

THOREAU ON THE IRISH



According to Noel Ignatiev's **HOW THE IRISH BECAME WHITE**, "To be acknowledged as white, it was not enough for the Irish to have a competitive advantage over Afro-Americans in the labor market; in order for them to avoid the taint of blackness it was necessary that no Negro be allowed to work in occupations where Irish were to be found."



IRISH PHYSIOGNOMY.

According to the jokes that were going the rounds in those days among non-Irish white racists (the bulk of the population, actually), the Irish were "Negroes turned inside out" while the American free blacks were "smoked Irish."

It has been well said, that inside the charmed Caucasian chalk circle it is the sum of what you are not -not Indian, not Negro, not a Jew, not Irish, etc.- that make you what you are. And, that's as true now as it was then.

1837

September 12, Tuesday: In [Boston](#) during this month a mob of [Irish](#)-haters had attacked a military formation of the Irish-dominated Montgomery Guards. There was such animosity within the militia in regard to its [Irish](#) units, that a military review scheduled for this day on Boston Common had to be suspended.

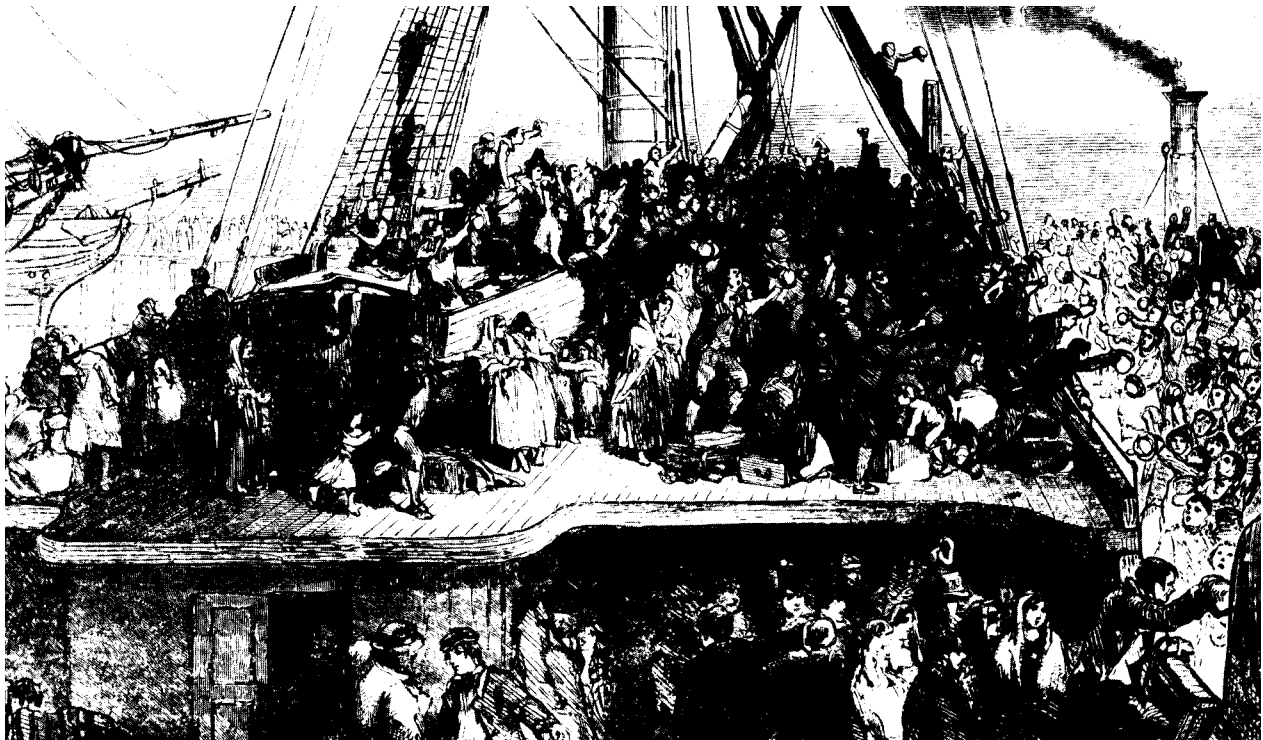
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1840

July 9, Thursday: Steerage conditions on a ship escaping the famine in [Ireland](#), per The London Illustrated Weekly:

The coward would reduce this thrilling sphere music to a universal wail, —this melodious chant to a nasal cant. He thinks to conciliate all hostile influences by compelling his neighborhood into a partial concord with himself, but his music is no better than a jingle, which is akin to a jar, —jars regularly recurring. He blows a feeble blast of slender melody, because nature can have no more sympathy with such a soul, than it has of cheerful melody in itself. Hence hears he no accordant note in the universe, and is a coward, or consciously outcast and deserted man. But the brave man, without drum or trumpet, compels concord everywhere by the universality and tunefulness of his soul.



FAMINE

Some Irish escape the famine in The London Illustrated Weekly of July 9, 1840



1843

May 22, Monday: Tom Thumb was exhibited in [Boston](#).

[Joseph Smith, Jr.](#)'s wife of many years Emma Hale Smith was shocked to discover her husband secluded in an upstairs bedroom of their home in Nauvoo, Illinois with a family maidservant, [Eliza M. Partridge](#) (with whom her husband had entered into secret plural marriage on March 8th).

[Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [Mrs. Lidian Emerson](#) from Castleton, Staten Island:

You always seemed to look down at me as from some elevation -some of your high humilities- and I was better for having to look up. I felt taxed not to disappoint your expectations.

Castleton, Staten Island, May 22nd

1843

My Dear Friend,

I believe a good many conversations with you were left in an unfinished state, and now indeed I don't know where to take them up. But I will resume some of the unfinished silence[]. I shall not hesitate to know you. I think of you as some elder sister of mine, whom I could not have avoided — a sort of lunar influence — only of such age as the moon, whose time is measured by her light. You must know that you represent to me woman — for I have not travelled very far [or] wide — and what if I had? I like to deal with you, for I believe you do not lie or steal, and these are very rare virtues. I thank you for your influence for two years — I was fortunate to be subjected to it, and am now to remember it. It is the noblest gift we can make — What signify all others that can be bestowed? You have helped to keep my life “on loft,” as Chaucer

GEOFFREY CHAUCER



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[of Griselda] says, *and in a better sense. You always
^ seemed to look down at me as from some
elevation, some of your high humilities,
and I was the better for having to look*

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*up. I felt taxed not to disappoint your
expectation — or could there be any accident
so sad as to be respected for something
better than we are? It was a pleasure
even to go away from you, as it is not
to meet some, as it apprised me of my
high relations, and such a departure is a
sort of further introduction and meeting.
Nothing makes the earth seem so
spacious as to have friends at a distance[.]
They make the latitudes and longitudes.
You must not think that fate
is so dark there, for even here I can see
a faint reflected light over Concord, and
I think that at this distance I can better
weigh the value of a doubt there.
Your moonlight — as I have told you,
though it is a reflection of the sun,
allows of bats and owls and other twilight
birds to flit therein. But I am very
glad that you can elevate your life with
a doubt — for I am sure that it is
nothing but an insatiable faith after all
that deepens and darkens its current — And
your doubt and my confidence are only
a difference of expression.
I have hardly begun to live on Staten Island
yet, but like the man who, when forbidden
to tread on English ground, carried*

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*Scottish ground in his boots, I carry Con-
cord ground in my boots and in my
hat — and am I not made of
Concord dust? I cannot realize
that it is the roar of the sea I
hear now, and not the wind in Walden
woods. I find more of Concord after all
in the prospect of the sea, beyond Sandy[-]
Hook than in the fields and woods.*



*If you were to have this Hugh the
gardener for your man you would
think a new dispensation had commenced.
He might put a fairer aspect on the
natural world for you, or at any [rate]
a screen between you and the [almshouse.]
There is a beautiful red honeysuckle
now in blossom in the woods here, which
should be transplanted to Concord, and
if what they tell me about the tulip
tree be true, you should have that
also. I have not seen Mrs Black
yet, but I intend to call on her
soon. Have you established those simpler
modes of living yet? — “In the full
tide of successful operation?” —
Tell Mrs[.] Brown that I hope
she is anchored in a secure haven, and de-
rives much pleasure still from reading
the poets — And that her constellation*

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*is not quite set from my sight, though it
is sunk so low in that northern horizon.
Tell Elizabeth Hoar that her bright
present did “carry ink safely to Staten
Island”, and was a conspicuous object
in Master Haven’s inventory of my [goods]
effects. — Give my respect to M^{me}
Emerson, whose Concord face I should*

{written perpendicular to text in center of page:
Address: Mrs. Lidian Emerson[.]
Concord
Mass[.]}

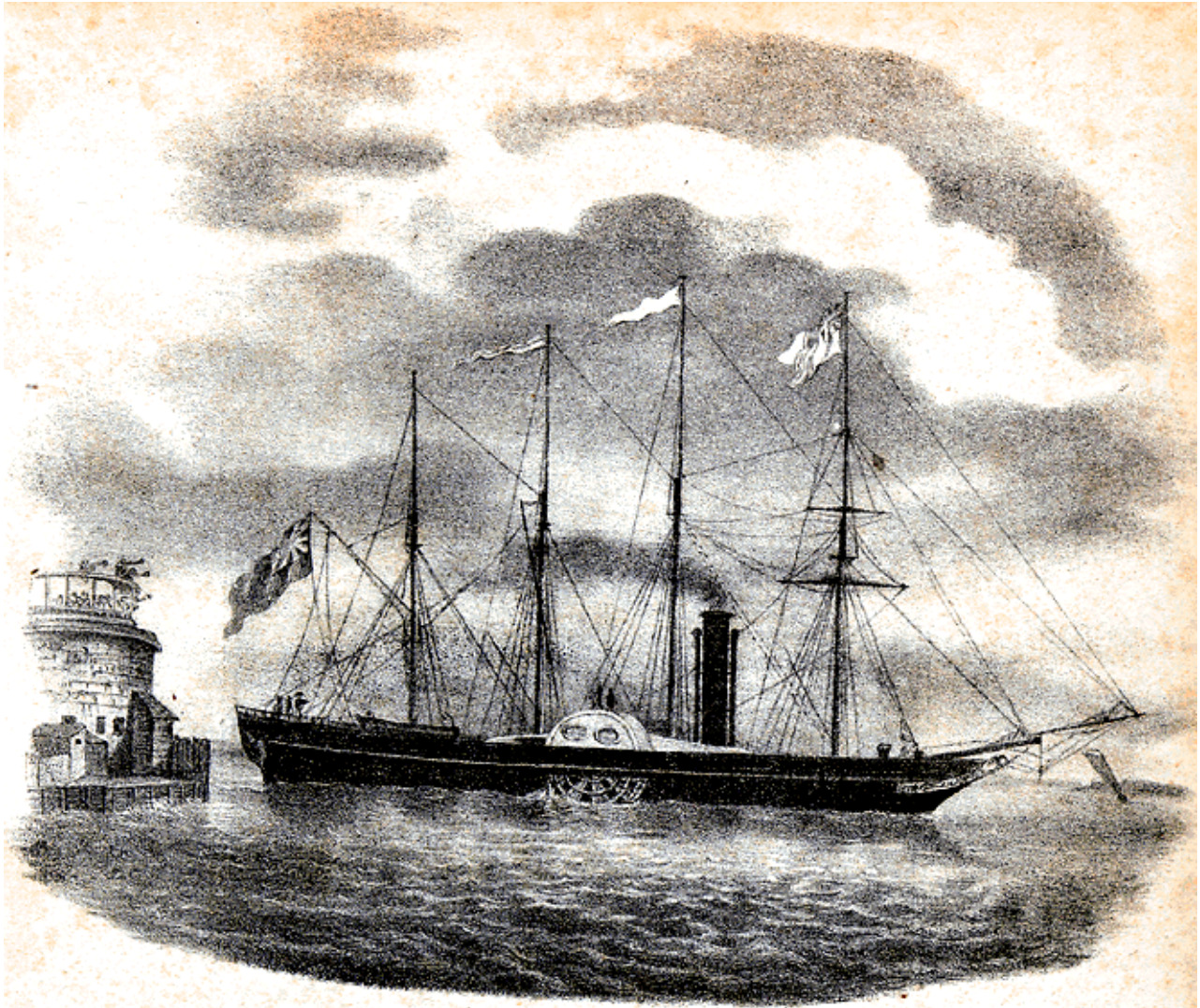
*her be glad to see here this summer; and remem-
ber me to the rest of the household who
have had vision of me. [Has Edith de-
generated or Ellen regenerated [yet,] for I
fear and hope that so it will be?
Shake a day-day to Edith, and
say “[G]ood night” to Ellen for me.]
Farewell — Henry D. Thoreau*

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Lidian commented to her friend [Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#), Thoreau's mother, that Henry had written her a "grateful and affectionate" letter, and Cynthia remarked tactfully that her Henry "was always tolerant." It must have been rather difficult for Cynthia and [John Thoreau](#), Senior, to watch from the sidelines as their surviving son's affections were pre-empted and their parental influence diluted by this local gentry with which they could not compete.

[Thoreau](#) also wrote on this day to his younger sister [Sophia](#), informing her that he had seen the *Great Western*, the latest thing in steam sailboats:



Castleton, Staten Island, May 22nd. — 43
Dear Sophia,
I have had a severe cold ever since
I came here, and have been confined to the

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house for the last week with bronchitis, though I am now getting out, so I have not seen much in the botanical way. The cedar seems to be one of the most common trees here, and the fields are very fragrant with it. There are also the gum and tulip trees. The latter is not very common, but is very large and beautiful, bearing flowers as large as tulips and as handsome. It is not time for it yet. The woods are now full of a large honeysuckle in full bloom, which differs from ours in being red instead of white, so that at first I did not know its genus. The painted cup is very common in the meadows here. Peaches, and especially cherries, seem to grow by all the fences. Things are very forward here compared with [Co]ncord. The apricots growing out of doors are already as large as plums. The apple, pear, peach, cherry, and plum trees, have shed their blossoms. The whole Island is like a garden,

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and affords very fine scenery. In front of the house is a very extensive wood, beyond which is the sea, whose roar I can hear all night long, when there is no wind, if easterly winds have prevailed on the Atlantic. There are always some vessels in sight — ten, twenty, or thirty miles off — and Sunday before last there were hundreds in long procession, stretching from New York to Sanday Hook, and far beyond, for Sunday is a lucky day. I went to New York Saturday before last. A walk of half an hour, by half a dozen houses, along the Richmond road, ie. the road that leads to R — on which we live — brings me to the village [Southfield] of Stapleton, ~~still~~ in [Castleton,] where is the lower dock; but if I prefer I can walk along the shore three quarters of



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a mile further toward New York, to Quarantine, ~~another~~ village of Castleton, to the upper dock, which the boat leaves five or six times every day, a quarter of an hour later than the former place. Further on is the village of New-Brighton — and further still Port Richmond, which villages another steam-boat visits.

