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John Muir Newsletter, Fall 1991

John Muir Center for Regional Studies

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John Muir Newsletter

fall, 1991

university of the pacific

new series, volume 1 number 4

TO OUR READERS

Our readers and subscribers have responded enthusiastically to the first year of issues in the new series of the *John Muir Newsletter*. We here at the Muir Center are grateful for your accolades and encouragement, and we hope that more of you will become active supporters of the Center. We want to encourage you to demonstrate your support in two concrete ways. First, while we thank all our subscribers, we urge those of you who read the *Newsletter* but who have not yet become subscribers to do so immediately. Only through the development of a critical mass of subscribers can the *Newsletter* continue to publish and to expand its coverage of Muir-related information of interest. Since we all believe that this venture is a worthwhile one that ought to continue, it is our hope that a growing number of Muir enthusiasts will sign on as subscribers.

The second manner in which our readership can help the *Newsletter* in a concrete way is by continuing to submit information, news and features for publication. We on the staff are hopeful that your efforts in this regard will expand. We are happy to publicize any of your Muir-related activities and writings. We welcome any information on Muir publications, on forthcoming books or articles, book reviews and bibliographies of relevant information, of outings of interest to our readers, of dedications and commemorations, of environmental news and legislation, and so forth. Both the controversial and the mundane are welcome! Eventually, the *Newsletter* will include individual features such as forthcoming events, publications, etc., so that topics of interest are easily located by the readers. To realize these plans, the staff needs information from readers which can supplement our own efforts. So readers should very much consider this publication a joint effort, and keep us informed of all pertinent information. In short, let's all share our information so as to spread Muir-related news as far and wide as we can.



SAD NEWS: THE PASSING OF SHERRY HANNA

The John Muir Center staff was shocked and saddened by news of the death, November 3, of Mrs. Sherry Hanna, 85, widow of Strentzel Hanna, John Muir's eldest grandchild. Her heart suddenly gave out after a long and active life. For years after the death of her husband, Sherry had been the caretaker of the Muir-Strentzel family cemetery near her Martinez home. She was a personal friend of many Muir scholars, often opening her home to visitors interested in the Muir-Strentzel story and in her personal collection of papers and artifacts. A supporter of the John Muir Center for Regional Studies as well as the John Muir National Historic Site at Martinez, she was a spokesperson for the Muir-Hanna families and a true friend of history.

1992 CALIFORNIA HISTORY INSTITUTE TO HEADLINE THE CHANGING CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENT

Plans are being finalized for the next annual California History Institute. On April 23-25, 1992, the Institute will be held featuring sessions on the subject "California Immigrants: People, Plants and Animals." The various sessions and speakers at the conference will observe the 500th anniversary of the Columbian encounter with the Western Hemisphere to focus on the environmental consequences of that seminal event. Incoming people and new plants and animals have been responsible for a dramatic transformation of the Americas, some positive and many disastrous. The focus on this timely and important topic at the sessions, followed by a regional field trip, will give participants a major overview of our society and environment. Details of the various sessions will be announced in the next *Newsletter*. Be sure to mark your calendar for this important event and plan to be in attendance.

STETSON AS MUIR: SCHEDULE UPDATE

In response to continued reader interest in the authentic Lee Stetson performances as John Muir, here is an updated and corrected schedule.

Nov. 25- Jan. 4, 1992- Yosemite National Park
Feb 6- Yosemite National Park
Feb. 8-14- San Antonio, TX
Feb. 20- Ojai, CA (Cate School)
Feb 21- Santa Barbara, CA
Feb. 28- Carmel, CA
March 5-6- Nevada City, CA
March 7- Renaissance, CA
March 21-22- Wilderness Convention, New Jersey
March 28- Cleveland, OH
April 4- Pittsburgh, PA

For further information, including new dates and any schedule changes, please contact Lee Stetson, Wild Productions, Box 811, Yosemite, CA 95389.

