were responsible for introducing Muir to new ideas and theories as well as to prominent scientists and naturalists. In addition they provided him with unfailing faith and support.

the country to the damage done to natural ecosystems by uncontrolled exploitation of forests. John Muir owned a copy of *Man and Nature* that he annotated heavily.⁴ The extent to which the book helped to determine Muir's philosophical outlook would depend on which edition he owned, and when he acquired it. If it were the first (1864) edition, and if he acquired it early, then the influence would have been seminal; if a later edition, then it probably would merely have fortified attitudes and beliefs which Muir already held.

The Vermont School of Transcendentalism

Significantly, Marsh's cousin, the Rev. James Marsh (1794-1842), sometime president of the University of Vermont, is credited with having sparked the Transcendentalist movement in this country, by introducing Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* to American readers. Specifically, it was Marsh's own "Preliminary Essay," the introduction to the first American edition of Coleridge's work, as much as *Aids to Reflection* itself, that captivated Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott, and their associates.⁶

When James Marsh was a student in Andover Theological Seminary during the 1820s, he, his cousin George Perkins Marsh, and two of their friends had "formed and maintained a club for the purpose of reading papers and exploring fields merely touched in the classroom." James Marsh had taught himself German so as to read the German philosophers in their own language — philosophers who contributed much to the development



James Marsh, cousin of George Perkins Marsh, is credited with introducing the basic philosophical theories of Transcendentalism to America in the 1820s and revolutionizing New England college instruction. Both of these significant accomplishments would have an effect on Muir's life.

of Transcendentalism in New England. During the discussions, the Marsh cousins profoundly influenced each other. "Each stimulated the other, but James Marsh, who had already embarked on 'that ocean of German theology and metaphysics,' probably led the way." Later, when both cousins were living in Burlington, "they revived their Dartmouth club, and spent one or two evenings a week reading and discussing Greek, German, and English philosophy."

Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*, along with Marsh's own "Preliminary Essay," was first published in this country in 1829, but several years earlier — sometime during the period when James Marsh and his cousin were meeting for extracurricular discussions — "Marsh had worked out for himself the fundamental principles which that book contained, and . . . he had for some time taught them to his students" by the time the book was published.

The "Vermont School" of James Marsh was the immediate antecedent of New England Transcendentalism, which was centered 150 miles southeast of Burlington, in Concord, Massachusetts. Marsh's influence was felt in Vermont for a full century. He was president of the University of Vermont for only seven years (1826-1833), yet

During the brief years in which he was associated with the university, he transformed it, from a struggling, ineffectual college, into an institution so important that for years it was considered the center of the most advanced thought in New England, and looked upon by other colleges as daring in its innovations; it was the original center of academic idealistic philosophy, and the real link between the education of the east and the middle west.⁷

In short, "James Marsh revolutionized New England college instruction no less profoundly than he transformed New England philosophy."

When the better known Transcendental Club held its first meeting in Boston in September 1836, the members all had been reading Marsh. One of the organizers of that club was Amos Bronson Alcott. A native of Connecticut but a resident of Concord from 1840 until his death in 1888, Alcott had first read *Aids to Reflection* in 1832. He had received a copy of the work from William Russell, the renowned educator, in 1830 but apparently had not managed to read it for two years. (John Swett, John Muir's friend, was a student of Russell's in New Hampshire.) But when Alcott finally did read it he was profoundly affected.⁸

George Perkins Marsh helped to build the foundation for Muir's conservation work with his writing of *Man and Nature*, published in 1864.



Special Collections, University of Vermont Library

In January of 1836, eight months before the first (organizational) meeting of the Transcendental Club, Alcott would record in his diary, "I am now reading — with an interest not at all abated — for the fifth time, the *Aids to Reflection*. What a rich volume this is!" In October of 1836, the first full-fledged meeting of the club convened in Alcott's home in Boston. As Alcott's biographer has said, "When they first came together they were saturated, one and all, with Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* and the comment that President James Marsh of the University of Vermont had recently written upon it."⁹ Thus did Transcendentalism flow forth from the mountains of Vermont, enriched by the fertilizing influence of German idealism, into the mainstream of New England culture. Through his intellectual explorations, James Marsh was singlehandedly clearing the way for John Muir through his influence on education in the midwest, on Emerson and Emerson's associates, and on his cousin George Perkins Marsh.

Two Transcendentalists, to whose writings the Carrs and James Davie Butler introduced John Muir, influenced Muir more directly than either Marsh did but no more profoundly. They are, of course, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry D. Thoreau. Emerson influenced Muir directly — personally in correspondence as well as in his own person — as well as "indirectly," through his published writings. Thoreau, whom Muir never met, influenced Muir's thinking indirectly, but nonetheless profoundly, through his writings.

It was the pioneer Yankees, the itinerant Vermonters, who brought Muir and the Transcendentalists together. These were Vermonters of Calvinist heritage who had allied themselves spiritually with Transcendentalist Concord, not with Unitarian Cambridge or Boston. Perhaps when young they and the Marsh cousins had drunk from the headwaters of the same pure spiritual stream that flowed out of the Green Mountains, producing the movement we call American Transcendentalism. At the University of Wisconsin, in California, and elsewhere, they were ideally qualified to point out the way to young John Muir.¹⁰

James Davie Butler, John Muir's professor at the University of Wisconsin, and an 1836 graduate of Middlebury College in Vermont, had an early and close brush with the well-springs of Vermont Transcendentalism. In a letter, he recalls that, "Late in 1844



Courtesy, The Bancroft Library

Muir never had the opportunity to meet Henry David Thoreau, but was nevertheless profoundly influenced by Thoreau's writings.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, considered the seminal figure in American Transcendentalism, influenced Muir directly through a visit with Muir in Yosemite and through correspondence, as well as indirectly through his published writings.

I visited Woodstock and was taken under the roof of Charles Marsh. . . ."⁵ Charles Marsh, a stern, even tyrannical Calvinist, was the father of George Perkins Marsh.

"I soon consented to lecture on alternate evenings in Norwich as well as Woodstock," Butler continued. "After six months in Burlington, . . . I came back to Norwich [Academy] as professor. . . . Dartmouth, a mile distant in space, from Norwich, was severed [from] it by a great gulf of mutual contempt. . . ." In 1820, George Perkins Marsh had graduated from Dartmouth with highest honors; two weeks after graduating, he had moved across the Connecticut River — and the great gulf of mutual contempt? — to begin his first job, teaching English at Norwich Academy. Marsh was a native of Woodstock.

Marsh's biographer, David Lowenthal, reports that Marsh had grown up a practical-minded Yankee "who prided himself on his devotion to utility and reason, but he was also a romantic." Further, Lowenthal states (pp. 17-18),

He was attracted by Thoreau and by the eccentric Transcendentalist poet Jones Very, whose lyrics reawakened "the sense of the delight of life in close contact with nature"; the sonnet "Nature" carried Marsh back to his childhood in Woodstock: "The bubbling brook doth leap when I come by/Because my feet find measure with its call." Marsh was "forest-born," he asserted in his old age; the "bubbling brook, the trees, the flowers, the wild animals were to me persons, not things." At the end of his life he recalled that as a lonely boy he had "sympathized with those *beings*, as I have never done since with the *general* society of men, too many of whom would find it hard to make out as good a claim to *personality* as a respectable oak can establish."

It is easy to understand the rapport that would develop between the Midwestern son of a Calvinist, John Muir, and New England sons of Calvinism, James Davie Butler and George Perkins Marsh (or, more accurately, the ideas of Marsh), in particular.

Two Botanists and a Geologist

Two Cambridge academics, both of them scientists, ultimately contributed much to John Muir's own development as a scientist. Asa Gray, the Harvard botanist, though a "Yorker," born in Upstate New York of Yankee stock, is always associated with New England. Louis Agassiz, the Harvard zoologist (and a rival of Gray's), was born in Switzerland but, like Gray, is strongly associated with New England. While yet in Switzerland, Agassiz had conceived the theory of continental glaciation, which Ezra Slocum Carr passed on to his students — including John Muir — at the University of Wisconsin. It was in the field of glaciology that Muir was to earn the right to be called a scientist — or, stated more accurately, perhaps, to having conducted genuine scientific research. Gray never consorted with Transcendentalists — perhaps never even met one, other than John Muir. Agassiz was their friend and ally.