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In New York I saw Geo. Ward, and also Giles Waldo and William Tappan, [whom] I can describe better when I have seen them more — They are young friends of Mr [Em-] erson. Waldo came down to the Island to see me the next day. I also saw the Great Western, the Croton Water works, and the picture gallery of the National Academy of Design. But I have not had time to see or do much in N. Y. yet. Tell Miss Ward I shall try to my put ~~her~~ microscope to a good use, and if I find any new and pressible flower, will throw it into my common place book[.] Garlic, the original of the common onion, grows like grass here all over the fields, and during its season spoils the cream and butter for the market, as the cows like it very much. Tell Helen there are two schools just established in this neighborhood, with large prospects, or rather designs, one for boys, and another for girls. The latter by a Miss Errington — and though it is very small as yet — I will keep my ears open for her in such directions — The encouragement is very slight. I hope you will not be washed away by the Irish sea. Tell Mother I think my cold was not wholly owing to imprudence[] Perhaps I was being acclimated.

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*Tell [fa]ther that Mr Tappan whose son I know — and whose clerks young Tappan and Waldo are — has invented and established a new and very important business — which [Wa]ldo thinks would allow them to burn 99 out of 100 of the stores in NY, which now only offset and cancel one another. It is a kind of intelligence office for the whole country — with branches in the principal cites, giving information with regard to the credit and affairs of every man of business in the country. Of course it is not popular at the south and west. It is an extensive business and will employ a great many clerks. Love to all — not forgetting aunt and aunts — and Miss and Mrs Ward. [Y^L] Affectionate Brother
Henry D. Thoreau.*

THOREAU RESIDENCES

Elsewhere, Thoreau would muse, in a manuscript now at the Huntington Library in Pasadena, that has been dated by Franklin Benjamin Sanborn to the 1848-1850 period and contains material that would get put in WALDEN:

A Sister,

One in whom you have - unbounded faith - whom you can - purely love. A sweet presence and companion making the world populous. Whose heart answers to your heart. Whose presence can fill all space. One who is a spirit. Who attends to your truth. A gentle spirit - a wise spirit - a loving spirit. An enlargement to your being, level to yourself. Whom you presume to know.... The stream of whose being unites with your own without a ripple or a murmur. & this spreads into a sea.

I still think of you as my sister.... Others are of my kindred by blood or of my acquaintance but you are part of me. You are of me & I of you I cannot tell where I leave off and you begin.... To you I can afford to be forever what I am, for your presence will not permit me to be what I should not be.... My sister whom I love I almost have no more to do with. I shall know where to find her.... I can more heartily meet her when our bodies are away. I see her without the veil of the body.... Other men have added to their farms I have annexed a soul to mine.

When I love you I feel as if I were annexing another world to mine.... O Do not disappoint me.

*Whose breath is as gentle and salubrious as a Zephyr's whisper. Whom I know as an atmosphere.... Whom in thought my spirit continually embraces. Unto whom I flow.... Who art clothed in white. Who comest like an incense. Who art all that I can imagine - my inspirer. The feminine of me - Who art magnanimous
It is morning when I meet thee in a still cool dewy white sun light In the hushed*



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dawn - my young mother - I thy eldest son.... Whether art thou my mother or my sister - whether am I thy son or thy brother.

On the remembrances of whom I repose - so old a sister art thou - so nearly hast thou recreated me ... whose eyes are like the morning star Who comest to me in the morning twilight.

From another holograph sheet in Thoreau's handwriting, a sheet which is torn at the top:

By turns my purity has inspired and my impurity has cast me down.

My most intimate acquaintance with woman has been a sisters relation, or at most a catholic's virgin mother relation — not that it has always been free from the suspicion of lower sympathy. There is a love of woman [page torn] with marriage; — of woman on the [page torn] She has exerted the influence of a goddess on me; cultivating my gentler humane nature; cultivating & preserving purity, innocence, truth, [end of page]

[Succeeding fragment; marked 1850 by Franklin Benjamin Sanborn.] *Woman, is a nature older than I and commanding from me a vast amount of veneration -like Nature. She is my mother at: the same time that she is my sister, so that she is at any rate an older sister.... I cannot imagine a woman no older than I. ... Methinks that I am younger than aught that I associate with. The youngest child is more than my coeval?*



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October 6, Friday: [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#) went for a hike in the bucolic Concord countryside:



I took a solitary walk to Walden Pond. It was a cool, north-west windy day, with heavy clouds rolling and tumbling about the sky, but still a prevalence of genial autumn sunshine. The fields are still green, and the great masses of the woods have not yet assumed their many-colored garments; but here and there, are solitary oaks of a deep, substantial red, or maples of a more brilliant hue, or chestnuts, either yellow or of a tenderer green than in summer. Some trees seem to return to their hue of May or early July, before they put on their brighter autumnal tints. In some places, along the borders of low and moist land, a whole range of trees were clothed in the perfect gorgeousness of autumn, of all shades of brilliant color, looking like the palette on which Nature was arranging the tints wherewith to paint a picture. These hues appeared to be thrown together without a design; and yet there was perfect harmony among them, and a softness and delicacy made up of a thousand different brightnesses.

Walden Pond was clear and beautiful, as usual.

(Did he see what Cindy Kassab saw, that is depicted in her painting?)



In the course of his excursion the author discovered something of great interest and relevance, that even some [Irish](#) day-laborers have a life and loved ones and need to have somewhere for their families to lay their heads (**see next page**). According to the author's AMERICAN NOTEBOOKS, he got lost on his way home to the Old Manse:



According to my invariable custom, I mistook my way, and emerging upon a road, I turned my back, instead of my face, toward Concord, and walked on very diligently, till a guide-board informed me of my mistake. I then turned about, and was shortly overtaken by an old yeoman in a chaise, who kindly offered me a ride, and shortly set me down in the village.

This has now all been replayed for us, on the last page of Part II: TRAVELING IN STYLE of the [Los Angeles Times Magazine](#) for October 16, 1994. The anonymous article, allegedly or ostensibly dealing with early literary appreciation of the aesthetics of hiking through the woods to “**Walden Pond**,” is facing an advertisement of a cruise from La-La Land to Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlán¹, and Cabo San Lucas on the good ship *Nordic Prince*, and a cruise to Catalina and then Ensenada on its sister ship *Viking Serenade*, and headlines

1. Minus, of course, the Spanish acute accent in the [Times](#) newspaper, which does not truck with foreigners or their languages.



In a small and secluded dell, that opens upon the most beautiful cove of the whole lake, there is a little hamlet of huts or shanties, inhabited by the Irish people who are at work upon the rail-road. There are three or four of these habitations, the very rudest, I should imagine, that civilized men ever made for themselves, constructed of rough boards, with protruding ends. Against some of them the earth is heaped up to the roof, or nearly so; and when the grass has had time to sprout upon them, they will look like small natural hillocks, or a species of ant-hill, or something in which Nature has a larger share than man. These huts are placed beneath the trees, (oaks, walnuts, and white pines) wherever the trunks give them space to stand; and by thus adapting themselves to natural interstices instead of making new ones, they do not break or disturb the solitude and seclusion of the place. Voices are heard, and the shouts and laughter of the children, who play about like the sunbeams that come down through the branches. Women are washing beneath the trees, and long lines of whitened clothes are extended from tree to tree, fluttering and gambolling in the breeze. A pig, in a sty even more extemporary than the shanties, is grunting, and poking his snout through the clefts of his habitation. The household pots and kettles are seen at the doors, and a glance within shows the rough benches that serve for chairs, and the bed upon the floor. The visiter's nose takes note of the fragrance of a pipe. And yet, with all these homely items, the repose and sanctity of the old wood do not seem to be destroyed or prophaned; she overshadows these poor people, and assimilates them, somehow or other, to the character of her natural inhabitants. Their presence did not shock me, any more than if I had merely discovered a squirrel's nest in a tree. To be sure, it is a torment to see the great, high, ugly embankment of the railroad, which is here protruding itself into the lake, or along its margin, in close vicinity to this picturesque little hamlet. I have seldom seen anything more beautiful than the cove, on the border of which the huts are situated; and the more I looked, the lovelier it grew. The trees overshadowed it deeply; but on the one side there was some brilliant shrubbery which seemed to light up the whole picture with the effect of a sweet and melancholy smile. I felt as if spirits were there -or as if these shrubs had a spiritual life- in short, the impression was undefinable; and after gazing and musing a good while, I retraced my steps through the Irish hamlet, and plodded on along a wood-path.



the idea that

**Thoreau Didn't Invent
This Celebrated Body of Water.**

**Years Before He Moved There,
Another Noted Writer Enjoyed Its Charms.**

Following such an egregious headline, the article in the L.A. Times inserts anonymous remarks in italic type:



Sometimes the footsteps of the famous overlap. When Henry David Thoreau built his cabin in 1845 at Walden Pond, near Concord, Mass., the pond itself and the surrounding woods were already well-known to his contemporaries. Ralph Waldo Emerson owned the land on which the pond stood, and Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the writer and editor Margaret Fuller and other literary lights of the time frequented the area. In the edited excerpt below, Hawthorne (1804-1864) -who had not yet written THE SCARLET LETTER, THE HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES, THE MARBLE FAUN and the other books by which he is remembered- describes a stroll through the autumn-bright woods and a visit to the pond in the early 1840s. The most surprising aspect of the account, which was written in 1843, is the author's discovery of a small settlement of environmentally sensitive Irish railroad workers living at the edge of the pond.

Well, one shouldn't come down too hard on the efforts of some newspaper peckerwood, who is obviously merely attempting to draw a paycheck by devising some sort of "news-hook" for a freebie citation from public-

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WHAT?

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domain 19th Century sources, intended merely as another page-filler between the pretty travel ads. –But who, in the first place, is it, specifically, by name, who has had this idea that is here headlined, that Thoreau did “**Invent**” Walden Pond, that “**Celebrated Body of Water**”? And why precisely is it, that we should now be temporizing about the First Literary Appreciation of a body of water that has existed in that precise spot since the melting of the buried blocks of ice left behind by the latest glacial era, something like 10,000 years ago? And how is it that this news maven has created the perception that before Thoreau went out to Walden Pond to build his shanty in late March of the following spring season, it was “*literary lights of the time*” such as [Waldo Emerson](#), [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), and [Margaret Fuller](#) who had “*frequented the area*”? Presumably this newsie is unaware that [Henry Thoreau](#) was “frequenting” that pond and those woods as a little child as much as two decades before Hawthorne had ever even visited Concord:

WALDEN: When I was four years old, as I well remember, I was brought from Boston to this my native town, through these very woods and this field, to the pond. It is one of the oldest scenes stamped on my memory. And now to-night my flute has waked the echoes over that very water. The pines still stand here older than I; or, if some have fallen, I have cooked my supper with their stumps, and a new growth is rising all around, preparing another aspect for new infant eyes. Almost the same johnswort springs from the same perennial root in this pasture, and even I have at length helped to clothe that fabulous landscape of my infant dreams, and one of the results of my presence and influence is seen in these bean leaves, corn blades, and potato vines.

and presumably this newsie is likewise unaware that it was the adult surveyor of woodlots Thoreau who had in fact recommended to Emerson that he purchase these several woodlots with some frontage on Walden Pond,² and is likewise unaware that Thoreau had had his little homemade boat *Red Jacket* on Walden Pond for some years and had, long before, taken literary light Fuller for a row on this pond in this boat, and is likewise oblivious to the fact that Thoreau had written about his experiences at Walden Pond many, many times in his journal before the Hawthornes ever considered moving to Concord for the cheap rent at the vacant Old Manse,³ and writing about his daily experiences in his own unpublished journal, not to speak of the fact that at the juncture at which Hawthorne witnessed these oh-so-picturesque shacks for the first time, these families of “railroad workers” which they had sheltered from the elements were needing –quite unbeknownst to the self-centered Hawthorne– to abandon their habitations and shoulder what of their scant possessions they could carry upon their backs, and trudge on down the American tracks which they had helped to construct and beneath which some of them in fact lay buried — because the heavy work in this area had been completed and they were all by that time without steady work and, if they had elected to remain there in bucolic Walden Woods next to bucolic Walden Pond, beyond the Concord Alms House and Poor Farm to which they were of course not eligible to have recourse, they would have eventually starved or frozen (whichever came first). Perhaps the newshawks are also innocent of an understanding that, as Thoreau most carefully described in *WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS*, one of these shanties Hawthorne saw, the one pertaining to the departing James Collins family, would be purchased by Thoreau for its construction materials to use in the creation of

2. Not, incidentally, “*the land on which the pond stood*,” a phrase which is quite remarkable not only as an impoverished simplification but also as an impoverished metaphor. And anyway, Emerson did not begin to purchase these woodlots with money from his dead wife’s estate until about a year after this initial visit by [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), so here again our hapless news flack has gotten his or her chronology back-assward.

3. Not all of which he bothered to pay, by the way.

his own anti-desperation shanty, on the hill-edge down on Bay Henry, etc., etc.



A 19th-Century Irish shanty in the Merrimack Valley

Such analyses seem entirely to avoid the fact that one object of Thoreau's constructing this shanty was to demonstrate that it was possible, with care, to construct a healthful and clean and comfortable abode at an expense that anyone might afford, **and thus to furnish these impoverished refugees of the potato famine with an inspirational model for imitation.**⁴ And if "*the surrounding woods were already well-known to his [Henry Thoreau's] contemporaries*" then we are left with an interesting "how-cum" about Hawthorne getting himself so turned around and lost in these surrounding woods at the end of this quoted piece from his AMERICAN NOTEBOOKS that, as the newspaper confesses, he had to ask for directions and had to be offered a lift back home to civilization! Just precisely how compatible is that with such terminology as "*already well-known*"?—Face it, most members of the Brahmin overcaste of "*literary lights of the time*," with which Thoreau the offspring of a peasant or tradesfamily had to deal, wouldn't have been able to find their own asses had they been privileged to hunt for them with both hands. Over and above all that, we may marvel at the casualness of the newspaper's characterization of these desperately poor families of refugees of a foreign famine, forced to attempt to live on this sandy, virtually barren soil among the pines in dark Walden Woods where they could not conceivably have created productive cottage gardens, while their men had labored for like \$0.⁷³ the day for 18 hours of exhausting and quite dangerous rude labor, as, now get this, "*environmentally sensitive*." Come on, newspaper people, "*environmentally sensitive*," that's for proper WASPs whose lives are not at constant risk, people who suppose that they can save the planet by sorting out their green empties from their clear empties — people like the ones who purchase your cruise tickets on the *Viking Serenade* and the *Nordic Prince* and the *Love Boat*! While one is at this sort of historical redactionism one might as well characterize the nigger-hating, nigger-baiting "Plug Ugly" [Irish](#) mob actions of the Boston urban hub of this period as having been, in actuality, mere prototype protests against the wickedness of chattel slavery! As a retort to this sort of newspaper-PC rewriting of history, a retort which might also be able to pass muster as an attempt at good humor, we might mention that among these "*environmentally sensitive*" Irishmen it was little Johnny Riordan of Concord's Riordan Family who was the most environmentally sensitive of all — because in the New England turn of seasons it was getting cold and his little

4. In fact [Waldo Emerson](#) eventually sold Thoreau's empty shanty to one of them, his drunken [Irish](#) gardener Hugh Whelan, to shelter this man's family.