HIKING THE MUIR TRAIL WITH ONE OF OUR READERS

Don Scheese hiked the entire John Muir Trail in the summer of 1991, reading Muir's journals of his southern Sierra sojourns as he followed in his footsteps. Subsequently, Scheese gave an illustrated talk at the 1991 Western Literature Association meeting in Estes Park, CO, entitled "Meditating with Muir on the John Muir Trail." It is part of a longer article that he is working on in which he stresses the importance of fieldwork to ecocriticism. For further information, contact Don Scheese at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA 95053.

NEW PUBLICATION OF INTEREST

North Dakota Quarterly has now published the theme issue to which we alerted our readers sometime ago. The issue is dedicated to Nature Writers/Writing, and contains eighteen different essays on nature writing. One is an article on John Muir by John Tallmadge; six are original essays on nature writing. Copies can be ordered by writing Robert Lewis, editor, *North Dakota Quarterly*, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND 58202-8237.

JOHN MUIR NEWSLETTER.

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FALL, 1991

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VICTORIANS AND MEADOWLARKS: TWO MUIR LETTERS REDISCOVERED

*Editor's note: buried in an obscure clipping in the John Muir Family Collection at the University of Pacific are reprints of two long-forgotten letters John Muir wrote to Katherine Hittell in 1895. They are contained in an article on songbird protection by Juliet Wilbor Tompkins, a journalist from Oakland who later was an editor for Munsey's Magazine as well as a freelance writer and novelist. Too long to be fully reprinted, the article is indicative of the songbird preservation movement in the 1890s, which in the Bay Area was led, not coincidentally, by outspoken feminists like Sarah McChesney, Mary McHenry Keith, and Katherine Hittell. The nineteenth century connection between feminists and conservation activists needs extensive study, as does the influence of Bay Area feminists on Muir. Preliminary discussion of these questions can be found in R.H. Limbaugh, "Stickeen and the Moral Education of John Muir," *Environmental History Review*, 15 (Spring 1991), 25-45.*

The excerpt below was found in Muir's clipping file and probably comes from The San Francisco Examiner in the spring of 1895. The two letters were not included in the 1986 microform edition of the John Muir Papers, and are reprinted here courtesy of the Holt Atherton Library and the Muir-Hanna Trust.

PROTECT OUR SONGBIRDS

SOME ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN SOON TO SAVE THE WARBLERS

If it be true that not a sparrow falls to the ground unnoted, what cumbersome records must be piling up to confront us! Watch the women that pass along the street and you will be appalled at the crimes that are committed in the name of vanity, for on nine hats out of ten balance the fragments of a drawn and quartered bird.... If the half-starved dogs and superfluous cats could be stuffed and used for millinery purposes, women might decorate themselves to the uttermost limits of their barbaric instincts, and not a protest would be raised; but these poor little airships of nature, who earn their own living and contribute more than their share to the beauty and harmony of the world, must they go?

That is not a merely rhetorical question. They are going fast, and if we want to save them, something must

be done about it. Orioles are nearly extinct in California, humming birds are growing scarcer every year, and all the tribes who have been cursed with bright plumage are swiftly diminishing. As though it were not enough to lose those, the sweetest singers of all birdland are being slaughtered by thousands to serve the ignoble purpose of an entree....

A number of individual attempts have been made in California to check this wholesale slaughter. Great efforts were made a year ago to protect at least the meadow larks, who came into the markets by the thousand as soon as the quail season was over. It would be as fitting to split up celestial harps for kindling wood, but the tiny musicians brought a dollar a dozen and nothing else mattered. Among the people who resented this was Miss Katherine Hittell, a lover of all things Californian, and she, aided by Mr. W. C. Chapman of the Academy of Sciences and several others, brought up the question at the Sportsmen's Convention. The result was that a clause for protecting meadow larks was attached to a bill for shortening the open season for quail and sent in to the Legislature. A member from the country frowned at the clause. "What's the good of that?" he demanded. "The bird only gullups out a few notes, anyway. Strike it out." And so they did.

Gullups out a few notes! Well, if the honorable member preferred the strings of an accordion to that ecstatic little round of melody, perhaps he was more to be pitied than blamed. The friends of gulluper managed to pass a city ordinance forbidding the sale of meadow larks in the San Francisco markets during the breeding season, but such things are hard to enforce and the proscribed birds are defiantly smuggled in. At a certain boarding-house the guests feast upon them once a week, as once Nero did on the tongues of nightingales.