Toward the end of the century, a single Brahmin, Charles Sprague Sargent, contributed greatly to Muir's growing reputation as a forest naturalist and, no doubt, to Muir's self-esteem. Sargent was founding director of Harvard's Arnold Arboretum (founded in 1872) which, while a unit of the university, is situated not in Cambridge but in the Jamaica Plain section of Boston near the vast estates of those Brahmins who lived in Brookline, Wellesley, and other wealthy suburbs west of Boston. And, while himself a graduate of Harvard College, Sargent was decidedly "Boston," not "Cambridge." He was, after all,

Courtesy, The Bancroft Library



Louis Agassiz (1807-1873)

Courtesy, The Bancroft Library



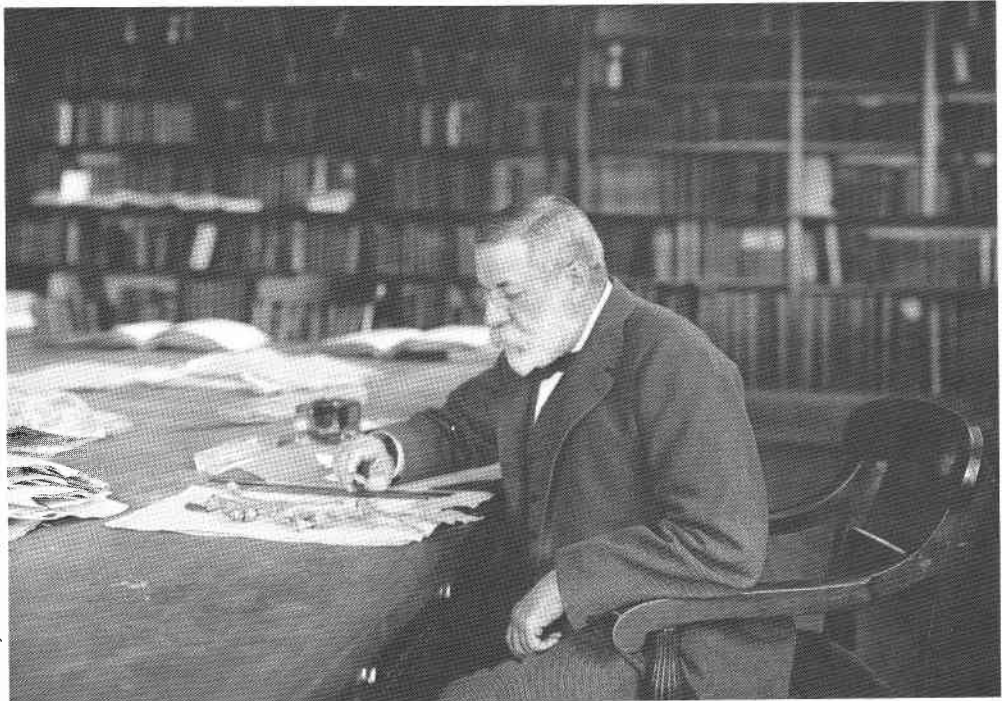
Asa Gray (1810-1888)

an *alumnus* of Harvard, not a member of its faculty in permanent residency there. Nor was Sargent a trained botanist or — at least during his college years — a scholar in any meaningful sense of the word. Graduating eighty-eighth in a class of ninety, Sargent obviously would need time and the right opportunity if he were ever to achieve distinction in a profession. He would have to establish an “identity” beyond that of Brahmin. Sargent was offered the opportunity not because he had shown any great promise but strictly because of his privileged social position. Yet he became a respected and even eminent botanist — a conservationist — strictly on his own merits. I suspect it was he who convinced Harvard to grant John Muir an honorary Master’s degree in 1896, though Robert Underwood Johnson, editor of *The Century* magazine and close friend of Muir’s, claims to have taken the initiative on this.

Asa Gray, who retired the year Sargent was made Director of the Arnold Arboretum and, for all intents and purposes, Gray’s successor at Harvard, introduced Sargent to John Muir in 1878, according to Muir’s biographer, Stephen Fox, but the “relationship had lapsed during Muir’s farmer days. In the early 1890s, Robert Underwood Johnson brought them back together again.”

In January, 1879, Sargent had begun a correspondence with George Perkins Marsh, who was ambassador to Italy at the time. In later years, Sargent would claim (in a letter of November 25, 1908, to Robert Underwood Johnson) that he owed his interest in forests and forest preservation “almost entirely” to Marsh’s *Man and Nature*. A copy of the 1874 edition of that work, “Presented to my Arboreal friend C. S. Sargent Esq. by Francis Skinner Dec. 1875,” is almost certainly the copy Sargent read.

“I have long been a student of *Man and Nature* and have derived great pleasure and



Courtesy of the Arnold Arboretum

Introduced by Asa Gray in 1878, Charles Sprague Sargent and John Muir became lifelong friends. They lived a continent apart and through the years they had a prolific correspondence and traveled together on several occasions including a trip to Alaska and a world tour.

profit from your pages," Sargent wrote to Marsh in his first extant letter to him (that of January 23, 1879). "I stand greatly in need of aid & counsel from all who like yourself are interested in solving the problems which the waste of forests has forced us to this generation," Sargent wrote on July 18 of the same year. "I feel," he continued, "that I can count on you for much good advice, and that you will be willing to interest your correspondents and friends in Europe in the undertaking, as I must build up as wide a correspondence as possible," enlisting Marsh's help in establishing the young Arnold Arboretum. For his part, Marsh took a great interest in the arboretum. In a letter of May 16, 1879, Marsh revealed to Sargent that, "I was born on the edge of an interminable forest & passed a very large part of my early life among the trees."¹¹

The year 1879 was a pivotal one for Sargent with respect to his involvement in "forests and forest preservation." In April of that year the *Nation* published his article "in regard to the future of the California Forests." Later that year he accepted the invitation of General Francis Amasa Walker, Superintendent of the Tenth Census of the United States to, as he informed Robert Underwood Johnson in 1908, "assume charge of an investigation into the forest resources of the United States as a part of the work of the Tenth Census. The results of this investigation were published in the ninth volume of the Final Reports of the Tenth Census in 1882. . . . This report, I think I can say without vanity, marked the first real step taken in this country toward forest preservation, and I believe that it was owing to this report that the early forest reservations were made."¹²

In 1884, Sargent was appointed by the state of New York the chairman of a commission to study the Adirondack forests and to make recommendations for their better management to the legislature in 1885. In 1888, Sargent launched *Garden and Forest*, a weekly magazine published "as an organ for the Arboretum and to popularize . . . forest preservation." The magazine survived for only ten years and had to be abandoned "for want of support." But during its ten years of publication it carried scores of articles on forest preservation with titles such as "The Future of Our Forests," "The Adirondack Forests in Danger," "The Forests of the White Mountains in Danger," "The Forests of California," and "Organizing for Forest Preservation." One article was titled simply "The Yosemite Valley," another "The Nation's Forests." Though John Muir apparently never wrote for *Garden and Forest*, the magazine must have been an important ally for him in his political campaigns.

In 1896, Sargent was appointed by the National Academy of Sciences as chairman of a commission to study public domain forests and to suggest legislation for their preservation and management. Muir chose not to be a member of the commission, but did accompany it, as unofficial guide and advisor, through Oregon, California, and Arizona. The commission recommended to President Grover Cleveland that he establish a number of forest reservations with a total area of some 20,000,000 acres. Later, as Sargent wrote to Johnson, he prevailed on President William McKinley not to revoke Cleveland's action because doing so would help "western timber thieves."