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toes were turning blue.⁵ If one perceives anything at all about “sensitivity” in the quoted passage from Hawthorne’s literary notebook, it is not sensitivity but insensitivity which one perceives — originally, we can here perceive very starkly that author’s notorious insensitivity to the problems of others, and, now, we are given an opportunity to perceive this news person’s utter insensitivity to Hawthorne’s having chosen to depict the plight of these refugees as merely picturesque.⁶



And in fair days as well as foul we walked up the country — until from Merrimack it became the Pemigewasset that leaped by our side — and when we had passed its fountain-head the wild Amonoosuck whose puny channel we crossed at a stride guiding us to its distant source among the mountains until without its guidance we reached the summit of agiocochook.

But why should we take the reader who may have been tenderly nurtured — through that rude country — where the crags are steep and the inns none of the best, and many a rude blast would have to be encountered on the mountain side. (*FD* 82-83)

We don’t know precisely how many people have starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to [cholera](#) in [Ireland](#) during the ensuing period, but we do know that the first great die-

5. Refer to Thoreau’s poem about Johnny’s plight during the early winter of 1850 and to his carrying a cloak to Johnny in the late winter of 1851-1852: “I found that the shanty was warmed by the simple social relations of the Irish.” Thoreau’s good attitude of compassion and involvement contrasts sufficiently with [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#)’s attitude of aestheticism and disengagement to remind one of the following distinction which Simone Weil drew during WWII in her New York notebook:



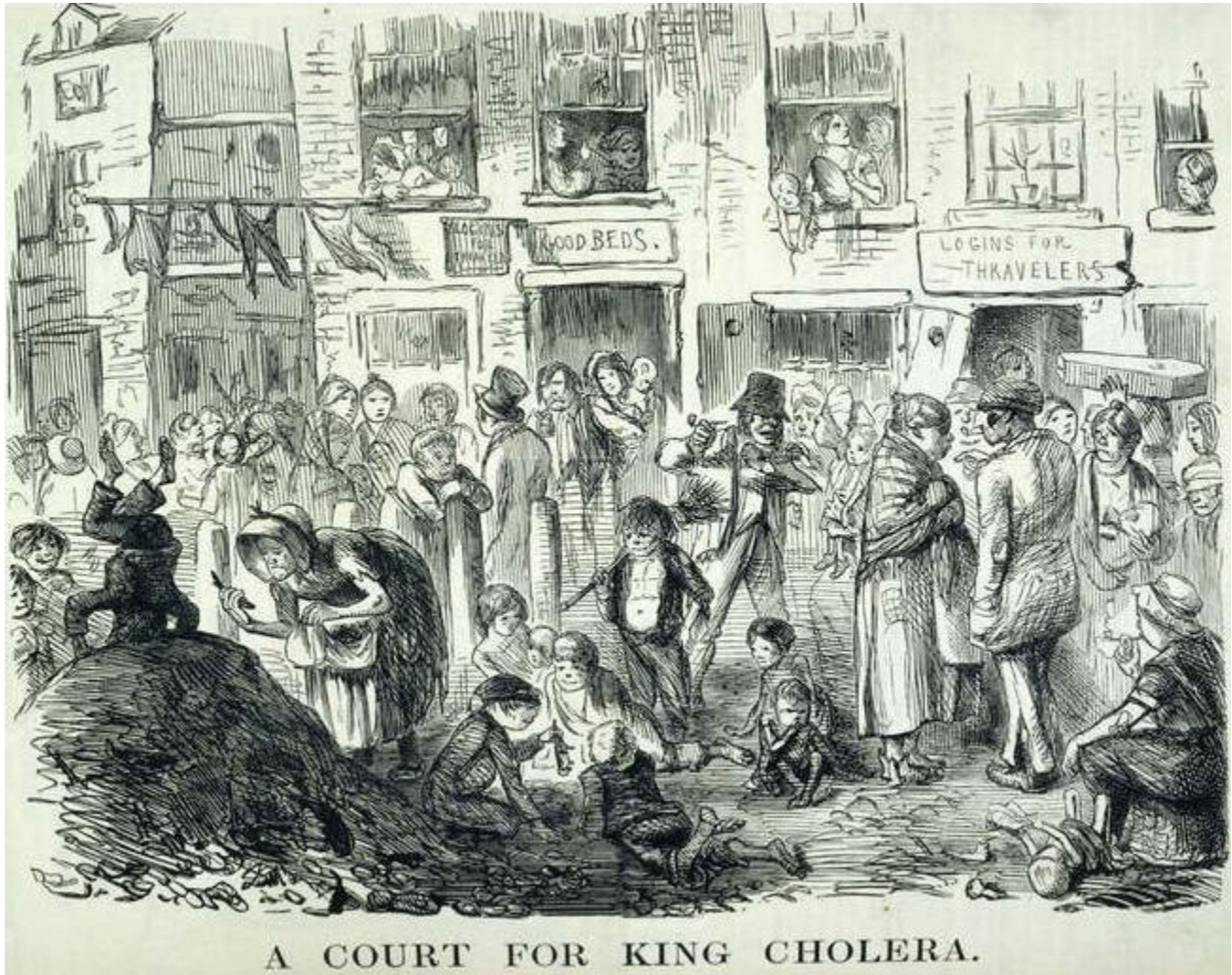
Natural piety consists in helping someone in misfortune so as not to be obliged to think about him any more, or for the pleasure of feeling the distance between him and oneself. It is a form of cruelty which is contrary only in its outward effects to cruelty in the ordinary sense. Such, no doubt, was the clemency of Caesar. Compassion consists in paying attention to an afflicted man and identifying oneself with him in thought. It then follows that one feeds him automatically if he is hungry, just as one feeds oneself. Bread given in this way is the effect and the sign of compassion.

6. Professor Walter Roy Harding considered that [Thoreau](#), in [WALDEN](#); OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS, wrote disparagingly of the [Irish](#), although, as he got to know them personally, he changed his mind about them and became their defender. He commented that why Thoreau did not then excise his disparaging remarks is not known. So the question would be, **did** Thoreau in fact write disparagingly of the fugitives from this ecological disaster, the [Irish Potato Famine](#)? Or was Harding quite mistaken here, misconstruing for derogation what in fact was mere frank description? And, was the impact of this episode in our human history the direct result of the ecological disaster, the late blight, or was it instead the direct result of a mean and contemptible English social policy — and was Thoreau aware of and contemptuous of this political causation?

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off would occur during the winter of 1846-1847. A table prepared after the fact by Census Commissioners,



presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each year probably worked out to something like this (the figures shown for 1849 are the result of a [cholera](#)



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

epidemic in Connacht, Leinster, and Munster, as well as of the general starvation):

Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

October 17, Tuesday: [Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [Waldo Emerson](#) from Staten Island and commented about the cheap and abused Irish labor that was flooding in, and the manner in which refugees such as the Riordan Family were contaminating the pristine purity of Walden Woods with their shacks and their effluvia and their dead horse carcasses and their whatever, and yet found that there was room in his heart for graciousness when confronted with the desperate needfulness which he saw evident everywhere:

Methinks I could look with equanimity upon a long street of Irish cabins and pigs and children revelling in the genial Concord dirt, and I should still find my Walden wood and Fair Haven in their tanned and happy faces.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH



An Irish family reunited at the Boston dock

(Emerson had sent Thoreau a manuscript copy of his new poem “Ode to Beauty,” and in this response letter Thoreau also wrote quite bluntly to the poet that his latest effort at a poem sounded as if he were parodying himself.)



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

Staten Island Oct 17th

My Dear Friend,

I went with my pupil to the Fair of the American Institute, and so lost a visit from Tappan whom I met returning from the Island. I should have liked to hear more news from his lips, though he had left me a letter, and the Dial which is a sort of circular letter itself. I find Channing's letters full of life and enjoy their wit highly. Lane writes straight and solid like a guide-board, but I find that I put off the Social Tendencies to a future day—which may never come. He is always Shaker fare, quite as luxurious as his principles will allow. I feel as if I were ready to be appointed a committee on poetry, I have got my eyes so whetted and proved of late, like the Knife-sharpener I saw at the Fair certified to have been in constant use in a gentleman's family for more than two years. Yes, I ride along the ranks of the English poets casting terrible glances, and some I blot out, and some I spare. Mackean has imported within the year several new editions and collections of old poetry, which I have the reading of but there is a good deal of chaff to a little meal, hardly worth bolting. I have just opened Bacon's Advancement of Learning for the first time, which I read with great delight. It is more like what Scott's novels were than anything.

H. S. MCKEAN

FRANCIS BACON

I see that I was very blind to send you my manuscript in such a state, but I have a good second sight (?) at least. I could still shake it in the wind to some advantage, if it would hold together. There are some sad mistakes in the printing.— It is a little unfortunate that the Ethnical scripture should hold out so well, though it does really hold out. The Bible ought not to be very large. Is it not singular that while the religious world is gradually picking to pieces its old testaments, here are some coming slowly after on the sea-shore picking up the durable relics of perhaps older books and putting them together again?

Your letter to contributors is excellent and hits the nail on the head. It will taste sour to their palates at first no doubt, but it will bear a sweet fruit at last.

I like the poetry, especially the Autumn verses. They ring true. Though I am quite weather beaten with poetry having weathered so many epics of late. The Sweep Ho sounds well this way. But I have a good deal of fault to find with your ode to Beauty. The tune is altogether unworthy of the thoughts. You slope too quickly to the rhyme, as if that trick had better be performed as soon as possible or as if you stood over the line with a hatchet and chopped off the verses as they came out some short and some long. But give us a long reel and we'll cut it up to suit ourselves. It sounds like parody. "Thee knew I of old" "Remediless thirst" are some of those stereotyped lines. I am frequently reminded I believe of Jane Taylors Philosopher's scales,



and how the world

“Flew out with a bounce”

which — “jerked the philosopher out of his cell.” or else of “From the climes of the sun all war-worn and weary”. I had rather have the thoughts come ushered with a flourish of oaths and curses. Yet I love your poetry as I do little else that is near and recent – especially when you get fairly round the end of the line, and are not thrown back upon the rocks.— To read the lecture on the Comic, is as good as to be in our town meeting or Lyceum once more.

I am glad that the concord farmers have plowed well this year, it promises that something will be done these summers. But I am suspicious of that Brittonner who advertises so many cords of good oak chestnut and maple wood for sale— Good! aye, good for what? And there shall not be left a stone upon a stone. But no matter let them hack away— The sturdy Irish arms that do the work are of more worth than oak or maple. Methinks I could look with equanimity upon a long street of Irish cabins and pigs and children revelling in the genial Concord dirt, and I should still find my Walden wood and Fair Haven in their tanned and happy faces.— I write this in the corn field—it being washing day—with the ink-stand Elizabeth Hoar gave me—though it is not redolent of corn-stacks—I fear.

Let me not be forgotten by Channing & Hawthorne – nor our grey-suited neighbor under the hill –

Yr friend H.D. Thoreau

1844

A number of reports appeared in [Irish](#) newspapers, of a blight (now known as *Phytophthora infestans*) which had attacked the potato crops in America for the 2d consecutive growing season. This was not a known disease



such as “the curl” or “the dry rot,” but something new. We don’t know precisely how many people have starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to [cholera](#) in Ireland during the ensuing period, but we do know that the first great die-off would occur during the winter of 1846-1847. A table



prepared after the fact by Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each year probably worked out to something like



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

this:

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population

Year	%
1842	5.1%
1843	5.2%
1844	5.6%
1845	6.4%
1846	9.1%
1847	18.5%
1848	15.4%
1849	17.9%
1850	12.2%

1847

January 14, Wednesday: On the question of war taxes during the war on Mexico, William Wells Brown said that since the government would be taking the money by coercion, the individual taxpayer would not be blameworthy for the evil that would be done with the tax moneys. He would come to advocate that, if the government were to make a move to begin to conscript American blacks to fight in this war against Mexico, that seeing as how Mexico had outlawed [slavery](#) — that American blacks should, like the San Patricios, “fight against the United States.”

WAR ON MEXICO

Who were these “San Patricios”? — As Robert Ryal Miller’s *SWORD AND SHAMROCK* makes clear, many so-called San Patricios were [Irish](#) deserters from the US Army, most deserting because of ill treatment and from sympathy with the Mexicans as fellow [Catholics](#). This would lead to some problems after the war in punishing the men. Those who had deserted from the army after declaration of the war upon Mexico would be [hanged](#), but those who had deserted before the declaration of war would often merely be flogged and have their cheek branded with a “D.” (On the other hand, actually the bulk of the San Patricios were Mexican nationals, as this group included men of German, English, and Irish extraction who were living in Mexico.)



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

January 15, Thursday: Reports were coming in that there were people along the coast of [Ireland](#) who were attempting to subsist upon seaweed, and were unable to obtain even this sort of nourishment every day. There were also reports that people had consumed even the seeds and tubers which had been laid aside for the next year's crops. But the British government was concerned that, were it to purchase any more Indian corn on the open market, this would again elevate the prices of foodstuffs. This was the height of the die-off of the Irish population, peaking in March.

IRISH POTATO FAMINE

Public Works Enrollment

October 1846	114,000
January 1847	570,000
March 1847	750,000

September 18, Saturday: [Waldo Emerson](#) entered into an agreement with his gardener, Hugh Whelan, who intended to move, enlarge, and occupy [Thoreau's \(Emerson's\) shanty](#); Whelan was to rent what had been the [beanfield](#) from Emerson, its owner, with its stumps all pulled by Thoreau's labor, for \$10.⁰⁰ a year.





THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

November 14, Sunday: [Henry Thoreau](#), living in the Emerson home in Emerson's absence, wrote to [Waldo Emerson](#) terming himself a transplanted [hermit](#):

It is a little like joining a community -this life- to such a hermit as I am - and as I dont keep the accounts I dont know whether this experiment will succeed or fail finally. At any rate, it is good for society- & I do not regret my transient - nor my permanent share in it.



Thoreau included news of the [beanfield](#) and [Emerson's shanty](#), and of Hugh Whelan:

Hugh still has his eyes on the Walden agellum, and orchards are waving there in the windy future for him. That's-the-where-I'll- go-next thinks he-but no important steps are yet taken. He reminds me occasionally of this open secret of his with which the very season seems to labor, and affirms sincerely that as to his wants, wood, stone, or timber-I know better than he. That is a clincher which I shall have to consider how to avoid to some extent, but I fear [see MS page for drawing] that it is a wrought nail and will not break. Unfortunately the day after Cattle-show-the day after small beer, he was among the missing, but not long this time. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots-nor indeed Hugh his-Hugh.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

(Eventually, after the shanty would tip backward into the cellar hole that Hugh had dug, cracking its plaster, this man would be seen on the road out of town — and he would be crying.)

