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The John Muir Newsletter, Spring 2005

The John Muir Center for Environmental Studies

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Perhaps one of John Muir's earliest understandings about the measurement of wealth may have come as he heard his father calling down the well to him, "get in the bucket!" This fateful moment had come about because his father would not spend the money for a professional well digger and blaster. Why hire someone when you had a sturdy son to dig through the Wisconsin sandstone "from early morning until dark, day after day, for weeks and months?" On this particular morning the well had filled with carbonic acid gas. Moments after being lowered into the well for more chiseling, John had begun to lose consciousness. When he heard his father call to him, John looked up, caught a "glimpse of a branch of a bur-oak tree which leaned out over the mouth of the shaft," crawled into the bucket and was lifted to the surface and to life.

As a young man, Muir worked in factories and invented many money-saving devices or methods. That was until he was temporarily blinded in an accident while tightening a piece of machinery. These brushes with tragedy inspired him to think more of the riches of "God's inventions," than those of industry. In February of this year John Muir's

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CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

JOHN MUIR IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE
MARCH 31-APRIL 1, 2006

College of the Pacific’s John Muir Center will host a conference at the Stockton campus of University of the Pacific on March 31-April 1, 2006. The focus of the 2006 California History Institute will be “John Muir in Global Perspective.”

Conference organizers are seeking paper proposals on aspects of John Muir’s Scottish roots; Muir’s world travels; Muir’s historical impact across the globe in such areas as botany, geology, mountaineering, and conservation; correspondence and friendships abroad; and Muir’s contemporary legacy worldwide.

Highlights of the conference will include a preview of the exhibition on naturalist John Muir, artist William Keith, and University of California geology professor Joseph LeConte, curated by Steve Pauly of Grass Valley, California. The three Bay area residents began meetings in 1889 that led to formation of the Sierra Club in 1892. The exhibition which originated at Saint Marys College this spring will be mounted at The Haggin Museum of Stockton during April. In addition, an exhibition in the University Library of original John Muir manuscripts from the John Muir Papers will be available for viewing during the conference.

Conference attendees are encouraged to visit Yosemite National Park during the annual meeting of The Yosemite Association on March 25. Contact information on Muir-related sites in northern California will be provided for those who want to tour Yosemite, Muir’s home in Martinez, and/or Muir Woods before or after the conference. We expect to host a number of Scots who are active in promotion of John Muir’s legacy abroad and will have Harold Wood, Chair of the Sierra Club Education Committee, and Garrett Burke, designer of the John Muir California State Quarter with us throughout the weekend.

Send abstract and brief vitae by November 1 to W. R. Swagerty/John Muir Center/University of the Pacific/Stockton/CA 95211; (209) 946-2578 (FAX); or email johnmuir@pacific.edu

Sketch of John Muir from: www.saintgregorys.org/Media/JohnMuir-sket2.jpg

(News & Notes continued on page 7)
image was minted on to the California state quarter. I wondered if he would have been humbled or dismayed at this use of his likeness. How did John Muir feel about wealth and money? He did not die a poor man, mostly because of his hard work managing his family’s fruit ranch in Martinez. But well before managing the ranch his resourcefulness ensured that he would always be comfortable – albeit by his own definition. Let us take a look at a few passages from Muir’s writing that bolster his view on wealth.

A little money we all need nowadays, but there is nothing about the getting of it that should rob us of our wits. Gold digging is only a dull chore, and no sane man will allow it to blind him and draw him away from the real blessing of existence. Life is too short to allow much time for money-making.” ("John Muir on the Sea"..., San Francisco Examiner, August 23, 1897)

I know that I could under ordinary circumstances accumulate wealth and obtain a fair position in society, and I am arrived at an age that requires that I should chose some definite course for life. But I am sure that the mind of no truant schoolboy is more free and disengaged from all the grave plans and purposes and pursuits of ordinary orthodox life than mine. (Letter to his sister Sarah, August 1, 1869)

This quickly acquired wealth [of the California sheep owners] usually creates desire for more. Then indeed the wool is drawn close down over the poor fellows’ eyes, dimming or shutting out almost everything worth seeing. (My First Summer in the Sierra, p.30)