"Why, apart from sentiment, it is a plain question of mathematics," Miss Hittell said. "A meadow lark, cooked, gives one person pleasure for, at most, ten minutes. A living one gives pleasure to a whole community all its life long. It's a clear case of the greatest good to the greatest number.... One or two have suggested that the meadow lark was destructive of crops and fruit, but I have letters from some of the most prominent farmers and orchardists of the State, such as Mr. A.T. Hatch and Mrs. Buckingham of Vacaville, to prove that that isn't true, while Dr. Cooper in his 'Ornithology of California' claims that the meadow lark is a valuable friend, who eats destructive insects. And, anyway, if so many birds are protected every year for the men's pleasure, it seems to me that just this one might be saved for the women. If *The Examiner* takes this up I will help in any way I can, and so will plenty of others."

That this last is true Miss Hittell has had plenty of proof, in such form as the following letters from John Muir:

Martinez, April, bird song month, 1895.

My dear Miss Hittell: I heartily sympathize with you, as you know, in your efforts to save our songbirds. Better

far and more reasonable it would be to burn our pianos and violins for firewood than to cook our divine midgits of songlarks for food. I am now stupidly busy writing a book and cannot do anything worth while in the way of writing for the larks. But the work of saving them by creating public opinion in their favor will have to go on year after year, and I hope I may still do something to help. I shall call the attention of the Sierra Club to the subject at the next meeting. With best wishes, I am very truly yours, John Muir.

Martinez, April 30, 1895.

My dear Miss Hittell: Thanks for your information about the blessed larks. We will save them yet. Keep on pegging away at the divine work until the public sympathy is aroused. Civilized people are still very nearly savage, and much work must be done 'ere they see the brutality of their ways. I consider the meadow lark the best, most influential, most characteristic of all California song birds--the least earthy, the most divine and I could say no more were I to speak till Doomsday. Keep busy late and early. Next Legislature you will be more successful if you begin now. Let me know when I can help you. Ever cordially yours. John Muir.

The article ends with an eloquent call for public support.

LETTERS FROM READERS

J. Parker Huber, who is researching Muir's holograph notes in the back of his personal copy of Thoreau's The Maine Woods, located in the Holt Atherton Library at the University of the Pacific, has submitted the following list of questions:

1. Did John Muir ever encounter moose? if so, where?
2. Muir had a connection with Abba and Moses Woolson of Boston. Any idea how he met them?
3. I am trying to decipher Muir's handwriting He uses "Al. Ex" several times. . . . What do you think they stand for?

Our reply:

1. We don't recall any moose confrontations, but you might check his family correspondence for July-November, 1898, while he was with C. S. Sargent and W. M. Canby on the Eastern forest tour. His journal for that period is

unfortunately missing, but he wrote letters home that may refer to animals he confronted, especially in Maine and Vermont. See the *John Muir Papers*, Microform edition, Reel 10, letters to Helen, Wanda and Louis.

2. Muir probably knew the Woolsons through Jeanne Carr, who introduced him to many acquaintances from the Carrs' New England days.

3. "Al" is Muir's shorthand for Alaska; "Ex" is his shorthand for Excellent. He would frequently note passages on subjects he found interesting, and would express various comments assessing quality. In some cases his references were to subjects he was working on himself. This would be the case for notes in *Maine Woods*. While reading Thoreau he was working on his Alaska opus which he never completed before his death, but he apparently found Thoreau's remarks particularly relevant to his own Alaska experience and ideas.

RECENT MUIR RESEARCH AT THE HOLT-ATHERTON LIBRARY

The John Muir photograph collection provides a wealth of resource material for those doing research or publications on Muir. The over 3,300 photographs and illustrations in many ways still remains an untapped resource with most of the material never having been published. Although Muir never carried a camera, he received photos from a variety of Yosemite and Sierra visitors, most of whom he knew personally and often escorted. Included in the collection are works of famed photographers such as Edward S. Curtis, Theodore P. Lukens, and Eadweard W. Muybridge.