Thoreau described an encounter with [Sophia Foord](#) which would be suppressed by Franklin Benjamin Sanborn



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

when it was initially printed in The Atlantic Monthly:

I have had a tragic correspondence, for the most part all on one side, with Miss Ford. She did really wish to—I hesitate to write—marry me—that is the way they spell it. Of course I did not write a deliberate answer—how could I deliberate upon it? I sent back as distinct a No, as I have learned to pronounce after considerable practice, and I trust that this No has succeeded. Indeed I wished that it might burst like hollow shot after it had struck and buried itself, and make itself felt there. There was no other way. I really had anticipated no such foe as this in my career.

We note that this letter, which is often quoted simply because it reveals a titillating love incident, more importantly reveals also a positive interest by Thoreau in abstract science, and in particular with the astronomical discoveries that were being made with the assistance of the powerful new [telescope](#) at the [Harvard Observatory](#):



[Perez Blood] and his company have at length seen the stars through the great telescope, and he told me that he thought it was worth the while. [Professor Benjamin Peirce] made them wait till the crowd had dispersed (it was a Saturday evening) & then was quite polite. He conversed with him & showed him the Micrometer &c— He said that Mr [Blood]'s glass was large enough for all ordinary astronomical work. [The Reverend Barzillai Frost] & [[Dr. Josiah Bartlett](#)] seemed disappointed that there was no greater difference between the Cambridge glass and the Concord one. They used only a power of four hundred. Mr [Blood] tells me that he is too old to study the Calculus or higher mathematics. They think that they have discovered traces of another satellite to Neptune— They have been obliged to exclude the public altogether at last — the very dust which they raised "which is filled with minute crystals &c &c" as professors declare, having to be wiped off the glasses, would ere long wear them away. It is true enough. Cambridge college is really beginning to wake up and redeem its character & overtake the age. I see by the new catalogue that they are about establishing a Scientific school in connexion with the University — at which any one above eighteen, on paying one hundred dollars annually — (Mr Lawrence's 50000 will probably diminish this sum) may be instructed in the highest branches of Science — in Astronomy theoretical and practical, with the use of the instruments — so the great Yankee Astronomer may be born without delay — in Mechanics and Engineering to the last degree — [Professor [Louis Agassiz](#)] will ere long commence his lectures in the zoological department — a Chemistry Class has already been formed, and is under the direction of [Professor Eben N. Horsford] — A new and adequate building for these purposes is already being erected.

Concord Nov 14th 1847.

Dear Friend,

I am but a poor neighbor to you here — a very poor companion am I— I understand that very well — but that need not prevent my writing to you now. I have almost never written letters in my life, yet I think I can write as good ones as I frequently see, so I shall not hesitate to write this such as it may be, knowing that you will welcome anything that reminds you of Concord.



I have banked up the young trees against the winter and the mice, and I will look out in my careless way to see when a nail is loose, or a nail drops out of its place. The broad gaps at least I will occupy. I heartily wish that I could be of good service to this household — but I who have used only these ten digits so long to solve the problem of a living — how can I? This world is a cow that is hard to milk—

Life does not come so easy — and ah! how thinly it is watered ere we get it— But the young bunting calf — he will get at it. There is no way so direct. This is to earn one's living by the sweat of his brow. It is a little like joining a community — this life — to such a hermit as I am — and as I don't keep the accounts I don't know whether this experiment will succeed or fail finally. At any rate, it is good for society — & I do not regret my transient — nor my permanent share in it.

Lidian and I make very good housekeepers — she is a very dear sister to me— Ellen & Edith & Eddy & Aunty Brown keep up the tragedy & comedy & tragi-comedy of life as usual. The two former have not forgotten their old acquaintance — even Edith carries a young memory in her head, I find. Eddie can teach us all how to pronounce. If you should discover any new and rare breed of wooden or pewter horses I have no doubt he will know how to appreciate it. He occasionally surveys mankind from my shoulders as widely & wisely as ever Johnson did. I respect him not a little, though it is I that lift him up there so unceremoniously— And sometimes I have to set him down again in a hurry, according to his “mere will & good pleasure.” He very seriously asked me the other day— “Mr Thoreau — will you be my father?” I am occasionally Mr Rough-and-Tumble with him — that I may not miss him, and lest he should miss you too much — so you must come back soon, or you will be superseded. Alcott has heard that I laughed & so set the people a laughing at his arbor, though I never laughed louder than when on the ridge pole. But now I have not laughed for a long time, it is so serious. He is very grave to look at. But not knowing all this I strove innocently enough the other day to engage his attention to my mathematics. “Did you ever study geometry?” — “The relation of straight lines to curves — the transition from the finite to the infinite?” — “Fine things about it in Newton & Leibnitz.” — But he would hear none of it.—

Men of taste preferred the natural curve— Ah! he is a crooked stick himself. He is getting on now so many knots an hour— There is one knot at present occupying the point of highest elevation — the present highest point— and as many knots as are not handsome, I presume, are thrown down & cast into the pines. Pray show him this if you meet him anywhere in London, for I cannot make him hear much plainer words here. He forgets that I am neither old, nor young, nor anything in particular, and behaves as if I had still some



of the animal heat in me. As for the building I feel a little oppressed when I come near it, it has so great a disposition to be beautiful. It is certainly a wonderful structure on the whole, and the fame of the architect will endure as long—as it shall stand. I should not show you this side alone if I did not suspect that Lidian had done ample justice to the other.

Mr Hosmer has been working at a tannery in Stow for a fortnight, though he has just now come home sick— It seems that he was a tanner in his youth—& So he has made up his mind a little at last. This comes of reading the New Testament. Was 'nt one of the apostles a tanner? Mrs Hosmer remains here, and John looks stout enough to fill his own shoes and his father's too.

Mr. Blood and his company have at length seen the stars through the great telescope, and he told me that he thought it was worth the while. Mr Peirce made them wait till the crowd had dispersed (it was a Saturday evening) & then was quite polite. He conversed with him & showed him the Micrometer &c— He said that Mr B's glass was large enough for all ordinary astronomical work. Mr Frost & Dr Bartlett seemed disappointed that there was no greater difference between the Cambridge glass and the Concord one. They used only a power of four hundred. Mr B tells me that he is too old to study the Calculus or higher mathematics

They think that they have discovered traces of another satellite to Neptune— They have been obliged to exclude the public altogether at last—the very dust which they raised “which is filled with minute crystals &c &c” as professors declare, having to be wiped off the glasses, would ere long wear them away. It is true enough. Cambridge college is really beginning to wake up and redeem its character & overtake the age. I see by the new catalogue that they are about establishing a Scientific school in connexion with the University—at which any one above eighteen, on paying one hundred dollars annually—(Mr Lawrence's 50000 will probably diminish this sum) may be instructed in the highest branches of Science—in Astronomy theoretical and practical, with the use of the instruments—so the great Yankee Astronomer may be born without delay—in Mechanics and Engineering to the last degree—Agassiz will ere long commence his lectures in the zoological department—a Chemistry Class has already been formed, and is under the direction of Prof. Horsford—A new and adequate building for these purposes is already being erected. They have been foolish enough to put at the end of all this earnest the old joke of a diploma. Let every sheep keep but his own skin, I say.

I have had a tragic correspondence, for the most part all on one side, with Miss Ford. She did really wish to—I hesitate to write—marry me—that is the way they spell it. Of course I did not write a delib-



erate answer — how could I deliberate upon it? I sent back as distinct a No, as I have learned to pronounce after considerable practice, and I trust that this No has succeeded. Indeed I wished that it might burst like hollow shot after it had struck and buried itself, and make itself felt there. There was no other way. I really had anticipated no such foe as this in my career.

I suppose you will like to hear of my book — though I have nothing worth writing about it — indeed for the last month or two I have forgotten it — but shall certainly remember it again. Wiley & Putnam — Munroe — The Harpers — & Crosby & Nichols — have all declined printing it with the least risk to themselves — but Wiley & Putnam will print it in their series — and any any of them anywhere at my risk. If I liked the book well enough I should not delay, but for the present I am indifferent. I believe this is after all the course you advised — to let it lie.

I do not know what to say of myself. I sit before my green desk in the chamber at the head of the stairs — and attend to my thinking, sometimes more, sometimes less distinctly. I am not unwilling to think great thoughts if there are any in the wind, but what they are I am not sure. They suffice to keep me awake while the day lasts, at any rate. Perhaps they will redeem some portion of the night ere long. — I can imagine you astonishing — bewildering — confounding and sometimes delighting John Bull with your Yankee notions — and that he begins to take a pride in the relationship at last — introduced to all the stars of England in succession after the lectures, until you pine to thrust your head once more into a genuine & unquestionable nebula — if there be any left. I trust a common man will be the most uncommon to you before you return to these parts. I have thought there was some advantage even in death, by which we “minghle with the herd of common men.”

Hugh still has his eyes on the Walden agellum, and orchards are waving there in the windy future for him. That's-the-where-I'll-go-next thinks he — but no important steps are yet taken. He reminds me occasionally of this open secret of his with which the very season seems to labor, and affirms sincerely that as to his wants, wood, stone, or timber — I know better than he. That is a clincher which I shall have to consider how to avoid to some extent, but I fear [see MS page for drawing] that it is a wrought nail and will not break. Unfortunately the day after Cattle-show — the day after small beer, he was among the missing, but not long this time. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots — nor indeed Hugh his — Hugh.

As I walked over Conantum the other afternoon I saw a fair column of smoke rising from the woods directly over my house that was, as I judged, and already began to conjecture if my deed of sale would



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

not be made invalid by this. But it turned out to be John Richardson's young wood on the S E of your field— It was burnt nearly all over & up to the rails and the road. It was set on fire no doubt by the same Lucifer that lighted Brooks' lot before. So you see that your small lot is comparatively safe for this season, the back fires having been already set for you.

They have been choosing between John Keyes & Sam Staples if the world wants to know it as representatives of this town — and Staples is chosen. The candidates for Governor —think of my writing this to you— were Gov. Briggs & Gen Cushing — & Briggs is elected, though the Democrats have gained. Aint I a brave boy to know so much of politics for the nonce? but I should'nt have known it if Coombs⁷ had'nt told me. They have had a Peace meeting here—

I should'nt think of telling you of it if I did'nt know that anything would do for the English market, and some men —Dea Brown at the head— have signed a long pledge swearing that they will “treat all mankind as brothers” henceforth. I think I shall wait and see how they treat me first. I think that nature meant kindly when she made our brothers few. However, my voice is still for peace.

So Good-bye and a truce to all joking — My Dear Friend — from H.D.T.

LOUIS AGASSIZ

December 15, Wednesday: [Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [Waldo Emerson](#), indicating that Hugh Whelan was having problems in moving [Emerson's shanty](#) from its old site near the bank of Walden Pond to its new site next to the road at the front of what had been the [beanfield](#).



Eventually, this man would be seen on the road out of town, and he would be crying.

7. This was probably not [Eseek Coombs](#), but perhaps was his father or some other relative.



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

Winter: [Henry Thoreau](#) watched the ice-cutters, mostly [Irish](#), on Walden Pond.

The weather along the west coast of [Ireland](#) this winter was characterized as “one continuous storm.” The poorly nourished fishermen, due to [famine](#) weakness, were in general unable to row their frail *curraghs* through the breakers so as to fish offshore, although some, driven by desperation, drowned while attempting such maneuvers.

Some of the visitors to the cloisters of Westminster Abbey were not of the usual kind, but were instead naturalists. They were coming to inspect a large collection of madrepores and sea sponges kept in seawater inside glass cases in the drawing-room of Ashburnham House. This constituted the 1st marine aquarium in England. The exhibit had been created by Anna Thynne, the wife of the Reverend Lord John Thynne, Sub-Dean of the Abbey. This lady’s housemaid (possibly, but of course not necessarily, an impoverished [Irish](#) woman refugee of the great [famine](#)) would need to spend 30 to 45 minutes each day pouring six gallons of salt water backward and forward before an open window, in order to keep it fresh. (The result would become a mania of the 1850s.)

Having given up his dental practice in Connecticut, apparently after a fatality, [Dr. Horace Wells](#) relocated to New-York and became addicted to [chloroform](#).



DENTISTRY



1848

[William Henry Harvey](#)'s *PHYCOLOGIA BRITANNICA* (Plates 147-216) (London: Reeve & Banham). Also, his "Directions for Collecting and Preserving Algae," in [American Journal of Science and Arts](#) (II, 6: 42-45). He was appointed Professor of Botany of the Royal Dublin Society.

To the current regulations for emigration, the British parliament added a requirement that each vessel carrying more than 100 passengers must have aboard a surgeon. This would result in advertisements offering free passage to surgeons. A requirement was stated, that the emigrants were to be inspected for infectious diseases before embarkation, and that none who could not be certified as free of such diseases might be embarked. Each vessel carrying more than 100 emigrants was required to provide a cook and a cooking place.