Who wouldn’t be a mountaineer! Up here all the world’s prizes seem nothing (My First Summer In the Sierra, p.206)

Few in these hot, dim, fricthy times are quite sane or free; choked with care like clocks full of dust, laboriously doing so much good and making money,- or so little, - they are no longer good from themselves. (“Wild Parks and Forests Reservations of the West,” Atlantic Monthly, January 1898, p.16)

Nevermore, however weary, should one faint by the way who gains the blessings of one mountain day; whatever his fate, long life, short life, stormy or calm, he is rich forever. (My first Summer in the Sierra, p.82)

Pure science is a most unmarketable commodity in California. Conspicuous energetic, unmixed materialism rules supreme in all classes. (Letter to Mrs. (Jeanne) Carr, February 24, 1869)

Beauty and science have led me to many wild places and countries. Many times I could have become money-rich, yet time-poor. But I have chosen Wild Beauty. When I was in Argentina looking at trees, a reporter asked me what my occupation was. I told him, “Tramp—I’m seventy-four, and still good at it!’ In all my wandering days, I have never met anyone as free as myself. The world’s prizes mean nothing to me. Whoever gains the blessings of one mountain day is rich forever. (This is a paraphrase of Muir thoughts for John Muir: My Life with Nature, by Joseph Cornell, p.69)

Years ago a friend of mine and I were discussing riches and he said that wealth could be determined by having lots of money or having few material needs. Even in his old age and monetary wealth, John Muir fell into the latter category. As to the quarter, Muir would have probably been more concerned about the attention drawn to him than his likeness being used as currency. However, he would have been overjoyed to see his glorious Yosemite there too – educating all Americans to the immeasurable wealth obtained by visiting, respecting, and preserving nature.

(Most of the quotations were found in Peter Browning’s John Muir In His Own Words: A Book Of Quotations, Great West Books, 1988. I have come across many wonderful quotations in various sources on the internet and in books. However, most were frustratingly paraphrased and unattributed.)

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BOOK REVIEW

The Battle over Hetch Hetchy
America's Most Controversial Dam
and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism
by Dr. Robert W. Righter

submitted by Ron Good
Executive Director, Restore Hetch Hetchy

In March, Dr. Robert Righter’s new historical book on Hetch Hetchy was released by Oxford University Press. Dr. Righter grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and is currently a Research Professor of History at Southern Methodist University. The book has already been reviewed in the New Yorker, the Washington Post, and the San Francisco Chronicle.

The book is available on our website, for $28, which includes postage and shipping. See www.hetchhetchy.org

The following description and reviews were released by Oxford University Press:

In the wake of the devastating 1906 earthquake and fire, the city of San Francisco desperately needed reliable supplies of water and electricity. Its mayor, James Phelan, pressed for the damming of the Tuolumne River in the newly created Yosemite National Park, setting off a firestorm of protest. For the first time in American history, a significant national opposition arose to defend and preserve nature, led by John Muir and the Sierra Club, who sought to protect what they believed was the right of all Americans to experience natural beauty, particularly the magnificent mountains of the Yosemite region.

Yet the defenders of the valley, while opposing the creation of a dam and reservoir, did not intend for it to be maintained as wilderness. Instead they advocated a different kind of development—the building of roads, hotels, and an infrastructure to support recreational tourism. Using articles, pamphlets, and broadsides, they successfully whipped up public opinion against the dam. Letters from individuals began to pour into Congress by the thousands, and major newspapers published editorials condemning the dam.

The fight went to the floor of Congress, where politicians debated the value of scenery and the costs of western...
development. Ultimately, passage of the Raker Act in 1913 by Congress granted San Francisco the right to flood the Hetch Hetchy Valley. A decade later the O'Shaughnessy Dam, the second largest civil engineering project of its day after the Panama Canal, was completed. Yet conflict continued over the ownership of the watershed and the profits derived from hydroelectricty. To this day the reservoir provides San Francisco with a pure and reliable source of drinking water and an important source of power.

Although the Sierra Club lost this battle, the controversy stirred the public into action on behalf of national parks.