Some examples of recent usage:

The National Geographic Society recently made use of a Muir portrait from the collection for an Italian

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New Hours at the Holt-Atherton Library

Due to budget cutbacks, the Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections will henceforth be open for research from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. from Monday through Friday. Researchers who travel to make use of the collections may require extended hours and are requested to call Daryl Morrison, Head of Special Collections, (209) 946-2404 to make an appointment in advance.

TRACING MUIR'S 1877 SHASTA TREK

John Muir wrote of his first view of Mount Shasta, "All my blood turned to wine, and I have not been weary since." This September, John Muir "returned" to Mount Shasta, in the person of Lee Stetson -- the actor widely acclaimed for his portrayals of Muir.

Stetson and naturalist Kurt Rademacher led eight Muir enthusiasts on a week-long trip retracing Muir's September, 1877, trip up the flanks of Mount Shasta, across the McCloud and Fall Rivers to Mount Lassen, down to Chico, and floating down the Sacramento River to hike among the Sutter Buttes.

On the original trip, Muir accompanied Sir Joseph Hooker, Dr. and Mrs. Asa Gray and the Bidwells of Chico on a botanical excursion to Shasta. After Hooker and the Grays left the excursion, Muir accepted John and Annie Bidwell's invitation to accompany them and Annie's sister, Sallie Kennedy, southeast across the then largely unsettled area to Mount Lassen. After descending to Chico, Muir stayed a week with the Bidwells on their 22,000-acre ranch, enjoying their hospitality and cementing what proved to be a lifelong friendship. The Bidwell's carpenter built Muir a small boat in which he floated solo for five days down the Sacramento, exploring its jungle-like banks and climbing the irresistible Sutter Buttes.

Rademacher, in designing the 1991 trip, researched Muir's published writings, the Bidwell's diaries and reminiscences of the trip, and subsequent letters between them. From these accounts and references to ranches and landmarks, he plotted the 1877 route both on topographic maps and in the field. Local historical societies helped track down maps of 1870s ranch owners and other records to clarify confusing references. In other cases, notes on vegetation and geology helped determine locations or elevation, though one "missing" lake had evolved into a meadow during the ensuing 114 years. The diaries and other records also revealed daily activities and humorous anecdotes of the 1877 trek.

The 1991 tour was one of The Nature Conservancy's "Wild California Excursions," a series of special trips which raise money to help buy preserves and restore habitat for rare and endangered species. Along the route the small group visited six Conservancy preserves that maintain and protect the landscape and its wildlife so that it remains much

as Muir and his co-travelers first saw it.

Condensing the original month-long trip into one week, the group traveled by van instead of horseback, but made many stops and nature walks. Except for one night at a hike-in cabin with catered dinner at the McCloud River Preserve, lodging and meals were at bed and breakfast inns and fine restaurants along the route. Rademacher provided lively commentary on the local history and natural history throughout the trip, with other Nature Conservancy staff along the way sharing insight on their special areas of expertise.

Out on the trail, Stetson shifted spontaneously into the Muir role as the party happened upon familiar plants, animals or rock formations. In the evenings around the fire or out on a veranda, he performed adaptations of his regular shows with locally relevant additions, such as Muir's "frozen and broiled" night atop Mount Shasta surviving a blizzard in a sputtering fumarole.

Among the highlights of the trip were hiking at timberline on Mount Shasta; finding 1877 camp sites there, at McCloud River Falls, Bear Flat, Pit River and Butte Lake; getting caught in a "glorious" thunder and hail storm while hiking to Cinder Cone; staying in the summer house that the Bidwells later built at Big Meadows (Rademacher's great-grandfather was Bidwell's carpenter who built this house, now a B&B inn on Lake Almanor); exploring the boiling mud pots on Mount Lassen; a special evening tour of the Bidwell Mansion in Chico; canoeing along the Sacramento River; visiting the Conservancy's new oak and cottonwood restoration forests along the river; and Lee Stetson performing Muir on a narrow sandbar while the group sat in three anchored jetboats to avoid the mosquitos on shore.