Sargent and Muir got to know each other, and they got along surprisingly well. As Sargent's biographer has observed, "So different were Muir and Sargent that it is hard to imagine their association progressing beyond a businesslike correspondence based on common objectives. Even by Boston standards, Sargent was a reserved character. Yet, somehow, Muir got through to him, and a strong sympathy bound the two from the beginning of their acquaintance."¹³

In his laconic recollection of Muir, published in the "John Muir Memorial Number" of the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, Sargent gives an excruciatingly brief summary of his travels

with Muir: "Muir and I traveled through many forests, and saw together all the trees of western North America, from Alaska to Arizona. We wandered together through the great forests which cover the southern Appalachian Mountains, and through the tropical forests of southern Florida. Together we saw the forests of southern Russia and the Caucasus and those of eastern Siberia. . . ." Sargent seemed to understand Muir. "No one has studied the Sierra trees as living beings more deeply and continuously than Muir," Sargent declared, "and no one in writing about them has brought them so close to other lovers of nature."¹³

Muir visited Sargent's home in Brookline twice, once in 1893 and again in 1896. In 1893 he visited, not only "Professor Sargent's grand place" in Brookline, but Thoreau's and Emerson's graves and Walden Pond in Concord. The graveyard he thought "the most beautiful graveyard I ever saw," Walden simply "beautiful." "Professor Sargent's grand place" he declared "the finest mansion and grounds I ever saw." Muir was well received wherever he went in New England, so great was his name and the respect in which he was held there.¹⁵

For evidence of Sargent's and Muir's mutual esteem, one need only examine Muir's ecstatic review of Sargent's *Silva of North America* in the July 1903 *Atlantic Monthly*, Sargent's praise of *The Mountains of California*, or Sargent's dedication of volume eleven of his *Silva* to "John Muir lover and interpreter of nature who best has told the story of the Sierra forests."

Sargent and Muir corresponded for decades during the critical years of their collaboration. In the archives of Arnold Arboretum, for example, there are upwards of thirty Muir and Sargent letters to each other, most of them from Muir to Sargent. Mingled with business-like discussion of trees, forests, and conservation campaigns in the letters is a sprinkling of humor, banter and gentle prodding that reveals the sincere rapport that facilitated their professional relationship, as does their frequent inquiries after each other's families. Of the two, Muir was, of course, the less inhibited.

Of all of the New Englanders John Muir knew and worked with, Charles Sprague Sargent was one of the very few he did not meet or learn about through the Carrs or James Davie Butler. Both Muir and Sargent were self-taught scientists, and professionally, at least, peers. "Socially," of course — in the narrow nineteenth century New England, or Boston, sense — they were not "equals." Sargent, to his great credit, never allowed his privileged social position to color his dealings with John Muir. Perhaps it was his service during the Civil War, or his own inner struggles to establish an identity of his own that allowed him to rise above the provincial Bostonian view of the cosmos. Whatever the source of his insight, it played a key role in the Muir-Sargent relationship.

Also to his credit, Sargent seems never to have urged Muir to go East to Boston or Cambridge — to Harvard or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology — as had Gray (the Harvard academic), John Daniel Runckle (the Boston — MIT — academic), and Emerson (the Concord Transcendentalist). Like Louis Agassiz, Sargent apparently preferred to think of Muir in his natural habitat, among the redwoods and glaciers of the Sierra. Of all of the New Englanders who remained New Englanders, Sargent seems to have disappointed Muir least, and to have aided him most during his years of accomplishment.

One first-generation descendant of Yankees, Catharine Merrill, professor of literature at North Western Christian (now Butler) University, in Indianapolis, Indiana, aided and supported John Muir — both she and her relatives — beginning with Muir's brief but epochal sojourn in Indianapolis in 1866 and 1867; at that time he was blinded by an

industrial accident and tormented by the fear that he might never see again, and he vowed to devote the rest of his life to studying Nature if only his sight would return. Return his sight did, and Muir kept his promise. Catharine Merrill may be included among the New Englanders who were friends and associates of John Muir. And it was in her city that Muir made the momentous decision that has had such wide-ranging significance for the conservation movement in this country and abroad. It was in Indianapolis that John Muir — literally and figuratively — saw the light.

Muir met Merrill (whose parents were born in Vermont) through a letter of introduction from his former college professor, the peripatetic and redoubtable Vermonter, James Davie Butler. Butler and Merrill, in their turns, had met in Crawfordsville, Indiana, in the mid-1850s, when Butler was teaching at Wabash College and Merrill was attending a women's seminary.¹⁶

It is intriguing that Muir came to know the several types of New Englanders roughly in the sequence, first, pioneer Vermonters, then Transcendentalist, then Harvard academics, then the lone Boston Brahmin. By the virtue of his achievements and reputation, Muir seems to have been "swept" *eastward*, against the mainstream of American society, toward an older and less egalitarian society. From that of anonymous tramp loose in the wilds of America, Muir's *persona* was slowly enlarged and transformed to the point where he was accepted, sought out, even, by the haughty Bostonian — as a scientific colleague and political ally, if not as a social peer. By the time Muir first visited Sargent in Boston in 1893, his reputation and influence spanned the nation west to east.

Ironically, Muir developed as he did largely because he identified with, and championed, that countercurrent of American culture which burst forth on the cultural landscape from headwaters in the Green Mountains of Vermont and — in the guise of a book called *Walden* — from the pure waters of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. Like George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature*, like James Marsh's "Preliminary Essay," and, perhaps, like Emerson's "Nature," *Walden* is a fountainhead of conservation thought in this country.

Each type of New Englander whom Muir met reflected the successive stages through which his career was quickly progressing: pilgrim, hermit, scientist, prophet, sage, and cultural hero. Perhaps only one New Englander encompassed all of those stages in his own life, Henry D. Thoreau.

Seed Time and Dispersal

During the 1850s, Henry Thoreau had grown more and more interested in botany and ecology to the point that, by early 1860, when he was avidly reading Charles Darwin's new book, *On the Origin of Species*, he was for all intents and purposes a working field ecologist, well before the emerging science had been given a name. In 1860, Thoreau was eagerly, one even might say furiously, studying the phenomenon of secondary ecological succession in the woodlots and fields of Concord. He had been interested in succession for a full decade, but spurred on, perhaps, by an invitation to present his findings to the Middlesex Agricultural Society at its annual fair in Concord on September 20, 1860, he began to accelerate his already intense field studies, counting the annual rings on tree stumps and testing (or applying) some of the concepts and observations about which he had just read in Darwin's book. During this period of incredible intellectual activity, Thoreau was also hard at work studying leaf fall and the dispersal of seeds and fruits.¹⁷

Thoreau recorded his observations in his journal, which is replete with measurements, facts, hypotheses, and other accouterments of the scientific method, to the point that many literary critics complain that the journal became overwhelmed by dry, scientific facts and theorizing in the post-*Walden* years. Already in the *second* extant entry in Thoreau's journal, that for October 24, 1837, six months before John Muir's birth, the seeds were sown for Thoreau's preoccupation with ecological succession. "Every part of nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another," he wrote in the fullness of his Transcendental awakening. "The oak dies down to the ground, leaving within its rind a rich virgin mould, which will impart a vigorous life to an infant forest. The pine leaves a sandy and sterile soil, the harder woods a strong and fruitful mould."

"So this constant abrasion and decay makes the soil of my future growth," he continued. "As I live now so shall I reap. If I grow pines and birches, my virgin mould will not sustain oak; but pines and birches, or, perchance, weeds and brambles, will constitute my second growth."

Black Frost, Failed Harvest

In 1860, the first autumnal frost hit Concord early — September 10th — exactly a week after Thoreau had recorded in his journal the "first decidedly autumnal day" of the season, "a cloudless sky, a clear air, with, maybe, veins of coolness." It was not a severe frost. Thereafter, pulses of cold air swept out of the north every week or so, inducing rain in New England. On September 20th, the day Thoreau gave his lecture on the succession of forest trees at the agricultural fair, it poured, just under two inches of rain falling in twenty-four hours. More rain fell on the 25th (just under one inch), and on the 28th a very severe frost hit — "what you may call a black frost," Thoreau wrote in his journal. On September 29th, he reported "Another hard frost and a very cold day," on the 30th, "Frost and ice." Finally, on October 1st, he entered this record in his journal: "Remarkable frost and ice this morning; quite a wintry prospect. The leaves of trees stiff and white at 7 A.M. It was 21° this morning early. I do not remember such cold at this season." These weekly pulses of cold air would continue to sweep over Concord throughout the fall and winter. In a sense, they would sound a silent death knell to Thoreau's life and work, for before winter even began that year Thoreau would catch the cold that would kill him, through the damage it did to his lungs, in May, 1862.¹⁸

The winter of 1860-61 had begun early, perhaps under the influence of the sunspot cycle, which was at an eleven-year zenith during the summer and fall of 1860. Aurorae boreales were especially frequent, even in the summer. In any event, the "black frost" hit Concord at an uncommonly early date. Snow began falling in earnest early in December and remained on the ground for months. Even after it had melted in early March 1861, several massive snowstorms swept through Concord. For Henry Thoreau, who by then had a worsening cold that was opening tubercular scars in his lungs, it was no winter for easy recuperation. Thoreau was dying, in fact, and he was only forty-three years of age.