At this point the [Irish](#) who had emigrated to the USA aboard the horrendous "[famine](#) ships," and survived, were beginning to provide a great deal of, and an increasing amount of, assistance for their relatives on the old sod:

Low Estimates for Total Remittances to Ireland

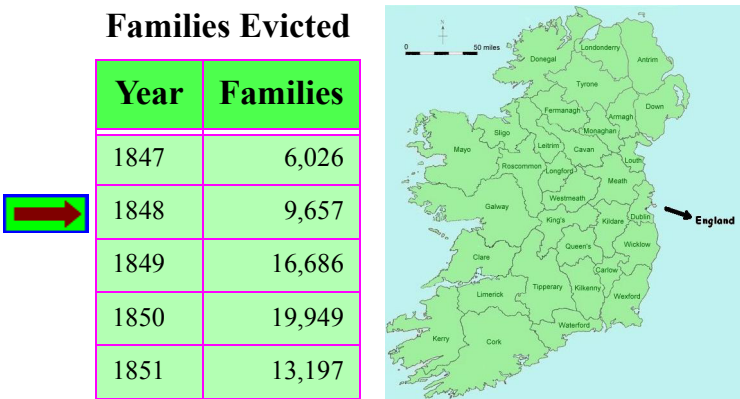
Year	Amount
1848	£460,000
1849	£540,000
1850	£957,000
1851	£990,000

Because of the fact that:

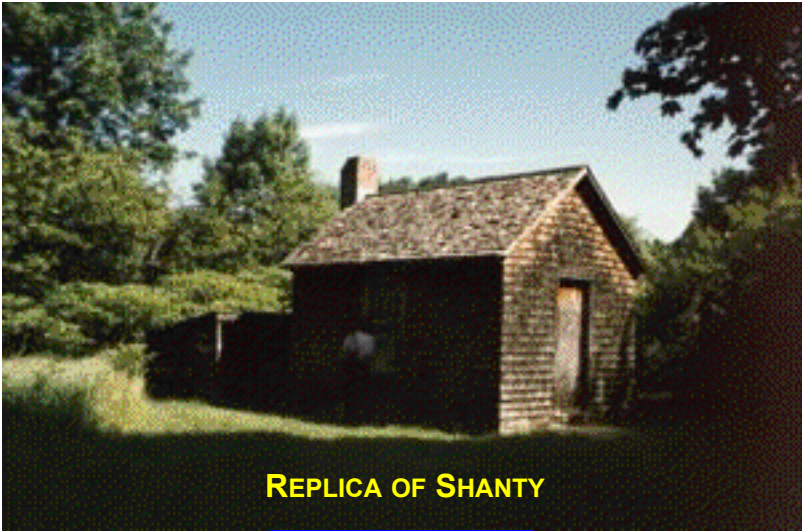
It is useless to disguise the truth that any great improvement in the social system of Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present state of agrarian occupation, and that this change necessarily implies a long, continued and systematic ejectment of small holders and of squatting cottiers.

the trend among the "improving" absentee landlords of the island had become to hire gangs of thugs who

would evict small tenants and tear the roofs from their cottages to make certain they could not come back:



April 15, Saturday: According to the journal of [Bronson Alcott](#), [Waldo Emerson](#)’s shanty that [Henry Thoreau](#) had built on the land on which he had squatted at Walden Pond had already at this point in time been relocated from its position on “Bay Henry” to a new spot in the former [beanfield](#) “nearer to the highway.”



REPLICA OF SHANTY

EMERSON’S SHANTY

(According to the journal of Daniel Brooks Clark, he and James Clark had been the ones who had moved what remained of the not-yet-famous shanty up to the top of the hill on behalf of [Emerson](#)’s drunken Scotch-Irish gardener Hugh Whelan.⁸



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

1849

The [Irish](#) who had emigrated to the USA were providing a great deal of, and an increasing amount of, assistance for their relatives on the old sod:

Low Estimates for Total Remittances to Ireland

Year	Pounds
1848	£460,000
1849	£540,000
1850	£957,000
1851	£990,000

Because of the fact that:

It is useless to disguise the truth that any great improvement in the social system of Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present state of agrarian occupation, and that this change necessarily implies a long, continued and systematic ejectment of small holders and of squatting cottiers.

the trend among the “improving” absentee landlords of the island had become to hire gangs of thugs who would evict small tenants and tear the roofs from their cottages to make certain they could not come back:

Families Evicted

Year	Families
1847	6,026
1848	9,657

8. First the shanty was pulled up to the top of the slope in an unsuccessful attempt to enlarge it and turn it into a suitable home for [Emerson](#)’s gardener Hugh Whelan’s family, and then, when the man had dug the cellar hole too deep and the hole had collapsed into itself, and when this man had become dispirited and the spirit of the bottle had gotten to be too much for him, and he had run away eventually to turn up in Sterling, the structure would be sold in 1849 to James Clark, one of the sons at the Brooks Clark Farm on the Old Carlisle Road (now Estabrook Road), who considered himself to be a second Thoreau and on September 3, 1849 with the help of his brother Daniel moved it out to their family farm. In the process, the plaster cracked. “Finally, the poor fellow became insane and was placed in an asylum,” Edward Bacon would note in 1897 in his [WALKS AND RIDES AROUND BOSTON](#). James died five years after moving the shanty. Eventually what remained of the structure would be in use as a corncrib or something on that [Concord](#) farm. Eventually parts of the corncrib would wind up patching the side of somebody’s barn, and so there’s now a piece of the original wood and some of the nails at the Jacob [Baker Farm](#) media center in Lincoln. It’s not exactly as impressive as a piece of the True Cross on display in a quartz and gold jar in a cathedral in Europe, although presumably somewhat more reliably provenanced.



Families Evicted

Year	Families
1849	16,686
1850	19,949
1851	13,197

July: The weather in Massachusetts was hot. Later, on June 11, 1851, [Henry Thoreau](#) would recollect this summer and write in his journal “I do not know but I feel less vigor at night –my legs will not carry me so far –as if the night were less favorable to muscular exertion –weakened us somewhat as darkness turns plants pale –but perhaps my experience is to be referred to being already exhausted by the day and I have never tried the experiment fairly. It was so hot summer before last that the [Irish](#) laborers on the RR worked by night instead of day for a while –several of them having been killed by the heat & cold water. I do not know but they did as much work as ever by day. Yet methinks nature would not smile on such labors.”

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

September 3, Monday: On this day [Emerson's \(Thoreau's\) shanty](#) was being carted from its position next to the road leading to Walden Pond, where [Waldo Emerson's](#) gardener Hugh Whelan had abandoned it tipped back into its new cellar hole after his unsuccessful attempt to turn it into a suitable front vestibule for a home next to the [beanfield](#) for his family. The structure had been purchased by James Clark, one of the sons at the Brooks Clark Farm on the Old Carlisle Road (now Estabrook Road) — who was considering himself to be a second Thoreau. With the help of his brother Daniel he was moving it out to their family farm. In the process, the plaster was cracking. “Finally, the poor fellow became insane and was placed in an asylum,” Edward Bacon would note in 1897 in his *WALKS AND RIDES AROUND BOSTON*. (James would die five years after moving the shanty.)⁹



October 7 (?), Friday: At some point during the morning [Edgar Allan Poe](#) became too exhausted to continue his raving, sank back into his hospital bed in [Baltimore, Maryland](#) murmuring “Lord help my poor soul,” and died.

The brig *St. John*, full of [Irish](#) families fleeing the [Irish Potato Famine](#), hit the Grampus rock and broke up off Cohasset.

A just man's purpose cannot be split on any Grampus.

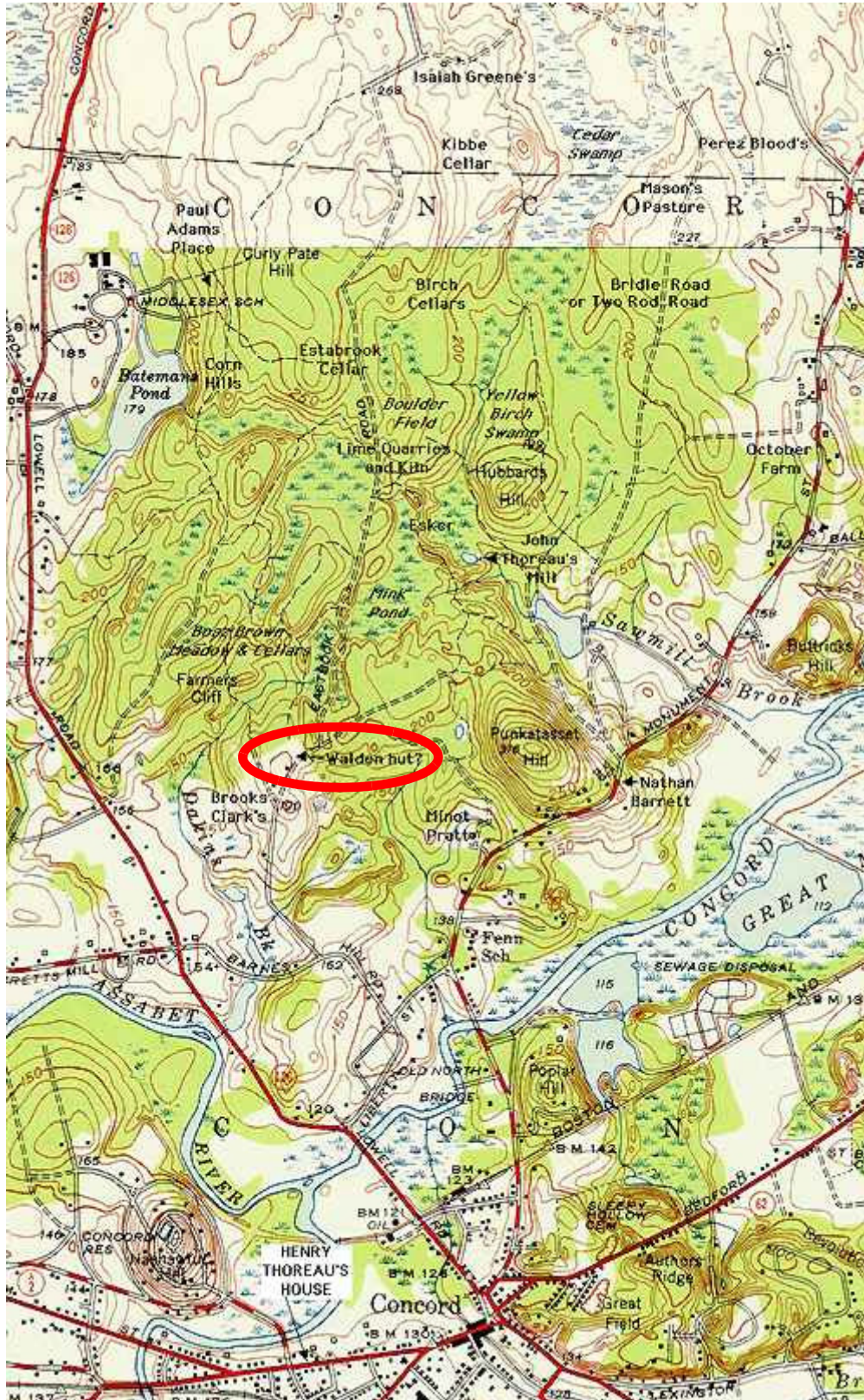
Lord, help their poor souls.

9. Eventually what remained of the structure would be in use as a corncrib or something on that [Concord](#) farm. Eventually parts of the corncrib would wind up patching the side of somebody's barn, and so there's now a piece of the original wood and some of the nails at the Jacob Baker Farm media center in Lincoln. It's not exactly as impressive as a piece of the True Cross on display in a quartz and gold jar in a cathedral in Europe, although presumably somewhat more reliably provenanced.

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THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

1850

November 28, Thursday: Frederick Douglass had ventured so far from the principle of nonviolence as to declare
“There are some things for which men deserve to die.... Slaveholders, being such, have no right to live.”



Thursday Nov 28th: Cold drizzling & misty rains which have melted the little snow– The farmers are beginning to pick up their dead wood. Within a day or two the walker finds gloves to be comfortable –& begins to think of an outside coat and of boots. Embarks in his boots for the winter voyage

The Indian talked about “our folks” & “your folks” “my grandfather” & “my grandfather’s cousin” –Samoset. It is remarkable, but nevertheless true as far as my observation goes –that women to whom we commonly concede a somewhat finer & more sybilline nature, yield a more implicit obedience even to their animal instincts than men. The nature in them is stronger –the reason weaker. There are for instance many young & middle aged men among my acquaintance who have scruples about using animal food, but comparatively few girls or women. The latter even the most refined are the most intolerant of such reforms. I think that the reformer of the severest as well as finest stamp class will find more sympathy in the intellectual & philosophic man than in the refined and delicate woman. It is perchance a part of woman’s conformity & easy nature. Her savior must not be too strong stern & intellectual –but charitable above all things.

The thought of its greater independence & its closeness to nature diminishes the pain I feel when I see a more interesting child than usual destined to be brought up in a shanty. I see that the child is happy –& is not puny – & has all the wonders of nature for its toys– I have faith that its tenderness will in some way be cherished and



THOREAU ON

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protected as the buds of the spring in the remotest & wildest dell no less than in the garden plot.

I am the little Irish boy
That lives in the shanty
I am four years old today

And shall soon be one and twenty
I shall grow up
And be a great man
And shovel all day
As hard as I can.
Down in the deep cut
/ v
Where the men lived
Who made the Rail road.

for supper

I lie on some straw
Under my fathers coat
At recess I play
With little Billy Gray

Then away I run.
And when school is done
My mother does not cry
And my father does not scold
For I am a little Irish Boy
And I'm four years old.

And if my feet ache
I do not mind the cold
For I am a little Irish boy
& I'm four years old.

I have some potatoes
And sometimes some bread
And then if its cold
I go right to bed.

And if I meet the cars
I get on the other track
And then I know whatever comes
I need'nt look back

Every day I go to school
Along the Railroad
It was so cold it made me cry
The day that it snowed.

THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

1851

August 23, Saturday: [Queen Victoria](#) boarded the yacht *America* with a group of English yachtmen, who proceeded to search the hull (most discretely, I assure you) for hidden engines of propulsion.



Eventually [Henry David Thoreau](#) would shift his vocabulary somewhat, in accord with this 1851 capture of the “America’s cup” by the yacht *America*, in that he would refer to the osprey as “the America yacht of the air.”



August 23, Saturday: To Walden to bathe at 5¹/₂ AM. Traces of the heavy rains in the night. The sand and gravel are beaten hard by them. 3 or 4 showers in succession. But the grass is not so wet as after an ordinary dew. The *verbena hastata* at the pond has reached the top of its spike—a little in advance of what I noticed yesterday—only one or two flowers are adhering. At the commencement of my walk I saw no traces of fog, but after detected fogs over particular meadows & high up some brooks’ valleys—and far in the deep cut the wood fog. 1st muskmelon this morning—

I rarely pass the shanty in the woods, where human beings are lodged literally no better than pigs in a sty. Little children—a grown man & his wife—and an aged Grandmother—living this squalid life squatting on the ground—but I wonder if it can be indeed true that little Julia Ruyaden calls this place home comes here to rest at night—and for her daily food—in whom ladies & gentlemen in the village take an interest—Of what significance are charity & alms houses? That there they live unmolested! in one sense so many degrees below the alms house! beneath charity. It is admirable—Nature against alms houses. A certain wealth of nature not poverty it suggests—Not to identify health & contentment with the possession of this world’s goods. It is not wise to waste compassion on them.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

As I go through the deep cut I hear one or two early humble bees come out on the damp sandy bank—whose low hum sounds like distant horns from far in the horizon over the woods. It was long before I detected the bees that made it.—So far away musical it sounded like the shepherds in some distant eastern vale greeting the king of day.



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The farmers now carry –those who have got them– their early potatoes & onions to market – starting away early in the morning or at midnight. I see them returning in the afternoon with the empty barrels. Perchance the copious rain of last night will trouble those who had not been so provident as to get their hay from the Great Meadows where it is often lost.

PM– walk to Anursnack & back over Stone B

I sometimes reproach myself because I do not find anything attractive in certain more trivial employments of men –that I skip men so commonly & their affairs –the professions and the trades –do not elevate them at least in my thought and get some material for poetry out of them directly. I will not avoid then to go by where these men are repairing the Stone Bridge –see if I cannot see poetry in that –if that will not yield me a reflection. It is narrow to be confined to woods & fields and grand aspects of nature only.– The greatest & wisest will still be related to men. Why not see men standing in the sun & casting a shadow –even as trees– may not some light be reflected from them as from the stems of trees– I will try to enjoy them as animals at least. They are perhaps better animals than men. Do not neglect to speak of men's low life and affairs with sympathy – though you ever so speak as to suggest a contrast between them & the ideal & divine– You may be excused if you are always pathetic – but do not refuse to recognize.