Rademacher particularly enjoys leading tours that combine nature and history on the preserves, such as exploring Ishi's homeland and the whales and wineries of Santa Cruz Island. The Muir trip, however, is the realization of a dream since he became Director of Field Trips for The Nature Conservancy of California two years ago. The combination of a naturalist with the Muir impersonation by Stetson made the trip a real success. They hope to offer a similar trip in the future. Interested parties may phone Kurt Rademacher at (415) 777-0862 Ext.223.

JOHN MUIR AND THE 1872 EARTHQUAKE: WHERE WAS EAGLE ROCK?

Dr. Gerald F. Wieczorek of the U.S. Geological Survey has been evaluating rockfall hazard in Yosemite Valley in cooperation with the National Park Service and has been trying to pinpoint the location of Eagle Rock, whose thunderous collapse during the 1872 earthquake Muir witnessed and described in his 1912 book *The Yosemite*. Muir's remarks about this "noble earthquake" should be read in full to appreciate his descriptive powers and the romantic flavor of this reminiscence written nearly 40 years after the event. This excerpt omits all but the clues bearing upon the location of Eagle Rock:

At half-past two o'clock of a moonlit morning in March, I was awakened by a tremendous earthquake.... I feared that the sheer-fronted Sentinel Rock, towering above my cabin, would be shaken down.... The Eagle Rock on the south wall, about half a mile up the Valley, gave way and I saw it falling in thousands of the great boulders I had so long been studying.... After the ground began to calm I ran across the meadow to the river to see in what direction it was flowing and was glad to find that down the valley was still down.

Following these clues has not been easy, as Dr. Wieczorek describes:

We are uncertain exactly where Muir's rock avalanche occurred because Eagle Rock is not identified on any maps of Yosemite Valley dating from that period or more recently. A stereographic photograph by Eadweard Muybridge identified Eagle Rock on top of what is currently known as Taft Point. The setting for an 1872 photograph by J.J. Reilly (Stereo No. 555) captioned "Earthquake Rock Fragments" has been recently relocated below Taft Point. Although this apparently resolves the location of Eagle Rock and Muir's rockfall avalanche, there remains a geographical dilemma. If Muir's cabin was located (as best we know) near the swinging bridge near Black's Hotel, below Sentinel Rock and east of Leidig Meadow, then Eagle Rock (Taft Point) was about 1.8 miles southwest or "down valley" (contrary to Muir's "up the valley"). Was Muir disoriented? Could his Eagle Rock have been different from Muybridge's? Could Muir have

been located in a different location than his cabin when he made his observations upon which he based his description? Are there other explanations for his location?

In response to these questions, we searched Muir's journals and correspondence for additional clues. His letter to Emerson on March 26, 1872 claimed that he tumbled out of his cabin and after a pause heard Eagle Rock falling "from up the Valley opposite Yosemite Fall...." Later, in working on his "Sierra Studies," he wrote: "On the 22d of March 1872 I was so fortunate as to witness the sudden formation of one of these interesting taluses by the precipitation of the Yosemite cliff formerly known as the Eagle...." The latter part of the sentence is crossed over, and "Eagle Rock" is inserted after "Yosemite." (see *Studies in the Sierra* No. II, ca. 1874, *John Muir Papers*, Microform Ed., Reel 36, 04713). This suggests "Eagle Rock" was a later adaption, not in common usage during the 1870s.

Whether Muir was "up" or "down" the Valley of course depends on the location of his cabin relative to the rockfall. But which cabin? Muir had several Yosemite homesites. His first cabin, constructed late in 1869, was close to little Yosemite Creek near Lower Yosemite Falls. This he evidently left in January, 1871, for a "hang nest" he built under a gable at the north end of Hutchings' Mill, very close to his original cabin site. In the fall of that year he moved into another "cabin" at Black's Hotel, where he spent the winter of 1871-1872 working on manuscript drafts. Sometime in the spring of 1872 he selected another cabin site and began construction. A letter from Muir to James Cross, April 25, 1872, refers to this third site: "I am building a cabin for my indefin[ate?] self in a clump of carnus bushes by the river bank but will be at 'Black's' this summer." This cabin was located "up" the Valley near the Lamon home on the Merced River bank just opposite the Royal Arches. It clearly was not the cabin he was using at the time of the earthquake.