Yet, it was not a particularly cold winter in southern New England. It was, in fact, warmer than average. But the brief, recurring pulsations of cold Canadian and Arctic air every week or ten days brought, first rain, then frost, then blizzard after blizzard. One of those pulsations, a remarkably strong one, occurred early in February 1861. As

David Ludlum puts it in *Early American Winters II*, "From the 6th of February to the 10th — a period covering four days or 96 hours — the mercury dropped abruptly 70 degrees to congeal at -40°. Then the fluid, thawing, soared 95 degrees to a maximum of 55°. Thus a change of 165 degrees had taken place in this short period. . . ."¹⁹

The buds on virtually all fruit trees and unprotected grapevines were killed. During those few hours, almost the entire potential fruit crop of 1861 was aborted in the northeast, especially in New England. Most agricultural and horticultural societies cancelled outright their fruit-harvest displays that fall. In the case of at least one society, it was the only such cancellation between the society's founding in the early 1840s and the present day. Obviously, there was something very unusual, perhaps even unique, about the winter of 1860-61. Beginning with the "black frosts" of the previous fall and ending with the unprecedented failure of the fruit crop, it was a season to be remembered. Among its human casualties was Henry D. Thoreau.²⁰

Succession

On or about September 20, 1860, the twenty-two year-old John Muir was leaving his father's farm in Buffalo Township, Wisconsin, for the State Agricultural Fair in Madison and, he hoped, an entirely new life. Within a matter of days he would be lionized in Madison for his mechanical inventions and, shortly thereafter — in the pages of *The Prairie Farmer* — throughout the Midwest. During the last days of the Wisconsin State Fair, the "black frosts" were ravaging tender vegetation in New England. The stage was being set by some cosmic force for a change of characters in the decades-long unfolding of the conservation movement in the United States.

Meanwhile, late in November or early in December, Thoreau caught a cold that he aggravated by making a 300-mile-round-trip journey to lecture on "The Fall of the Leaf" in Waterbury, Connecticut. It was a fatal mistake to have made the journey for, not only was Thoreau very sick, but it rained and snowed, then turned windy and very cold while he was traveling. By the middle of December, when Walden Pond froze over, Thoreau was housebound, the cold having lodged in his lungs. Like other members of his family, he had suffered off and on from bouts of tuberculosis most of his life. This severe cold once and for all placed the disease in the ascendancy.

At about this time, John Muir must have begun having second thoughts about the course his life had taken when he had gone to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, with Norman Wiard to demonstrate Wiard's much-acclaimed ice boat, the *Lady Franklin*, which was about to be denounced in the press as "a humbug." Thus, in late January, as Henry Thoreau sank into debility, John Muir returned to Madison and enrolled in the University of Wisconsin. The term opened on February 6th and would end on June 26th.²¹

"The Journey West"

In May, just as the oaks were coming into bloom, Henry Thoreau set out on a desperate, two-month-long trip by rail and steamer to Minnesota in search of the hot, dry climate doctors had advised him to seek for the sake of his rapidly declining health. He was accompanied by seventeen-year-old Horace Mann, Jr., son of the late educator and — until his death from tuberculosis (which he may have caught from Thoreau during the

journey west) — an aspiring botanist and the heir-apparent of an aging Asa Gray. Fatherless now, Mann, with his mother and younger brother, had moved to Concord from Ohio, where Horace Mann had died the year before.²²

Thoreau and Mann probably left Concord on the 11:59 a.m. train, heading west on the Fitchburg Railroad, and at Groton Junction, catching a connecting train to Worcester at 12:45 on the Worcester & Nashua Railroad. At about 12:53 they would have passed within 330 feet of Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands farmhouse in the town of Harvard, where in 1843 Alcott had conducted the renowned but short-lived experiment in Transcendental socialism. Five or ten minutes later, they would have passed near the site of Luther Burbank's boyhood home in the northern part of the town of Lancaster. Very shortly thereafter, they would have passed through the center of Lancaster, stopping at the Lancaster town depot, a sixth of a mile from the site of the New-England Normal Institute where, from 1853 until 1855, William Russell, Bronson Alcott's friend and mentor and John Swett's former teacher, had conducted yet another of his schools based upon Pestalozzian educational principles, his last. Young Francis Amasa Walker was a student in Russell's school. Walker would become president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and, as cited above, director of the Tenth United States Census. Perhaps Russell, who settled in Lancaster when the school folded, was in town that day.

From Lancaster, the train sped to Worcester, the home of Thoreau's friends Harrison Blake and Theophilus Brown and a hub of railroad connections for points south and west. Thoreau and Mann spent a day in Worcester with Blake, having stayed the night at Blake's home, and left Worcester early on the morning of May 13th, bound for Albany, New York, and points west. That afternoon, as they traveled westward, both Thoreau and Mann recorded a pronounced change in the aspect of the vegetation. "The leafing is decidedly more advanced in western Massachusetts than in eastern," Thoreau recorded in his journal. "Apple trees are greenish. Red elder-berry is apparently just beginning to bloom." In Albany, where they stopped for the night, young Mann wrote to his mother that, "We see things much greener here than at home."

The next morning, they probably left Albany at 7:30 on the New York Central Railroad, bound for the Suspension Bridge near Niagara Falls, going via the Rochester, Lock Port, and Niagara Falls Division, and arriving at the Suspension Bridge at 8:30 p.m. They remained in the Niagara Falls area for a full five days, spending much time botanizing on Goat Island. Then, on May 20th, they left Niagara Falls for Detroit on the Great Western (Canada) Railroad, going by way of Hamilton, Paris, London, Chatham, and Windsor, Ontario, and proceeding on to Detroit, probably via ferry from Windsor.

The next day, they left for Chicago on the Michigan Central Railroad, passing through Ann Arbor, Jackson, and Kalamazoo, Michigan, and Michigan City, Indiana. All along the way, Thoreau was taking copious notes on the plants and landscapes he saw, both from the train window and close-up. As the train passed through the sand dunes at the southern tip of Lake Michigan, in Indiana, Thoreau noted that it was "All hard wood or no evergreen except some white pine, when we struck Lake Michigan, on the sands from the lake partly & some larch before." The next day he recalled that he "Saw last p.m. high dune hills along lake & much open oak wood low but old (?) with black trunks but light foliage."

Almost a quarter century earlier, in 1837, George Perkins Marsh had visited Michigan City. In 1857, he had visited Michigan City again. In *Man and Nature*, which was published in 1864, he recalled the evolution of the dunes which he observed during his

visits.²³ Three decades after *Man and Nature* was published, a young botanist from the University of Chicago by the name of Henry Chandler Cowles (a native of Connecticut) conducted a series of ecological observations on the succession of plant communities on the Indiana Dunes of Lake Michigan. Cowles's work is a landmark in the science of ecology; it elucidated the process of ecological succession that Thoreau had been working on in Concord four decades earlier.²⁴

Thoreau and Mann left Chicago at 9:15 on the morning of May 23rd, bound for Dunleith [now East Dubuque], Illinois, on the Galena and Chicago Union Railway. After passing through Belvidere, Cherry Valley, and Rockford, they began to see open prairie. Thoreau was impressed. "Greatest rolling prairie without trees just beyond Winnebago," he recorded. . . . "Distances on prairie deceptive. A stack of wheat straw looks like a hill in the horizon $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ mile off. It stands out so bold and high." The train passed through Winnebago at about 2:22 in the afternoon. Twenty minutes later, at 2:42, it would have passed through Pecatonica. At 6:20 p.m., right on schedule, they arrived in Dunleith. They had reached the Mississippi River.

From Dunleith, Illinois, the two travelers went up the Mississippi on the boat *Itasca*, to St. Paul and St. Anthony, Minnesota, arriving there mid-morning on Sunday, May 26th. En route, they had stopped at Dubuque, Iowa; Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin; and Brownsville and Red Wing, Minnesota. In addition to recording the living plants he saw, Thoreau had written of great mounds of wheat straw and sacks of wheat near homes and on the wharves of the river towns. On the river itself he had seen "Great rafts of boards & shingles 4 or 5 rods wide & 15 or 20 long." "Banks in primitive condition bet[ween] the towns, which is almost everywhere," he had noted. Horace Mann had written to his mother that "From the tops of the bluffs the country lays on every side level and most[ly] pra[i]rie with a little wood on it in different places." Thoreau had taken note of McGregor, Iowa, a new town opposite Prairie du Chien. They remained in Minnesota for almost exactly one month.