Resolve to read no book –to take no walk –to undertake no enterprise but such as you can endure to give an account of to yourself Live thus deliberately for the most part.

When I stopped to gather some blueberries by the roadside this afternoon I heard the shrilling of a cricket or a grasshopper close to me quite clear almost like a bell –a clear ring –incessant not intermittent like the song of the black fellow I caught the other day –and not suggesting the night, but belonging to day– It was long before I could find him though all the while within a foot or two– I did not know whether to search amid the grass & stones or amid the leaves. At last by accident I saw him, he shrilling all the while under an alder leaf 2 feet from the ground – a slender green fellow with long feelers & transparent wings. When he shrilled his wings which opened on each other in the form of a heart perpendicularly to his body like the wings of fairies, vibrated swiftly on each other. The apparently wingless female as I thought was near.

We experience pleasure when an elevated field or even road in which we may be walking –holds its level toward the horizon at a tangent to the earth –is not convex with the earth's surface –but an absolute level–

On or under E side of Annursnack *Epilobium coloratum* colored willow herb (near the spring.) Also *Polygonum sagittatum* Scratch grass.

The Price Farm Road –one of those everlasting roads– which the sun delights to shine along in an August afternoon – playing truant– Which seem to stretch themselves with terrene jest as the weary traveller journeys– Where there are three white sandy furrows (*liræ*), two for the wheels & one between them for the horse –with endless green grass borders between –& room on each side for huckleberries & birches.– where the walls indulge in peaks –not always parallel to the ruts –& golden rod yellows all the path– Which some elms began to fringe once but left off in despair it was so long. From no point on which can you be said to be at any definite distance from a town.

I associate the beauty of Quebec with the steel-like and flashing air.

Our little river reaches are not to be forgotten. I noticed that seen northward on the Assabet from the causeway bridge near the 2nd stone bridge. There was man in a boat in the sun just disappearing in the distance round a bend. lifting high his Arms & dipping his paddle – as if he were a vision bound to land of the blessed.– far off as in picture. When I see Concord to purpose – I see it as if it were not real but painted, and what wonder if I do not speak to *thee*. I saw a snake by the roadside & touched him with my foot to see if he were alive – he had a toad in his jaws which he was preparing to swallow with his jaws distended to 3 times his width –but he relinquished his prey in haste & fled –& I thought as the toad jumped leisurely away with his slime covered hind quarters glistening in the sun –as if I his deliverer wished to interrupt his meditations –with out a shriek or fainting –I thought what a healthy indifference he manifested. Is not this the broad earth still – he said.

1852

February 8, Sunday: [Herman Melville](#) wrote to [Julian Hawthorne](#):

My Dear Master Julian I was equally surprised and delighted by the sight of your printed note. (At first I thought it was a



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

circular (your father will tell you what that is)). I am very happy that I have a place in the heart of so fine a little fellow as you. You tell me that the snow in Newton is very deep. Well, it is still deeper here, I fancy. I went into the woods the other day, and got so deep into the drifts among the big hemlocks & maples that I thought I should stick fast there till Spring came, – a Snow Image.

Remember me kindly to your good father, Master Julian, and Good Bye, and may Heaven always bless you, & may you be a good boy and become a great good man.

Herman Melville



Feb. 8. Mrs Buttrick says that she has 5 cents for making a shirt, and that if she does her best she can make one in a day.

It is interesting to see loads of hay coming down from the country now a days – (within a week) they make them very broad & low. They do not carry hay by RR yet. The spoils of up-country fields. A Mt of dried herbs. I had forgotten that there ever was so much grass as they prove. – And all these horses & oxen & cows thus are still fed on the last summer's grass which has been dried! They still roam in the meads.

One would think that some people regarded character in man as the botanist (regards character) in flowers – who says “**Character** characterem non antecellit nisi constantia.” but this is well explained, and so that it becomes applicable to man, by this parallel aphorism of Linnaeus – Character non est, ut genus fiat, sed ut genus noscatur.”

It is apparently Fries who is made to say of his own system – or it may be Tuckerman who says it – that “By this key, I have not yet found that any plants, manifestly & by consent of all allied, are sundered.”

Tuckerman says cunningly “If the rapt admirer of the wonders and the beauties of life & being might well come to learn of our knowledge the laws and the history of what he loves, let us remember that we have the best right to all the pleasure that he has discovered, and that we are not complete if we do not possess it all. Linnaeus was as hearty a lover & admirer of nature as if he had been nothing more”.

Night before last our first rain for a long time – This afternoon the first crust to walk on. It is pleasant to walk over the fields raised a foot or more above their summer level – and the prospect is altogether new.

Is not all music a hum more or less divine? I hear something new at every telegraph post. I have not got out of hearing of one before I here a new harp.

Thoughts of different dates will not cohere.

Carried a new cloak to Johnny Riaden? I found that the shanty was warmed by the simple social relations of the Irish. On sunday they come from the town & stand in the door way & so keep out the cold. One is not cold among his brothers and sisters. What if there is less fire on the hearth, if there is more in the heart.

These Irish are not succeeding so ill after all – The little boy goes to the primary school and proves a forward boy there – And the mothers brother who has let himself in the village tells me that he takes the Flag of our Union – (if that is the paper edited by an Irishman). It is musical news to hear that Johnny does not love to be kept at home from school in deep snows.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

In this winter often no apparent difference between rivers ponds & fields

The French respected the Indians as a separate & independent people and speak of them & contrast themselves with them – as the English have never done. They not only went to war with them but they lived at home with them. There was a much less interval between them.

THOREAU ON

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A 20th-Century painting by [Charles Ephraim Burchfield](#) representing this thought “*Is not all music a hum more or less divine? I hear something new at every telegraph post. I have not got out of hearing of one before I hear a new harp*” displays a more modern type of telegraph-line insulator than actually had been in use during the 1850s:



The line insulators in use during that earlier period would actually have looked more like the following preserved examples:





THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

1853

September 5, Monday: During the Middlesex Cattle Show, two non-Irishmen and ten Irishmen engaged in an organized spading competition. One of these spaders was Concord's industrious man of County Kerry,



[Michael Flannery](#), the hired hand of Abiel H. Wheeler, and while one of the two non-Irishmen, Enoch Garfield, carried off the 1st prize, the 2nd prize of \$4.00 was won by Flannery. Wheeler would outrageously claim Flannery's prize money on the grounds that since it was he who employed Flannery, obviously anything that might pertain to Flannery would belong to him, and [Henry Thoreau](#) would draw up and circulate a petition in opposition to such abuse of a new guest in the community.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

October 12, Wednesday: [Henry Thoreau](#) circulated a petition in Concord, in regard to abusive treatment [Michael Flannery](#) had received from the Concord citizen for whom he was working as a hired hand:

Concord Oct 12th '53

We, the Undersigned, contribute the following sums, in order to make up to Michael Flannery the sum of four dollars, being the amount of his premium for spading on the 5th ult., which was received and kept by his employer, Abiel H. Wheeler.



October 12: To-day I have had the experience of borrowing money for a poor Irishman who wishes to get his family to this country. One will never know his neighbors till he has carried a subscription paper among them. Ah! it reveals many and sad facts to stand in this relation to them. To hear the selfish and cowardly excuses some make, —that if they help any they must help the Irishman who lives with them, —and him they are sure never to help: others with whom public opinion weighs, will think of it, trusting you will never raise the sum and so they will not be called on again; who give stingily after all. What a satire in the fact that you are



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

much more inclined to call on a certain slighted and so-called crazy woman in moderate circumstances rather than on the president of the bank: But some are generous and save the town from the distinction which threatened it, and some even who do not lend, plainly would if they could.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

December 19, Monday: Sometime after the incident of the spading competition, [Michael Flannery](#) had quit working for Abiel H. Wheeler and become a field laborer instead for Elijah Wood. At this point he discussed this new job with [Henry Thoreau](#) and told of his continuing efforts to get his family from Ireland. That evening Thoreau wrote to H.G.O. Blake:

An Irishman came to see me to-day, who is endeavoring to get his family out to this New World. He rises at half past four, milks twenty-eight cows (which has swollen the joints of his fingers), and eats his breakfast, without any milk in his tea or coffee, before six; and so on, day after day, for six and a half dollars a month; and thus he keeps his virtue in him, if he does not add to it; and he regards me as a gentleman able to assist him; but if I ever get to be a gentleman, it will be by working after my fashion harder than he does.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

From this day into December 21st, Thoreau would be surveying a Corner Spring woodlot that James P. Brown was selling to William Wheeler, which was cut in 1853-1854. (Brown lived near Nut Meadow Brook, and according to the Concord Town Report for 1851-1852, Thoreau had laid out a town road near his house and had been paid \$4.⁰⁰ for this by the town.)

View [Henry Thoreau](#)'s personal working drafts of his surveys courtesy of AT&T and the Concord Free Public Library:

http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau_Surveys/Thoreau_Surveys.htm

(The official copy of this survey of course had become the property of the person or persons who had hired this Concord town surveyor to do their surveying work during the 19th Century. Such materials have yet to be recovered.)

View this particular personal working draft of a survey in fine detail:

http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau_Surveys/137.htm

Thoreau wrote to [Spencer Fullerton Baird](#) in regard to [Louis Agassiz](#)'s American Association for the Advancement of Science, to withdraw his name, pleading that he would be unable to attend meetings and explaining that the kind of science he was attracted to was the science of the Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s

[THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#)

and [Alexander von Humboldt](#)'s

ASPECTS OF NATURE



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

— as he understood very well that this was bound suitably to render him unattractive to them.¹⁰

In this letter Thoreau made reference to a poem that had been published anonymously in Punch, or the London Charivari, by [Thomas Hood](#), entitled "[The Song of the Shirt](#)."

In this letter, also, Thoreau made reference to pamphlet of 10 pages of blue paper just put out by the Smithsonian Institution that was going to become part of his personal library, [Spencer Fullerton Baird](#)'s DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING COLLECTIONS IN NATURAL HISTORY, PREPARED FOR THE USE OF THE PARTIES ENGAGED IN THE EXPLORATION OF A ROUTE FOR THE PACIFIC RAILROAD ALONG THE 49TH PARALLEL.

GOD IN CONCORD by Jane Langton © 1992

Viking Penguin

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*If you are going into that line, —going to besiege
the city of God, —you must not only be strong
in engines, but prepared with provisions to
starve out the garrison.*
Thoreau, Letter to Harrison Blake,
December 19, 1853

Homer took his convictions about Pond View to Police
Chief James Flower

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Concord Dec 19th 53

Mr Blake,

My debt has accumulated so that I should have answered your last letter at once, if I had not been the subject of what is called a press of engagements, having a lecture to write for last Wednesday, and surveying more than usual besides. — It has been a kind of running fight with me — the enemy not always behind me, I trust.

True, a man cannot lift himself by his own waist-bands, because he

10. Harding and Bode, CORRESPONDENCE, pages 309-10. He gave quite a different reason for not becoming a member in his JOURNAL: "*The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot.*" Although it has been alleged many times that this reading had great influence on [Henry Thoreau](#), quite frankly I have been unable myself to verify that Thoreau took this species of nature writing as [Waldo Emerson](#) had, with any seriousness.



cannot get out of himself, but he can expand himself, (which is better, there being no up nor down in nature) and so split his waistbands, being already within himself.

You speak of doing & being – & the vanity real or apparent of much doing – The suckers, I think it is they, make nests in our river in the spring of more than a cart-load of small stones, amid which to deposit their ova. The other day I opened a muskrats' house. It was made of weeds, five feet broad at base & 3 feet high, and far and low within it was a little cavity, only a foot in diameter where the rat dwelt. It may seem trivial – this piling up of weeds, but so the race of muskrats is preserved. We must heap up a great pile of doing for a small diameter of being. – Is it not imperative on us that we do something – if we only work in a tread-mill? and, indeed, some sort of revolving is necessary to produce a centre & nucleus of being. What exercise is to the body – employment is to the mind & morals. Consider what an amount of drudgery must be performed – how much hum-drum & prosaic labor goes to any work of the least value. There are so many layers of mere white lime in every shell to that thin inner one so beautifully tinted. Let not the shell fish think to build his house of that alone; and pray what are its tints to him? Is it not his smooth close-fitting shirt merely? whose tints are not to him, being in the dark, but only when he is gone or dead, and his shell is heaved up to light a wreck upon the beach, do they appear. With him too it is a song of the shirt – “work – work – work” – & this work is not merely a police in the gross sense, but in the higher sense, a discipline. If it is surely the means to the highest end we know, can any work be humble or disgusting? Will it not rather elevate as a ladder – the means by which we are translated? How admirably the artist is made to accomplish his self culture by devotion to his art! The woodsawyer through his effort to do his work well, becomes not merely a better woodsawyer, but measurably a better man. Few are the men that can work on their navels – only some Brahmens that I have heard of. To the painter is given some paint & canvass instead. – to the Irishman a bog, – typical of himself. – In a thousand apparently humble ways men busy themselves to make some right take the place of some wrong, – if it is only to make a better paste-blackening – and they are themselves so much the better morally for it.

You say that you sit & aspire, but do not succeed much. Does it concern you enough that you do not? Do you work hard enough at it— Do you get the benefit of discipline out of it? If so, persevere. Is it a more serious thing than to walk a thousand miles in a thousand successive hours? Do you get any corns by it? Do you ever think of hanging yourself on account of failure?

If you are going into that line – going to besiege the city of God –



you must not only be strong in engines – but prepared with provisions to starve out the garrison. An Irishman came to see me today who is endeavoring to get his family out to this New World. He rises at half past 4 & milks 28 cows – (which has swollen the joints of his fingers) & eats his breakfast, without any milk in his tea or coffee, before 6 – & so on day after day for six & a half dollars a month – & thus he keeps his virtue in him – if he does not add to it – & he regards me as a gentleman able to assist him – but if I ever get to be a gentleman, it will be by working after my fashion harder than he does – If my joints are not swollen, it must be because I deal with the teats of celestial cows before break-fast, (and the milker in this case is always allowed some of the milk for his breakfast) to say nothing of the flocks & herds of Admetus afterward.

It is the art of mankind to polish the world, and every one who works is scrubbing in some part.

If the mark is high & far, you must not only aim aright, but draw the bow with all your might. You must qualify your self to use a bow which no humbler archer can bend.

Work – work – work!

Who shall know it for a bow? It is not of yew-tree. It is straighter than a ray of light – flexibility is not known for one of its qualities.