That leaves us with the vicinity of Black's Hotel as the best candidate for the site Muir occupied during the earthquake. Since Muir was operating as caretaker during his stay at Black's, his "cabin" must have been very near the rest of the resident rooms, which were constructed in an L-shape at a site in the old Lower Yosemite Village area on the south side of the river southeast of the current swinging bridge. A detailed site map showing Black's Hotel and Muir's earlier and later cabin sites can be found in the National Park Service *Historic Resource Study*, Yosemite, v. 3 (Sept. 1987).

Dr. Wieczorek's dilemma is clear when the Black's Hotel site is compared to a geophysical map of the Valley: Taft Point is clearly "down" river from the old Lower Yosemite Village site. Only three explanations are

possible: 1) Muir's description was in error; 2) Muir's caretaker cabin was downriver, far from Black's Hotel; 3) Taft Point was not the site of Muir's "Eagle Rock." We're inclined to the latter option. Yosemite nomenclature was still in transition in the early 1870s. It seems more than possible that there was another "Eagle" rock or spire upriver from Black's on the south rim. Note the term itself was applied on the north rim as well ("Eagle Peak"). Muir's letter quoted earlier said the fallen rock was "opposite Yosemite Falls," which, if accurate, places the site more upriver from Black's than downriver. Finally, the fact that Reilly, who was guided by Muir on a High Sierra trip two years after the 'quake, did not use the term "Eagle" in describing the rock fragments below what later became known as Taft Point, makes me all the more cautious about accepting Muybridge's designation as definitive. Taking Muir's notes at face value, if he were at Black's when the earthquake occurred, and if the rockslide was about a half-mile upriver from that point on the south rim, then the best location for the site of Eagle Rock would be somewhere in the vicinity of what is now Union Point, above LeConte Lodge. That makes as much sense to us as the Taft Point site.

Any readers having different views or information are invited to write the editor of the *John Muir Newsletter* or to contact Dr. Wicczorek directly at the U.S. Geological Survey, National Center, MS 922, Reston, VA 22092.

(continued from page 5)

publication, *Yosemite*, produced by the Touring Club Italiano of Milan.

The National Historic Site has requested a number of research photographs showing the grounds and landscape of the Muir-Strentzel home and Old Adobe.

Ginger Wadsworth, a regional author, will be using Muir quotes and photographs in a forthcoming children's book. Recently reviewed by Shirley Sargent for accuracy, the book will feature over 60 photographs from the Muir collection. The book is expected to be out in early 1992. The book will be described in more detail upon its publication.

Earth Magazine is preparing an article, for release in its January, 1992, issue which will feature a page from John Muir's 1879 Alaska journal. *Earth* is a new geoscience magazine for "general audience, educators and students."

Marshall Editions, London, is preparing a book, *Natural Wonders of North America*, to be published by Harlequin Books in the United States and released next year. The editors are now considering items from the Muir collection for inclusion.

John Rohrbach, a photography research consultant, recently searched the Muir collection for images which could be used in the Philadelphia Museum of Art exhibit, entitled *Moments of Grace*. Mr. Rohrbach was greatly impressed with the wealth and condition of the collection and made photocopies of over 40 photographs to consider for the exhibit. The exhibit will survey the best of American landscape photography whether created by artist-photographers or amateurs. Michael E. Hoffman, Adjunct Curator of the Alfred Stieglitz Center at the Museum will direct the project.

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Please join us by completing the following form and returning it, along with a \$15. check made payable to The John Muir Center for Regional Studies, University of the Pacific, 3601 Pacific Ave., Stockton, CA 95211.

Yes, I want to join the John Muir Center and continue to receive the *John Muir Newsletter*. Enclosed is \$15 for a one-year membership. (Use this form to renew your current membership).

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The *Newsletter's* First Year
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The John Muir Center For Regional Studies
University of the Pacific, Stockton CA, 95211

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