Commencement

On the return trip in late June, Thoreau and Mann traveled down river to Prairie du Chien from St. Paul, arriving early on the morning of June 27th. After a wait of only an hour and a half, they started up the valley of the Wisconsin River "By cars to Milwaukee," via Madison, on the Milwaukee & Prairie du Chien Railway. It was a clear, warm day in southern Wisconsin. Almost exactly five months before, a disillusioned John Muir had returned to Madison from Prairie du Chien on the same railroad line to enroll in the University of Wisconsin.

Thoreau and Mann departed Prairie du Chien on the 10:00 a.m. mail and day-express passenger train, arriving in Madison about on schedule (1:27 p.m.). As they approached Madison from the northwest, Mann noticed the newly built University, or Bascom, Hall "on a rise of ground near the track as we enter the city," but he mistook it for the "state house." (Thoreau recorded a perfunctory, "Madison, capital & its 4 lakes.") Just beyond or to the right of University Hall they would have seen a smaller building — North Hall, the dormitory in which John Muir had just passed his first term at the University. Some eight minutes after arriving at the Madison depot, they were off to Milwaukee and thence, via Great Lakes steamer and rail, to New England by way of Ontario and northern New York.



Bird's-eye view of Madison, Wisconsin, in 1867. The upper left corner is the University of Wisconsin where Muir was conducting his studies. In the lower left corner is the Milwaukee & Prairie du Chien Railway on which Thoreau and Mann traveled.

The day before (Wednesday, June 26th), the University of Wisconsin had held its seventh annual commencement exercises in the Baptist Church. The eleven and one-half hour event was not over until 9:00 p.m.²⁵ According to Linnie Marsh Wolfe, Muir's biographer, and other evidence, John Muir left Madison for home in "late June," "after commencement," on foot. Exactly when he left is unclear, but it is doubtful that he would have begun a fifty-mile trek to Portage after 9 p.m. Rather he probably departed Madison within a day or two of commencement, possibly on the day after commencement, as he was to do in 1863. The following scenario may seem plausible.

The Passing of the Flame

John Muir left the campus some time around midday of Thursday, June 27, 1861, the day after commencement. Skirting the southern and eastern shores of Lake Mendota on his way north to Hickory Hill Farm, he climbed the small hill he would describe many years later in the last paragraph of *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, to catch one last glimpse of the campus. It was about 1:30 p.m. At just that instant, I like to imagine, a train pulled into view, cutting across a far corner of the campus on its way east. On the train were Horace Mann, Jr., and Henry D. Thoreau. Had Thoreau (a son of Cynthia Dunbar and John Thoreau, Sr.) happened to be admiring Lake Mendota through the train window, he just might have spied a lone figure atop a small prominence at the far

end of the lake. It would have been John Muir (a native son of Dunbar, Scotland). If Muir were casting one last glance back toward the campus, and therefore into the midday sun, he would have had to squint, for the light would have been that bright.²⁶

The scenario I have just sketched may never have happened. Yet I am inclined to believe that John Muir was still in, or else very near, Madison on the day Henry Thoreau passed through. It would make a neat, symbolic summary of Muir's relationship to Thoreau, an epiphany, perhaps. Thoreau, on his way home to die, had accomplished nearly all he would accomplish in his short lifetime of forty-four years. John Muir, having just left his father's home, had his entire public life ahead of him — had more life left than Thoreau would have in total. Muir had not even begun the great life's work that would make him famous, nor even his apprenticeship for it. Muir, at least, would not be struck down by a "black frost" but would live to a ripe, hoary age.

I entertain this scenario because it represents to me the passing of the flame. And yet, while Muir never met Thoreau in person, regardless of how close his path may have come to crossing Thoreau's, Muir already knew — or was very soon to know — the better part of the man: his spiritual part, or soul, as expressed in his writings. If I may be permitted to say so, it seems to have been arranged by the gods.

Closing the Circle

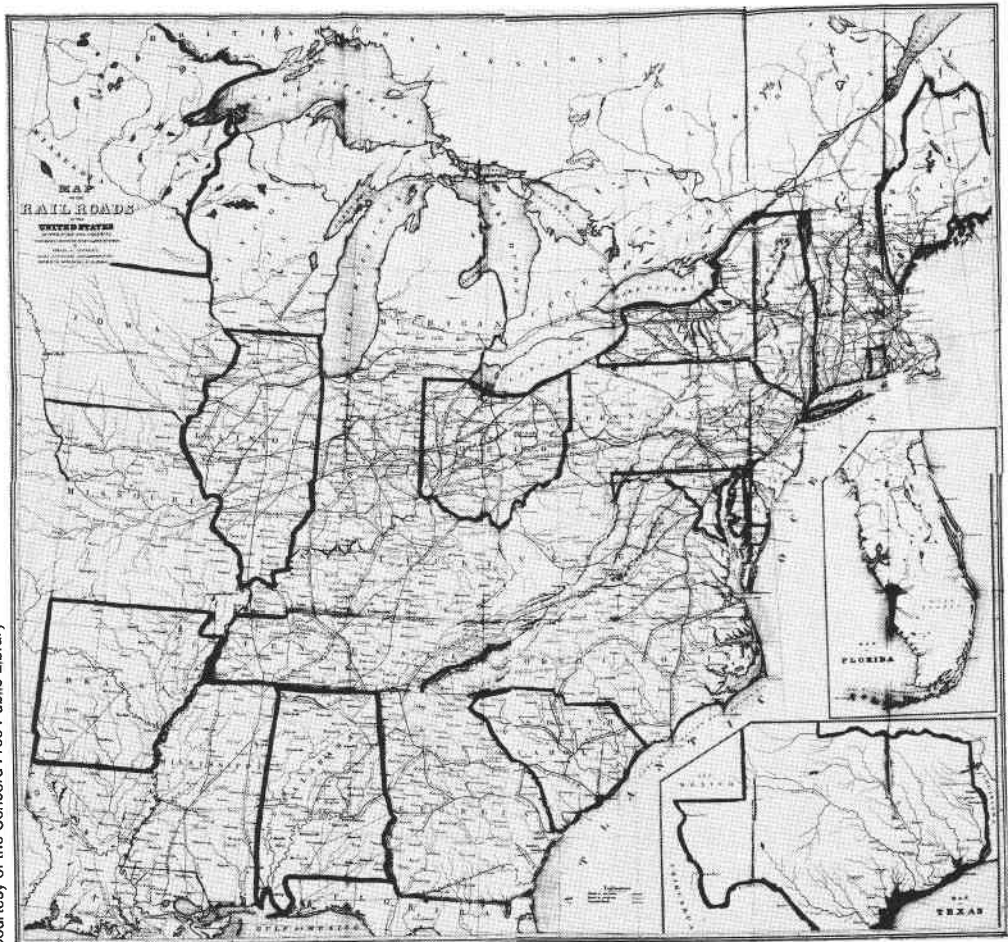
After about three days of botanizing on Mackinac Island, Michigan, Thoreau and Mann proceeded south on Lake Huron by the propeller ship *Sun* to Goderich, Ontario, where they boarded the Buffalo & Lake Huron Railway at nine in the morning of July 6th, bound for Stratford, changing at Stratford to the Grand Trunk Railway, after a two-hour wait, for Toronto. They stayed overnight in Toronto, leaving the next morning (probably at 6:30) for Ogdensburg, New York, which they would have reached late in the afternoon or early in the evening by ferry from Prescott, Ontario. They probably left Ogdensburg at 11:30 the next morning on the Northern (Ogdensburg) Railway for Rouse's Point, New York (arriving at 6:00 p.m.), thence, on the Vermont Central Railway, to White River Junction, Vermont (arriving there at 6:00 a.m.).