Dec 22nd

So far I had got when I was called off to survey. – Pray read the Life of Haydon the painter – if you have not. It is a small revelation for these latter days – a great satisfaction to know that he has lived – though he is now dead. Have you met with the letter of a Turkish cadi at the end of Layard's "Nineveh & Babylon" that also is refreshing & a capital comment on the whole book which preceeds it – the oriental genius speaking through him.

Those Brahmins put it through, they come off – or rather stand still, conquerors, with some withered arms or legs at least to show – & they are said to have cultivated the faculty of abstraction to a degree unknown to Europeans, – If we cannot sing of faith & triumph – we will sing our despair. We will be that kind of bird. There are day owls & there are night owls – and each is beautiful & even musical while about its business.

Might you not find some positive work to do with your back to Church & State – letting your back do all the rejection of them? Can you not go upon your pilgrimage, Peter, along the winding mountain path whither you face? A step more will make those funereal church bells over your shoulder sound far and sweet as a natural sound
Work – work – work!

Why not make a very large mud pie & bake it in the sun! Only put no church nor state into it, nor upset any other pepper-box that way. –



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

Dig out a wood-chuck for that has nothing to do with rotting institutions – Go ahead.

Whether a man spends his day in an extacy or despondency – he must do some work to show for it – even as there are flesh & bones to show for him. We are superior to the joy we experience.

Your last 2 letters methinks have more nerve & will in them than usual – as if you had erected yourself more – Why are not they good work – if you only had a hundred correspondents to tax you?

Make your failure tragical – by the earnestness & steadfastness of your endeavor – & then it will not differ from success – Prove it to be the inevitable fate of mortals – of one mortal – if you can.

You said that you were writing on immortality – I wish you would communicate to me what you know about that – you are sure to live while that is your theme –

Thus I write on some text which a sentence of your letters may have furnished.

I think of coming to see you as soon as I get a new coat – if I have money enough left – I will write to you again about it.

Henry D. Thoreau

BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

December 28, Wednesday: [Michael Flannery](#)'s predicament was still on [Henry Thoreau](#)'s mind, for he wrote in his journal:



E.W., who got the premium on farms this year, keeps twenty-eight cows, which are milked before breakfast, or 6 o'clock, his hired men rising at 4.30 A.M.; but he gives them none of the milk in their coffee.

A year later Thoreau would use a slightly revised version of this passage about local farmer "E.W." or Elijah Wood Jr. in a lecture he delivered before the [Nantucket](#) Athenaeum, "WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT" as one of several illustrations of money-grubbing.

[Paragraph 14] I know another farmer who keeps twenty-eight cows—whose hired man and boy rise daily at half past four in mid winter, and milk the cows before breakfast, which is at six o'clock by candlelight—and they get none of the milk in their coffee.

(The boy mentioned was in all likelihood [Michael](#)'s son [Johnny Flannery](#).)

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

1854

February 26, Sunday: [Henry Thoreau](#) was reading about [Dr. Elisha Kent Kane](#)'s expedition to find the remains of the expedition of [Sir John Franklin](#) in the Arctic.



U.S. GRINNELL EXPEDITION

THE FROZEN NORTH

In the afternoon he walked in the rain to Martial Miles's. Miles said he thought he had heard a bluebird.



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

WALDEN: What does Africa, -what does the West stand for? Is not our own interior white on the chart? black though it may prove, like the coast, when discovered. Is it the source of the Nile, or the Niger, or the Mississippi, or a North-West Passage around this continent, that we would find? Are these the problems which most concern mankind? Is Franklin the only man who is lost, that his wife should be so earnest to find him? Does Mr. Grinnell know where he himself is? Be rather the Mungo Park, the Lewis and Clarke and Frobisher, of your own streams and oceans; explore your own higher latitudes, -with shiploads of preserved meats to support you, if they be necessary; and pile the empty cans sky-high for a sign. Were preserved meats invented to preserve meat merely? Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought. Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state, a hummock left by the ice. Yet some can be patriotic who have no *self-respect*, and sacrifice the greater to the less. They love the soil which makes their graves, but have no sympathy with the spirit which may still animate their clay. Patriotism is a maggot in their heads. What was the meaning of that South-Sea Exploring Expedition, with all its parade and expense, but an indirect recognition of the fact, that there are continents and seas in the moral world, to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.-

“Erret, et extremos alter scrutetur Iberos.
Plus habet hic vitæ, plus habet ille viæ.”

Let them wander and scrutinize the outlandish Australians.
I have more of God, they more of the road.

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

SIR JOHN FRANKLIN

DR. ELISHA KENT KANE

MERIWETHER LEWIS

WILLIAM CLARK

MUNGO PARK

Thoreau wrote Elijah Wood about beginning to forward to him $\frac{3}{4}$ ths of **Michael Flannery**'s wages. A comment made was that this was in repayment of “money lent him in some pinch.”

Concord Feb. 26th '54

Mr Wood,

I mentioned to you that Mr. Flannery had given me an order on you for $\frac{3}{4}$ of his wages. I have agreed with him that that arrangement shall not begin to take effect until the first of March 1854.

yrs

Henry D. Thoreau

THOREAU ON THE IRISH



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

In a few years, upon returning to a friend a copy of [Dr. Kane](#)'s ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS: *THE SECOND GRINNELL EXPEDITION* IN SEARCH OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN, 1853, '54, '55, [Thoreau](#) would remark that "most of the phenomena therein recorded are to be observed about Concord":



ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS, I

ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS, II

Eventually Thoreau would obtain his own personal set of these volumes and would make notes in his Indian Notebooks #8 and #10 and his Fact Book.



E. H. Hall



There was one Philadelphian book of the fifties that lay on countless parlour tables, acclaimed by Irving, Bancroft, Prescott and Bryant, the ARCTIC EXPLORATIONS of Dr. Elisha Kent Kane, who had reached the highest latitude, the furthest north. A surgeon in the navy in Oriental waters, he had previously explored the Philippines in 1844 more extensively than any traveller before him; then he led one of the expeditions in search of the British explorer Franklin, who had vanished with his ship and crew in the northern ice-fields. He spent two winters in the arctic zone, encountering with his comrades the utmost of hardship and danger that men can endure, beset by darkness, cold, scurvy and rats and the perils of lockjaw and floating ice, subsisting on blubber and the beef of walrus and bear. Obligated at last to abandon their brig, the party escaped on sledges, having found what they thought was an open polar sea, and Dr. Kane's record of these adventures, describing their daily arctic life, revealed a world that was all but unknown and new. It abounded in pictures of Eskimo customs, seal-stalking and walrus-hunts, and Dr. Kane sketched landscapes that Dante might have conjured up, so mysterious, so inorganic and so desolate they were. They appeared to have been left unfinished when the earth was formed. The moonlight painted on the snow-fields fantastic profiles of crags and spires, and the firmament seemed to be close overhead with the stars magnified in glory in the awful frozen silence of the arctic night. One felt amid these night-scenes as if the life of the planet were suspended, its companionships and its colours, its movements and its sounds.



Feb. 26. [Kane](#), ashore far up Baffin's Bay, says, "How strangely this crust we wander over asserts its identity through all the disguises of climate!"

Speaking of the effects of refraction on the water, he says: "The single repetition was visible all around us; the secondary or inverted image sometimes above and sometimes below the primary. But it was not uncommon to see, also, the uplifted ice-berg, with its accompanying or false horizon, joined at its summit by its inverted image, and then above a second horizon, a third berg in its natural position." He refers to Agassiz at Lake Superior as suggesting "that it may be simply the reflection of the landscape inverted upon the surface of the lake, and reproduced with the actual landscape;" though there there was but one inversion.

He says that he saw sledge-tracks of Franklin's party in the neighborhood of Wellington Sound, made on the snow, six years old, which had been covered by the aftersnows of five winters. This reminds me of the sled-tracks I saw this winter.

Kane says that, some mornings in that winter in the ice, they heard "a peculiar crisping or crackling sound." "This sound, as the 'noise accompanying the aurora,' has been attributed by Wrangell and others, ourselves among the rest, to changes of atmospheric temperature acting upon the crust of the snow." Kane thinks it is rather owing "to the unequal contraction and dilatation" of unequally presenting surfaces, "not to a sudden change of atmospheric temperature acting upon the snow." Is not this the same crackling I heard at Fair Haven on the 19th, and are not most of the arctic phenomena to be witnessed in our latitude on a smaller scale? At Fair Haven it seemed a slighter contraction of the ice, -- not enough to make it thunder, This morning it began with snowing, turned to a fine freezing rain producing a glaze, -the most of a glaze thus far,-but in the afternoon



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

changed to pure rain.

P. M. -To Martial Miles's in rain.

The weeds, trees, etc., are covered with a glaze. The blue-curl cups are overflowing with icy drops. All trees present a new appearance, their twigs being bent down by the ice, - birches, apple trees, etc., but, above all, the pines. Tall, feathery white pines look like cockerels' tails in a shower. Both these and white [= pitch] pines, their branches being inclined downward, have sharpened tops like fir and spruce trees. Thus an arctic effect is produced. Very young white and pitch pines are most changed, all their branches drooping in a compact pyramid toward the ground except a single plume in the centre. They have a singularly crestfallen look. The rain is fast washing off all the glaze on which I had counted, thinking of the effect of to-morrow's sun on it. The wind rises and the rain increases. Deep pools of water have formed in the fields, which have an agreeable green or blue tint, - sometimes the one, sometimes the other. Yet the quantity of water which is fallen is by no means remarkable but, the ground being frozen, it is not soaked up. There is more water on the surface than before this winter.

March 6, Monday: [Henry Thoreau](#) was being written to by [Horace Greeley](#) / McElrath in New-York. In the afternoon he walked to Goose Pond. Greeley returned Thoreau's second \$2.⁰⁰ because a thief in the newspaper office had been apprehended.¹¹

Office of the Tribune[,]
New York, 6 March 185[4]
Mr. Henry D[.] Thoreau[]
Sir:
Yours of
[3rd] to Mr[] Greeley is before us and
we will send you the Tribune
though the money has not reached
us[.]
Very [Resp^y,]
Greeley & [M^cElrath]
[pr] S[.] Sinclair[e]

New York
Mar. 6, 1854.
Dear Sir:
I presume your
first letter containing
the \$2 ~~has~~ was robbed
by our general mail
robber at New Haven,
who has just been sent
to the State Prison. Your
second letter has probably
failed to receive due at-
tention, owing to a press
of business. But I will
make all right. You ought

11. This thief would do time.



*to have the Semi-Weekly,
and I shall order it
[Page 2]
sent you one year on
trial; if you choose to
write me a letter or
s[o] some time, very
well; if not, we will
be even without that.
Thoreau, I want you
to do something on
my [urging]. I want
you to collect and ar-
range your Miscella-
n[i]es, and send them to
me. Put in 'Katahdin,'
'Carlyle,' 'A Winter Wood,' and 'Canada,' &c. and I
will try to find a pub-
lisher who will bring
them out at his own*

*[Page 3]
risk and (I hope) to your
ultimate profit. If you
have any thing new to put
with them, very well;
but let us have ~~the~~
about a l2 mo volume
whenever you can get
it ready, and see if
there is not something
to your credit in the
bank of Fortune.
Yours,
Horace Greeley.
Henry D. Thoreau, Esq.
Concord, Mass.*



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

[Waldo Emerson](#) had advanced some money against subscription promises of various Concordians, including the Thoreau family, in order to enable [Michael Flannery](#) to send for his wife Ann and children from Ireland. At this point [Thoreau](#) was able to write the letter for this Irish laborer, sending for his family. He noted in particular Flannery's concern that his wife be careful and not let their children fall overboard due to the rocking of the ship.

THOREAU ON THE IRISH



March 6. A cool morning. The bare water here and there on the meadow begins to look smooth, and I look to see it rippled by a muskrat. The earth has to some extent frozen dry, for the drying of the earth goes on in the cold night as well as the warm day. The alders and hedgerows are still silent, emit no notes.

P.M. — To Goose Pond. According to [G. Emerson](#), maple sap sometimes begins to flow in the middle of February, but usually in the second week of March, especially in a clear, bright day with a westerly wind, after a frosty night. The brooks--the swift ones and those in swamps--open before the river; indeed some of the first have been open the better part of the winter. I saw trout glance in the Mill Brook this afternoon, though near its sources, in Hubbard's Close, it is still covered with dark, icy snow, and the river into which it empties has not broken up. Can they have come up from the sea? Like a film or shadow they glance before the eye, and you see where the mud is roiled by them. Saw children checker berrying in a meadow. I see the skunk-cabbage started about the spring at head of Hubbard's Close, amid the green grass, and what looks like the first probing of the skunk. The snow is now all off on meadow ground, in thick evergreen woods, and on the south sides of hills, but it is still deep in sprout-lands, on the north sides of hills, and generally in deciduous woods. In sprout lands it is melted beneath, but upheld by the bushes. What bare ground we have now is due then not so much to the increased heat of the sun and warmth of the air as to the little frost there was in the ground in so many localities. This remark applies with less force, however, to the south sides of hills. The ponds are hard enough for skating again. Heard and saw the first blackbird, flying east over the Deep Cut, with a tchuck, tchuck, and finally a split whistle.

March 8, Wednesday: Commodore [Matthew Calbraith Perry](#) was able to put ashore in [Japan](#) and begin to negotiate a trade agreement. [Henry Thoreau](#) made a journal entry that resulted in a portion of the following paragraph from

US MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

“Life without Principle”:

At a lyceum, not long since, I felt that the lecturer had chosen a theme too foreign to himself, and so failed to interest me as much as he might have done. He described things not in or near to his heart, but toward his extremities and superficialities. There was, in this sense, no truly central or centralizing thought in the lecture. I would have had him deal with his privatest experience, as the poet does. The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I *thought*, and attended to my answer. I am surprised, as well as delighted, when this happens, it is such a rare use he would make of me, as if he were acquainted with the tool. Commonly, if men want anything of me, it is only to know how many acres I make of their land --since I am a surveyor,--or, at most, what trivial news I have burdened myself with. They never will go to law for my meat; they prefer the shell. A man once came a considerable distance to ask me to lecture on Slavery; but on conversing with him, I found that he and his clique expected seven-eighths of the lecture to be theirs, and only one-eighth mine; so I declined. I take it for granted, when I am invited to lecture anywhere, --for I have had a little experience in that business, --that there is a desire to hear what I *think* on some subject, though I may be the greatest fool in the country, --and not that I should say pleasant things merely, or such as the audience will assent to; and I resolve, accordingly, that I will give them a strong dose of myself. They have sent for me, and engaged to pay for me, and I am determined that they shall have me, though I bore them beyond all precedent.



March 8: Steady rain on the roof in the night, suggesting April-like warmth. This will help melt the snow and ice and take the frost out of the ground. What pretty wreaths the mountain cranberry makes, curving



upward at the extremity! The leaves are now a dark, glossy red, and wreath and all are of such a shape as might fitly be copied in wood or stone or architectural foliages. I wrote a letter for an Irishman night before last, sending for his wife in Ireland to come to this country. one sentence which he dictated was, "Don't mind the rocking of the vessel, but take care of the children that they be not lost overboard." Lightning this evening, after a day of successive rains.