Future debates over dams and restoration clearly demonstrated the burgeoning strength of grassroots environmentalism. In a narrative peopled by politicians and business leaders, engineers and laborers, preservationists and ordinary citizens, Robert W. Righter tells the epic story of the first major environmental battle of the twentieth century, which reverberates to this day.

**Reviews**

*The Battle over Hetch Hetchy* is something beyond merely the best book anyone has ever written on confluence of canyon, dam, and city that so shaped the story of the modern American West. It is both a well-argued history and a beautifully-written testimony of hubris and loss, even possible redemption. If our places and times really do shape us,

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Californian Bob Righter was born to write this book. He now joins Pinchot, Muir, Brower as part of its story.--Dan Flores, author of *The Natural West*

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This book is a masterful study of the major symbolic controversy of American
environmental history, the clash between resource exploitation and preservation of wild nature. In his gracefully written, skillfully researched work, Robert Righter, one of our leading environmental historians, untangles the surprisingly complicated and contradictory debate over Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy, which has continued into the 21st century and remains as relevant today as it was a century ago when John Muir tried and failed to stop the city of San Francisco from damming the pristine Sierra valley for public water and electrical power. In the current climate, when the nation and world face the same vital larger issues, and when forces are mounting to tear out what may have been an unnecessary human defilement of nature, this wise and sensitive book could not have come at a better time.--Richard J. Orsi, California State University, Hayward

Tragedy, the philosopher Hegel tells us, can come from the clash of competing goods. In this thoroughly researched, elegantly written, and even-handed history, Robert Righter chronicles how alternative views of America's future -- urbanism versus the preservation of the environment -- collided at Hetch Hetchy Valley. The founding of cities inevitably involves a sacrifice of environment. In losing the Hetch Hetchy Valley, America more than paid its price to bring into being metropolitan San Francisco.--Kevin Starr, author of the *Americans and the California Dream* series

** Righter tells for the first time ever the full story of this famous wild valley in California and the battle that once raged, and is still raging today, over its fate. This is exemplary environmental history-well-researched, balanced and fair-minded, yet told with passion for the natural world.--Donald Worster, author of *A River Running West: The Life of John Wesley Powell*
**NEWS & NOTES (continued from page 2)**

**MOUNTAIN DAYS**
Mountain Days, the outdoor musical epic about the lives and loves of the great naturalist, John Muir, is going to play again this summer: Aug 3-7, 2005 at the Muir Amphitheatre in Martinez. There are new windscreens, fencing, box office, concessions building, picnic tables and a great show. At the amphitheatre, the Willow Theatre is also presenting an Independence Day weekend celebration featuring the companion piece to Muir, Sacagawea - symphonic suite and a production of The Sound of Music. It all starts July 1st and runs thru Aug 7. For more information, call (925) 798-1300 or visit www.willowstheatre.org

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**UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF JOHN MUIR GO ONLINE**
More than 100 pages of original letters by John Muir, America's most celebrated environmentalist, went online in April on the Wisconsin Historical Society's Web site. The 30 letters — believed to be the first important collection of original Muir manuscripts to be made available on the Web — were written between 1861 and 1914 to several friends from his childhood and youth in Wisconsin. "Because they're intimate personal letters spanning his entire adult life," says Society librarian Michael Edmonds, "they document all the major turning points in his career." Although typed transcripts of some of the letters have been quoted by scholars, all but six are published in their entirety for the first time on the Society's Turning Points in Wisconsin History Web site. They can be found in the online collection along with other letters and manuscripts relating to Muir, including his brother David's description of their childhood. This collection be found at: www.wisconsinhistory.org/highlights/archives/2005/04/muir.asp

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Costs are a problem everywhere, especially in academia today. We can only continue publishing and distributing this modest newsletter through support from our readers. By becoming a member of the John Muir Center, you will be assured of receiving the Newsletter for a full year. You will also be kept on our mailing list to receive information on the biennial California History Institute and other events and opportunities sponsored by the John Muir Center.

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

Manuscripts on any aspect of John Muir’s life or legacy are welcomed for consideration in the John Muir Newsletter. Please send submissions in hard copy or in Word or Wordperfect electronic files to W. R. Swagerty, Editor, at the address on this newsletter, or send to johnmuir@pacific.edu

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The

John Muir

Newsletter

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