That night (probably the night of Wednesday, July 9th — Thursday, July 10th), Thoreau and Mann sped through the very center of the most Yankee of the Yankee states: into Vermont at West Allburgh, thence via Swanton, Milton, and other towns to Essex Junction, a railroad junction four and one-half miles from James Marsh's University of Vermont in Burlington; from Essex Junction to White River Junction by way of Montpelier, the state capital; Northfield, present site of Norwich University, at which James Davie Butler taught ancient languages from 1845 to 1847, and equidistant (25 miles) between Middlebury, site of Butler's alma mater, and Peacham, ancestral home of Catharine Merrill's family; Sharon, birthplace of Joseph Smith; West Hartford, a village of Hartford, James Marsh's birthplace; Woodstock, George Perkins Marsh's birthplace; and (at White River Junction) within five miles of Dartmouth College, alma mater of both James Marsh and George Perkins Marsh, and five miles from Norwich, Vermont, the original site of Norwich Academy, where George Perkins Marsh taught upon his graduation from Dartmouth, and where James Davie Butler had taught; and on to Boston and Concord through central New Hampshire, passing ten or eleven miles from Pittsford, birthplace of John Swett, and through Merrimack, site of William Russell's normal school, from which John Swett had graduated in the late 1840s or early 1850s. Thoreau

and Mann probably arrived back in Concord, Massachusetts, at 11:59 a.m. on July 11th, two months to the minute after they had set out for Minnesota, and one day before Thoreau would observe his last birthday. In less than ten months he would be dead.

The Recurring Crossing of Paths

Thoreau's "Journey West," as he called it, was remarkable for the coincidences — temporal and spatial — with John Muir's earliest apprenticeship years. As Muir himself might say should he be able to examine the facts to be presented below, "Everything in the universe is connected to everything else." But the coincidences go even deeper than this. For the next six years — until Muir left the Midwest for good on his thousand-mile walk to the Gulf of Mexico — on every one of Muir's major botanical excursions, his path would cross the route of Thoreau's "Journey West" altogether no fewer than nine times, in Ontario, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan, and perhaps in New York State.



Thoreau's map of the railroads in the United States, circa 1853.

John Muir knew nothing about botany (or, at least, plant identification) when Thoreau died on May 6, 1862. Less than a month later ("in early June," according to Linnie Marsh Wolfe), Milton S. Griswold, also a student at the University of Wisconsin in those years, introduced an astonished Muir to the marvels of botany. Sometime between these two dates, Thoreau's essay, "Walking," was published as the lead article of the June 1862 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. "The West of which I speak," Thoreau declared, "is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World." Years later this declaration would be echoed by John Muir's "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world." Did Muir read "Walking" that spring, at the Butler or Carr home, perchance? Did this impassioned defense of wild Nature, on which Thoreau put the finishing touches as he lay upon his deathbed, and which was the first of his posthumous publications, kindle in Muir a realization that Nature was good, not evil, and that westward lay wildness? Did "Walking" set John Muir a-walking the wilds of America?

The next summer, Muir and two fellow students — one named James A. Blake, the other named M.M. Rice — set out the day after commencement on a "geological and botanical ramble" through south- and west-central Wisconsin. (Thoreau had made more than one such excursion with his friend and disciple Harrison Blake, who was related by marriage to the Rice family of Worcester, Massachusetts.) They botanized down the Wisconsin River to its confluence with the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien, along the same stretch of the river Thoreau and Mann had come by train, taking notes on the landscape and vegetation, almost exactly two years earlier. Muir and Blake crossed the Mississippi and headed south along the bluffs from McGregor, Iowa, across the river from Prairie du Chien. (Rice, who had sprained his ankle and developed aching muscles, had taken a train for home at Prairie du Chien.)

Thoreau, two years before, had recorded in his "Notes on the Journey West," "Macgregor [sic] a new town op[posite] to Prairie du Chien, the smartest town on the river. Exports the most wheat of any town bet[ween] St. Paul & St. Louis. Wheat in sacks. Great heaps at P[rairie] du Chien, covered at night & all over the ground & the only seed wheat." The first night, Muir and Blake camped on the bluffs, looking down upon the river in the morning. "Across the great Mississippi gorge the bluffs of the eastern shore loomed black and near, as if one might leap over," Wolfe states. At sunrise they saw on the river "countless barges and white side-wheel steamers chugging ahead between long, narrow log rafts and drifting 'strings.'" Perhaps one of the steamers was the *Itasca*, on which Henry Thoreau and Horace Mann, Jr., had traveled upriver two years and one month earlier.

Thoreau himself had noted "Great rafts of boards & shingles 4 or 5 rods wide & 15 or 20 long. . . . Load some 9 or 10 cords of wood at a loading. 20 men in 10 minutes. . . ." Wolfe reports (page 86) that, "As John gazed at the scene he got some idea of the magnitude of the lumber industry. Millions of feet of logs — slain white pine giants that only last winter stood lordly upon the hills of northern Wisconsin. . . . Maine and Michigan were already stripped in large part of their vast forests. Wisconsin was approaching the peak of lumber production. Minnesota was just at the beginning."²⁷

Muir's original plan during this excursion had been to wander down the Wisconsin to the Mississippi, thence up to the Falls of St. Anthony in Minnesota, along exactly the same route Thoreau and Mann had taken in May and June of 1861, and then south through Minnesota and Iowa. But Muir and Blake had abandoned their plan to travel northward and had, instead, crossed the Mississippi and headed south from McGregor.

In August 1872, Asa Gray delivered the presidential address at the American Association for the Advancement of Science's annual meeting in Dubuque, Iowa. Henry Thoreau had been dead more than ten years, Horace Mann, Jr., nearly five, and John Muir now living the Yosemite Valley. Gray gave his address on the return leg of a trip to the Far West, during which he met and traveled for some time with John Muir, in Yosemite and elsewhere. Merrill Moores, bound for college in Oregon, was spending the summer with Muir in Yosemite. The title of Gray's presidential address was "Sequoia and Its History." Charles Sprague Sargent had just been named curator of the newly established Arnold Arboretum; in November, Sargent would be promoted to the directorship of the Arboretum and named director of the Harvard Botanic Garden in Cambridge, succeeding Gray in that post.

On March 1, 1864, John Muir boarded a train at Portage bound for Canada by routes now only partially known. He "tramped through a portion of Michigan to Lake Superior and thence crossed into Canada," in the words of Linnie Marsh Wolfe, perhaps at Sault Sainte Marie, passing from one of the Manitoulin Islands to the other — from Saint Joseph to Drummond, Cockburn, and Sacred, the first, third, and last in Ontario, the second in Michigan — having traveled only thirty or so miles north of Mackinac Island, where Thoreau and Mann had botanized in 1861. Muir could easily have spotted the propeller ship *Sun* plying the waters of Lake Huron had he been tramping the southern shore of Drummond Island at the right moment.

Muir proceeded south along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay (separated from Lake Huron proper by a peninsula). Eventually, he arrived in southwestern Ontario, staying in Bradford, a few miles north of Toronto, then drifting toward Niagara Falls. On August 1, 1864, he camped on a "mountainside overlooking Burlington Bay." He arrived at Niagara Falls on September 2nd, where his brother joined him. For a week, the two brothers explored the banks of the Niagara River. Earlier, for five full days in May 1861, Thoreau and Horace Mann, Jr., had botanized in the vicinity of Niagara Falls — though primarily on the American side. Muir no doubt had remained on the Canadian side.

From Niagara Falls, Muir, still accompanied by his brother, went to the vicinity of Meaford, Ontario, on Owen Sound, remaining there for a year and a half, working in the Trout family's factory. During his several wanderings in southern Ontario, John Muir had to have crossed Thoreau's routes to and from Minnesota four times; after the Trout family's factory burned in March 1866, Muir had to have crossed Thoreau's route at least twice en route to Indianapolis.

John Muir was in Indianapolis about a year. On June 10, 1867, he left Indianapolis for a visit to Madison. He was accompanied by eleven-year-old Merrill Moores, the nephew of Catharine Merrill. Like John Muir, Moores (whose surname must be a variant of "moor" — of which "muir" is also a variant) celebrated his birthday on April 21st.²⁸ As has already been noted, in 1872, when Asa Gray was visiting John Muir in Yosemite, Merrill Moores, by then of college age, spent a summer in Yosemite with Muir, before proceeding to his freshman year at Willamette University in Oregon. "As I remember him," Moores was to record shortly before his death in 1929, "he [Gray] was an unusually handsome man, who, like Muir, wore a full beard, and presented a most impressive appearance. He spent about a week in the Valley and was with Muir all day long every day."

Muir and Moores went first to Danville, Illinois, by train, where they visited relatives of young Moores. On June 13th they left Danville, going first to Decatur and then to Bloomington. At three in the afternoon of the next day they arrived in Forreston and

struck out on foot for the "Prairie home of Mr. Neely," which was situated "on the prairie about seven miles southwest of Pecatonica," Illinois, apparently in Ridott Township. There, Muir and Moores botanized for a week.

Thoreau, on May 23, 1861, was traveling westward through this same stretch of prairie en route on the Chicago and Galena Union Railway from Chicago to Dunleith, Illinois, no more than five miles from the "Prairie home of Mr. Neely." At 2:22 on that Thursday afternoon, the train passed through Winnebago; after another twenty minutes it was passing through Pecatonica, some seven miles farther west. "Greatest rolling prairie without trees just beyond Winnebago," Thoreau scribbled in a note. "Last 40 miles in nw Ill quite hilly." It would be hard to believe that John Muir, if not Merrill Moores, did not tramp to within sight of the railroad during his week of botanizing on the prairie. In any event, a letter from Muir to Merrill Moores' mother was mailed from Pecatonica, and Merrill Moores recalled more than six decades later that they had traveled "From Rockford to Portage . . . by rail but by what railroad I have forgotten." Rockford, through which Thoreau and Mann had passed twenty minutes before arriving at Winnebago, is situated seven miles east of Winnebago. John Muir himself wrote that they had gone north to Portage "by Rockford and Janesville." Thus, from either Pecatonica or Winnebago, Muir and Moores traveled eastward some seven or fourteen miles along the same section of the Chicago and Galena Union Railway that Thoreau and Mann had traveled seven years before.

These coincidences and near-coincidences are remarkable because they encompass *all* of John Muir's earliest recorded botanical collecting trips. Beginning only in 1867, with his thousand-mile walk to the Gulf of Mexico, did Muir's path fail to cross or even coincide with that of Thoreau and Mann.

Summary and Miscellany

It was a New Englander, Jeanne C. Carr, who introduced Muir to New England — to her writers, her scientists, and most important, her unique contribution to American culture, New England Transcendentalism. Carr's husband, Ezra Slocum Carr, and James Davie Butler played similar though less central roles in this regard. Jeanne Carr, of all the apostles of New England culture who influenced Muir, was preeminent. Whether it was Thoreau's and Emerson's writings, Emerson himself, or Asa Gray, the Harvard botanist, Jeanne Carr first sent Muir their way, or they his. She was the *sine qua non*, and her role simply cannot be exaggerated. She may have failed to persuade Muir to leave the fastnesses of Yosemite in 1872 to see an ailing Louis Agassiz who was visiting San Francisco, but it was not for want of trying. Muir was too busy measuring ice flow in the Sierra that summer (aided, incidentally, by a college-bound Merrill Moores) to visit even Agassiz.

Two people I will have to mention only in passing, partly because their contributions to Muir were indirect, though real, and partly because any possible direct connections there may have been with Muir are elusive and would be very difficult to demonstrate. But they should be mentioned, as either agents or advocates of social attitudes that formed the cultural backdrop against which John Muir worked.

The first was Frederick Law Olmsted, the renowned landscape architect, a Connecticut Yankee, who played an early role in protecting Yosemite. While his approach to, or attitude toward, nature only palely reflected Thoreau's Transcendentalist approach,

Olmsted did help set the stage for the debut of John Muir a few years later. In 1872, a decade or so after he left California, Olmsted began a long-term collaboration with Charles Sprague Sargent on the design of the just-established Arnold Arboretum. The present layout of roads and plantings in the Arboretum is a direct consequence of their felicitous collaboration.

The other was Albert Bierstadt, who though born near Düsseldorf, Germany, was brought to New Bedford when he was only three and thus qualifies as a New Englander. He returned to Germany in the mid-1850s, when he was a young man, to study painting at Düsseldorf. After returning to this country in 1856, he traveled west and began painting western landscapes in the manner that was to make him very famous and rich. He fell on hard times when tastes in art inevitably changed two or three decades later, but in the meantime his canvasses of the American West — including some of the Yosemite Valley — brought home visually and vividly to easterners the natural beauty of the West. A painter of the so-called Rocky Mountain School, which was the successor to the Hudson River School and the Luminists, all of which were indebted to Transcendentalism, Bierstadt benefitted from the revolution Transcendentalism had wrought in America's attitudes toward wild nature. Bierstadt enlarged the tradition to accommodate an expanding America. One of his legatees was John Muir.

John Muir was annoyed by New Englanders' urging him to go to Boston. They must have seemed tiresome and smug. Yet they deserve credit for having helped Muir in one way or another. The Vermonters, at least, and it seems, Charles Sprague Sargent, were content that Muir remain where he was, doing what he was doing.

Conclusions

To summarize or epitomize New England's contribution to John Muir's career and, therefore, to America it can be argued that New England and New Englanders — New England culture — were John Muir's mentors to an amazing extent, especially during the crucial formative stages of his public career. New England herself influenced Muir at a distance — through her writers and painters, and through her displaced children in the earlier years. In later years, even a Brahmin contributed — perhaps because by then Muir was not merely Sierran, but Olympian. Then again, the Brahmin, Charles Sprague Sargent, was not bound by provincial Boston attitudes. In his profession Sargent was, like Muir, a self-made man.

New England had long since won emancipation from Calvinism by the time John Muir first made contact with her through the apostleship of Jeanne Carr — as well as through the ministrations of James Davie Butler. They showed Muir the way to liberation from the debilitating shackles of Daniel Muir's theology. Perhaps because of its primal experience with Calvinism, New England was well qualified to speak to John Muir's condition, was well qualified to point the way out.

The best in New England culture no longer passed Nature off as sinister, fallen, or mere commodity. George Perkins Marsh, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and above all, Henry D. Thoreau showed Muir the way. As time went on these New England writers spoke more and more forcefully to *America's* condition. Emerson gave America leave to fulfill her destiny by exploiting Nature if she must, but also (through his writings) gave John Muir leave to fulfill his, as he must, by preserving Nature. Thoreau, ever the consistent

one, chose the latter (preservation) and rejected the former (exploitation). It was Thoreau, I am convinced, who showed Muir the way to Yosemite and beyond — impelled him, perhaps.

The benefactions flowed in the opposite direction as well, eastward from Muir to New England. Marsh, Emerson, and Thoreau, even Charles Sprague Sargent, expressed support for Nature, insisting that forests and wildlife be preserved or — if exploited at all — be protected and managed well for later generations. But New England had been settled (that is, devastated) by Europeans very early. New England had no vast public domain to be apportioned wisely, no immense wilderness to be set off-limits to commercial exploitation, except, perhaps, in northern Maine. By 1850, Vermont itself was a lost cause in this regard. The opportunity to implement Emerson's, Marsh's, and Thoreau's words would have to come later, elsewhere, under the aegis of the federal government, and only after public opinion had been galvanized by the appalling depredations of untrammelled commercialism.

Much of New England's gift in this area to America in its literature and thought might have proved empty had John Muir not come along to implement some of New England's highest ideals. The ideals (which ultimately became all America's) would have remained frustrated, stillborn — ideals merely — had John Muir not implemented them. Muir fulfilled what stay-at-home New Englanders could only hope for, could only hope to atone for. The Transcendentalists had built many castles in the air. John Muir put a firm foundation under one of them.

The connections between Muir and New England moved in two directions, then. Muir and New England owe each other mutual debts of gratitude. Central to the link between them lie the writings of Henry D. Thoreau and the part played by Jeanne Carr in introducing Muir to them and to the writings of the other Transcendentalists.

Epilogue

And what can reasonably be made of the uncanny coincidence between Thoreau's career and Muir's, of the neat dovetailing of prophet into apostle? We might begin to answer by asking whether all coincidences are meaningless, whether the universe is devoid of meaning, mere cause and effect moving toward no particular end. I hesitate to speak for the universe at large, but to this infinitesimal part and parcel of Nature there is meaning in this coincidence at least, if in no other.

After all, what am I to make of the vanishingly small probability that both John Muir, the principal spiritual heir of Henry Thoreau, and Henry Thoreau himself would be in Madison, Wisconsin, on the same day, possibly at the same hour, when Thoreau was on his way home to die, his life's work over for all intents and purposes, save for the resolute pulling together of a few manuscripts for posthumous publication, and when John Muir had just left home and was in the earliest stages of his career?

And what should I conclude of Jeanne Carr's and James Davie Butler's being in Madison at that auspicious juncture in American conservation history? It was Nature herself, not Fate, I contend, who brought these coincidences about, wild Nature ensuring herself a future in America. With the Civil War just then beginning, perhaps it was time for Thoreau to pass from the scene, for once the new, ever more aggressive social order was ensconced after the war, a new hero would have to assume center stage, vigorous, armed

with incredible stamina, perseverance and enthusiasm, fabulous one-on-one encounters with wild Nature, and — above all — with Thoreau's own powerful Nature-centered philosophy.

I cannot help but wonder what America would be like now had John Muir not lived, or had his life not unfolded exactly as it did. Would we have the superb national park and wilderness systems we do, in the degree to which we have them? I doubt it. I like to believe that something immaterial — no thing — passed from Henry Thoreau to John Muir early on the afternoon of Thursday, June 27, 1861, something akin to fire — and that the fire ignited, energized, or was answered by some unique quality in John Muir's soul that would sustain him through a long and productive life, and that ultimately would bring all of us to the same concerns a full century and a quarter later. Sorely am I tempted to accept the suggestion a friend of mine put forth in the form of a question to me: Would you say, then, that Thoreau "died into" John Muir? Thoreau himself answered my friend's question decades before it was asked. "Every part of nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another," he had written six months before John Muir's birth.

Of course, I don't believe in such things any more than I believe in the kind of telepathy by which John Muir, atop North Dome, sensed James Davie Butler's presence in Yosemite in 1871 and later found him wandering on Mount Broderick, or by which he knew that his father was dying in Wisconsin, or his mother. But then, I am inclined to believe even less in meaningless coincidence.

NOTES:

1. A National Endowment for the Humanities stipend enabled me to begin research on the Muir-New England connection during a summer seminar conducted in Concord by Professor Walter Harding in 1979.

2. Biographical details for the major figures mentioned in this paper are based on a few standard works, viz.: for John Muir, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir*, by Linnie Marsh Wolfe (New York: Knopf, 1945), *The Life and Letters of John Muir*, two volumes, edited by William F. Badè (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1923, 1924), and *John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement*, by Stephen R. Fox (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981); for Henry D. Thoreau, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, by Walter Harding (New York: Knopf, 1965), and *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, fourteen volumes in two, edited by Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (New York: Dover, 1962); for Charles Sprague Sargent, *Charles Sprague Sargent and the Arnold Arboretum*, by Stephanie B. Sutton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); for Asa Gray, *Asa Gray 1810-1888*, by A. Hunter Dupree (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969); for Albert Bierstadt, *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West*, by Gordon Hendricks (New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d. [1973?]); for George Perkins Marsh, *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter*, by David Lowenthal (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); and for Frederick Law Olmsted, *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted*, by Laura Wood Roper (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), and *Park Maker: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted*, by Elizabeth Stevenson (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1977).

3. Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865-1895* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931), p. 78.

4. Wolfe, p. 83.

5. W.A. Ellis, compiler, *Sketch of the Life of James Davie Butler* (Northfield, Vermont, 1906).

6. Marjorie H. Nicolson, "James Marsh and the Vermont Transcendentalists," *Philosophical Review* 34 (January 1925): pp. 28-50. The discussion of the cousins Marsh is based on this source and on Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter*.

7. Nicolson, p. 35.

8. Information on Alcott and the Transcendental Club is based on statements in Nicolson (pp. 41-42), Joel Myerson, "Bronson Alcott's 'Journal for 1836,'" *Studies in the American Renaissance* 1978, Joel Myerson, editor (Twayne Studies in the American Renaissance) (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1978), pp. 17-104 (p. 26).

9. Odell Shepard, *Pedlar's Progress: The Life of Bronson Alcott* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937), p. 258. See

Joel Myerson, "A Calendar of Transcendental Club Meetings," *American Literature* 44 (May 1972): pp. 197-207 for details on the club's meetings.

10. Charles T. Morrissey, *Vermont: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton; Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981) gives good insight into certain aspects of Vermont character.

11. The originals of Sargent's letters are in the Bailey-Howe Memorial Library of the University of Vermont and are quoted with that library's permission. The quotations are taken from transcripts in the Archives of the Arnold Arboretum (Stephanne B. Sutton papers).

12. Most of the information in this paragraph and the two that follow comes from a letter of Charles Sprague Sargent to Robert Underwood Johnson (November 25, 1908), a copy of which is in the Archives of the Arnold Arboretum. Used with the permission of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. See also, Stephen A. Spongberg, "C.S. Sargent: Seeing the Forest and the Trees," *Orion* 3 (Autumn 1984): 4-11.

13. Sutton, pp. 156-57.

14. Charles Sprague Sargent, "John Muir," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 10 (January 1916), p. 37.

15. Badè, Vol. 2, pp. 269-70.

16. I base this conclusion on several published and unpublished items, including letters, related to the lives of both Merrill and Butler.

17. The information in this and following sections is drawn primarily from Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, and from Torrey and Allen, eds., *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*.

18. The weather data come from numerous published and unpublished sources. I have chronicled the onset of Thoreau's final illness in Edmund A. Schofield, "Time Recovering Itself: E. Harlow Russell's Thirty Years (and More) with Henry D. Thoreau," *The Concord Saunterer* 17 (August 1984): 14-48, and "The Origin of Thoreau's Fatal Illness," *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 171 (Spring 1985): p. 1-3.

19. David M. Ludlum, *Early American Winters II 1821-1870* (Boston: American Meteorological Society, 1968), p. 65.

20. The information about the effects of the winter on crops in New England and adjacent regions comes from several contemporary periodicals (e.g., *The Magazine of Horticulture*, *The Horticulturist*, and *The Gardener's Monthly*). The society that cancelled its harvest display in 1861 was the Worcester County (Massachusetts) Horticultural Society.

21. Wolfe and Badè supply the background for this section. Supplementary materials included catalogs of the Wisconsin State University for the period under consideration, photocopies of which were kindly supplied by the Division of Archives, University of Wisconsin — Madison (J. Frank Cook, Director, in particular), and staff members of The State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Geraldine Strey, Reference Librarian, in particular).

22. Details of Thoreau's "Journey West" come principally from Walter Harding, editor, *Thoreau's Minnesota Journey: Two Documents. Thoreau's Notes on the Journey West and The Letters of Horace Mann, Jr.*, Thoreau Society Booklet 16 (Genesco, NY, 1962). I have supplied details on train schedules and routes from various issues of *Snow's ABC Pathfinder Railway Guide for the New England States and Canada* (Boston, George K. Snow) and of *Appleton's Railway and Steam Navigation Guide* (New York: D. Appleton & Co.). In addition, photocopies of timetables published in Wisconsin newspapers, kindly supplied by The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, confirmed and augmented the information contained in *Snow's* and *Appleton's* guides.

23. George P. Marsh, *The Earth as Modified by Human Action. A New Edition of Man and Nature* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1874), pp. 579-80. The same passage appears in the first edition.

24. Henry Chandler Cowles, "The Ecological Relations of the Vegetation on the Sand Dunes of Lake Michigan," *Botanical Gazette* 27 (1899): 95-117, 167-202, 281-308, and 361-91.

25. "Commencement Exercises," *Daily Argus & Democrat* (Madison, WI), June 27, 1861. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin kindly supplied a photocopy of this item. Other details come from Wolfe and Consul W. Butterfield, *History of the University of Wisconsin* (Madison: University Press Co., 1879), pp. 86-87.

26. The weather data come from records held by the National Archives. Stations for southern Wisconsin on June 27, 1861, were New Buffalo, Madison, Rocky Run, Lakemills, Janesville, Hartford, Waterford, and Milwaukee.

27. Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter*, pp. 160-62, 185.

28. The quotations from "Notes on the Journey West" are from Harding, *Thoreau's Minnesota Journey*, pp. 3-4. Those from Wolfe are from *Son of the Wilderness*, pp. 85-87.

29. Details of the trip are based largely on Merrill Moores, "Recollections of John Muir as a Young Man," a typescript in the Holt-Atherton Center for Western Studies, and a letter from John Muir to Merrill Moore's mother that is owned by the Indiana Historical Society (John Muir to Julia Merrill Moores, June 18, 1867) and which is used with the permission of the Indiana Historical Society. This is the letter posted from Pecatonica; Muir wrote it at the "Prairie home of Mr. Neely."