MICHAEL FLANNERY

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

September 4, Monday: "I have provided my little snapping turtle with a tub of water and mud, and it is surprising how fast he learns to use his limbs and this world. He actually runs, with the yolk still trailing from him, as if he had got new vigor from contact with the mud. The insensibility and toughness of his infancy makes our life, with its disease and low spirits, ridiculous. He impresses me as the rudiment of a man worthy to inhabit the earth. He is born with a shell. That is symbolical of his toughness. His shell being so rounded and sharp on the back at this age. He [*sic*??] can turn over without trouble." Tortoise Eggs In the afternoon [Henry Thoreau](#) went to climbing fern, and at 7:30 PM he went by boat to Fair Haven Bay (Gleason J7).

Thoreau and other Concordians had lent [Michael Flannery](#) enough money to enable him to send for his wife Ann and children from Ireland, and Flannery was still repaying this advance by passing on to Thoreau three-quarters of the wages he was earning from Elijah Wood. On this day [Waldo Emerson](#) made an entry in his account book that the latest payment, of \$2.⁵⁰, left a balance due of \$2.⁵⁰ on the funds that Emerson himself had advanced:

Sept. 4	Recd. from Henry Thoreau on a/c of cash loaned	
	to Mr. Flannery [<i>sic</i>] last year	2.50
	balance still due	2.50

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

Dr. Bradley P. Dean has expressed the considered opinion on the basis of his research, that "It is likely that Emerson and a few others who had signed the subscription paper Thoreau had circulated on October 12, 1853, had lent Flannery a sum of money that was insufficient for his need, and that Thoreau had lent Flannery the difference. There is evidence that Michael worked for Mr. Thoreau's [graphite](#) business, and he very likely did so to earn money to pay off what must have been his substantial debts to Thoreau, Emerson, and his other neighbors. But Flannery's debt to Thoreau was, of course, more than money alone could repay, and this debt continued to mount. When Ann Flannery and her brood arrived from Ireland, the first house they went to was the Thoreaus' house on Main Street in Concord. There is no record of how long the Flannerys boarded with the Thoreaus before Michael was able to find accommodations for them elsewhere."

1855

March 22, Thursday: Prejudice toward [Irish Catholic](#) immigrants, fanned by the [Providence Journal](#) (nowadays this paper is referred to locally as the “ProJo”), was using as its vehicle the American, or “[Know-Nothing](#)” party, a secret organization that was sweeping town, city, and state elections in the mid-fifties. In this year its candidate, William W. Hoppin, had captured the [Rhode Island](#) governorship. Some of the party’s more zealous adherents even planned a raid on St. Xavier’s Convent, home of the “female Jesuits,” supported by a fake rumor they were circulating to the effect that a Protestant girl, named Rebecca Newell, was being held against her will by the nuns of Sisters of Mercy.



The password of these [Know-Nothing](#) Protestant rioters was “show yourself.” (Is the password of the Ku Klux Klan “expose yourself”?)

ANTI-CATHOLICISM

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#) on this day, an angry mob instigated by the ProJo and the [Know-Nothings](#) dispersed when confronted with Bishop Bernard O’Reilly and an equally militant crowd of [Irishmen](#). On this day, God’s providence was definitely on the side of the big shillelaghs!

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THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

Irish Gangs and Stick-Fighting

In the Works of William Carleton



John W. Hurley



1856

August 8, Friday: [Henry Thoreau](#) and [Waldo Emerson](#) walked in the Conantum district of Concord. Back home, Emerson then commented on this day in his journal, recording with condescension and forbearance not only that his tour guide had exhibited “some of his [botanical](#) rarities” –by this manner of elocution signalling that these were plants of interest only by reason of novelty– but also that he had “expatiated on the omniscience of the Indians” — which would be a total absurdity of course, since as W. well understood, these American aboriginals are people of a low culture and a lower intellect, doomed to die out both as a culture and as a race due to their manifest inability to cope with the overwhelming superiority of us, the omniscient white people.

Thoreau recorded an incident involving [Michael Flannery](#) and his wife Ann and their young son Johnny. (One gathers that this must have been shortly after the wife and children arrived in Concord from Ireland, while they were still boarding at the Thoreau boardinghouse.) It was the pursuit of his father John Thoreau’s 90-pound pig, which had escaped its pen and was wandering the streets of Concord. After several unsuccessful attempts to trap it, Thoreau writes, “an Irishman was engaged to assist”:

“I can catch him,” says he, with Buonapartean confidence. He thinks him a family Irish pig. His wife is with him, bareheaded, and his little flibbertigibbet of a boy, seven years old. “Here, Johnny, do you run right off there” (at the broadest possible angle with his own course). “Oh, but he can’t do anything.” “Oh, but I only want him to tell me where he is,—to keep sight of him.” Michael soon discovers that he is not an Irish pig, and his wife and Johnny’s occupation are soon gone. Ten minutes afterward I am patiently tracking him step by step through a corn-field, a near-sighted man helping me, and then into garden after garden far eastward, and finally into the highway, at the graveyard; but hear and see nothing. One suggests a dog to track him. Father is meanwhile selling him to the blacksmith, who is also trying to get sight of him. After fifteen minutes since he disappeared eastward, I hear that he has been to the river twice far [to] the north, through the first neighbor’s premises. I wend that way. He crosses the street far ahead, Michael behind; he dodges up an avenue. I stand in the gap there, Michael at the other end, and now he tries to corner him. But it is a vain hope to corner him in a yard. I see a carriage manufactory door open. “Let him go in there, Flannery.” For once the pig and I are of one mind; he bolts in, and the door is closed. Now for a rope. It is a large barn, crowded with carriages. The rope is at length obtained; the windows are barred with carriages lest he bolt through. He is resting quietly on his belly in the further corner, thinking unutterable things.

Now the course commences within narrower limits. Bump, bump, bump he goes, against wheels and shafts. We get no hold yet. He is all ear and eye. Small boys are sent under the carriages to drive him out. He froths at the mouth and deters them. At length he is stuck for an instant between the spokes of a wheel, and I am securely attached to his hind leg. He squeals deafeningly, and is silent. The rope is attached to a hind leg. The door is



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THE IRISH

opened and the driving commences. Roll an egg as well. You may drag him, but you cannot drive him. But he is in the road, and now another thunder-shower greets us. I leave Michael with the rope in one hand and a switch in the other and go home. He seems to be gaining a little westward. But, after long delay, I look out and find that he makes but doubtful progress. A boy is made to face him with a stick, and it is only when the pig springs at him savagely that progress is made homeward. He will be killed before he is driven home. I get a wheelbarrow and go to the rescue. Michael is alarmed. The pig is rabid, snaps at him. We drag him across the barrow, hold him down, and so, at last, get him home.

Per Charles Flannery, presumably the grandson of [Michael Flannery](#), as recorded in John E. Nickols's "Thoreau and the Pig" ([Thoreau Society Bulletin](#) LXXVII for Fall 1961, page 1): *"That Thoreau, he lived in a hut out there by the pond, he wasn't much, besides that he was insulting; he was an insulting man.... Why, do you know my grandfather and Henry Thoreau pounded lead together [pencil making], yessir, they pounded lead together.... Do you know what he said to my grandfather, I'll tell you what he said. My grandfather used to take Thoreau home to eat dinner. Henry Thoreau ate dinner at my grandfather's house plenty of times, when they were poundin' lead together. One time my grandfather took Henry Thoreau home with him to eat dinner. When they got to the house the pigs were loose. My grandfather said, 'Henry, help me drive the pigs out of the yard; you stand in the barn door over there.... You stand there and don't let the pigs run into the barn,' grandfather asked Thoreau to guard the door. Henry stood in the door. Just then one of the pigs made a run for the barn. Henry started to head him off but the pig ran right between his legs. Knocked Henry right off his feet. He got up, dusted himself off and he said to my grandfather, 'Mr. Flannery, only an Irish pig would do a thing like that.' ... Imagine that, imagine him saying a thing like that ... an Irish pig ... I tell you that man was insulting."*

THOREAU ON THE IRISH

1857

February 8, Sunday: Odell Shepard's THE HEART OF THOREAU'S JOURNALS indicates that we just don't know "to what particular friend Thoreau is saying farewell" in his journal entry of this date, which he began by complaining "And now another friendship is ended."



February 8: P.M. Debauched and worn-out senses require the violent vibrations of an instrument to excite them, but *sound* and still youthful senses, not enervated by luxury, hear music in the wind and rain and running water. One would think from reading the critics that music was intermittent as a spring in the desert, dependent on some [Paganini](#) or Mozart, or heard only when the Pierians or Euterpeans drive through the villages; but music is perpetual, and only hearing is intermittent. I hear it in the softened air of these warm February days which have broken the back of the winter.

For two nights past it has not frozen, but a thick mist has overhung the earth, and you awake to the unusual and agreeable sight of water in the streets. Several strata of snow have been washed away from the drifts, down to that black one formed when dust was blowing from plowed fields.

Riordan's solitary cock, standing on such an icy snow-heap, feels the influence of the softened air, and the steam from patches of bare ground here and there, and has found his voice again. The warm air has thawed the music in his throat, and he crows lustily and unweariedly, his voice rising to the last. Yesterday morning our feline

CAT



Thomas, also feeling the springlike influence, stole away along the fences and walls, which raise him above the water, and only returned this morning reeking with wet. Having got his breakfast, he already stands on his hind legs, looking wishfully through the window, and, the door being opened a little, he is at once off again in spite of the rain.

Again and again I congratulate myself on my so-called poverty. I was almost disappointed yesterday to find thirty dollars in my desk which I did not know that I possessed, though now I should be sorry to lose it. The week that I go away to lecture, however much I may get for it, is unspeakably cheapened. The preceding and succeeding days are a mere sloping down and up from it.

In the society of many men, or in the midst of what is called success, I find my life of no account, and my spirits rapidly fall. I would rather be the barrenest pasture lying fallow than cursed with the compliments of kings, than be the sulphurous and accursed desert where Babylon once stood. But when I have only a rustling oak leaf, or the faint metallic cheep of a tree sparrow, for variety in my winter walk, my life becomes continent and sweet as the kernel of a nut. I would rather hear a single shrub oak leaf at the end of a wintry glade rustle of its own accord at my approach, than receive a shipload of stars and garters from the strange kings and peoples of the earth.

By poverty, *i.e.* simplicity of life and fewness of incidents, I am solidified and crystallized, as a vapor or liquid by cold. It is a singular concentration of strength and energy and flavor. Chastity is perpetual acquaintance with the All. My diffuse and vaporous life becomes as the frost leaves and spicul[æ] radiant as gems on the weeds and stubble in a winter morning. You think that I am impoverishing myself by withdrawing from men, but in my solitude I have woven for myself a silken web or *chrysalis*, and, nymph-like, shall ere long burst forth a more perfect creature, fitted for a higher society. By simplicity, commonly called poverty, my life is concentrated and so becomes organized, or a κόσμος which before was inorganic and lumpish.

The otter must roam about a great deal, for I rarely see fresh tracks in the same neighborhood a second time the same winter, though the old tracks may be apparent all the winter through. I should not wonder if one went up and down the whole length of the river.

Hayden senior (sixty-eight years old) tells me that he has been at work regularly with his team almost every day this winter, in spite of snow and cold. Even that cold Friday, about a fortnight ago, he did not go to a fire from early morning till night. As the thermometer, even at 12.45 P.M., was at -9°, with a very violent wind from the northwest, this was as bad as an ordinary arctic day. He was hauling logs to a mill, and persevered in making his paths through the drifts, he alone breaking the road. However, he froze his ears that Friday. Says he never knew it so cold as the past month. He has a fine elm directly behind his house, divided into many limbs near the ground. It is a question which is the most valuable, this tree or the house. In hot summer days it shades the whole house. He is going to build a shed around it, inclosing the main portion of the trunk.

P.M. — To Hubbard Bath.

Another very warm day, I should think warmer than the last. The sun is from time to time promising to show itself through the mist, but does not. A thick steam is everywhere rising from the earth and snow, and apparently this makes the clouds which conceal the sun, the air being so much warmer than the earth. The snow is gone off very rapidly in the night, and much of the earth is bare, and the ground partially thawed. It is exciting to walk over the moist, bare pastures, though slumping four or five inches, and see the green mosses again. This vapor from the earth is so thick that I can hardly see a quarter of a mile, and ever and anon it condenses to rain-drops, which are felt on my face. The river has risen, and the water is pretty well over the meadows. If this weather holds a day or two longer, the river will break up generally.

I see one of those great ash-colored puffballs with a tinge of purple, open like a cup, four inches in diameter. The upper surface is (as it were bleached) quite hoary. Though it is but just brought to light from beneath the deep snow, and the last two days have been misty or rainy without sun, it is just as dry and dusty as ever, and the drops of water rest on it, at first undetected, being coated with its dust, looking like unground pearls. I brought it home and held it in a basin of water. To my surprise, when held under water it looked like a mass of silver or melted lead, it was so coated with air, and when I suffered it to rise, — for it had to be kept down by force, — instead of being heavy like a sponge which has soaked water, it was as light as a feather, and its surface perfectly dry, and when touched it gave out its dust the same as ever. It was impossible to wet. It seems to be encased in a silvery coat of air which is water-tight. The water did not penetrate into it at all, and running off is you lifted it up, it was just as dry as before, and on the least jar floating in dust above your head.

The ground is so bare that I gathered a few Indian relics.

And now another friendship is ended. I do not know what has made my friend doubt me, but I know that in love there is no mistake, and that every estrangement is well founded. But my destiny is not narrowed, but if possible the broader for it. The heavens withdraw and arch themselves higher. I am sensible not only of a moral, but even a grand physical pain, such as gods may feel, about my head and breast, a certain ache and fullness. This rending of a tic, it is not my work nor thine. It is no accident that we mind; it is only the awards of fate that are affecting.



THOREAU ON

THE IRISH

I know of no aeons, or periods, no life and death, but these meetings and separations. My life is like a stream that is suddenly dammed and has no outlet; but it rises the higher up the hills that shut it in, and will become a deep and silent lake. Certainly there is no event comparable for grandeur with the eternal separation — if we may conceive it so — from a being that we have known. I become in a degree sensible of the meaning of finite and infinite. What a grand significance the word “never” acquires! With one with whom we have walked on high ground we cannot deal on any lower ground ever after. We have tried for so many years to put each other to this immortal use, and have failed. Undoubtedly our good genii have mutually found the material unsuitable. We have hitherto paid each other the highest possible compliment; we have recognized each other constantly as divine, have afforded each other that opportunity to live that no other wealth or kindness can afford. And now, for some reason inappreciable by us, it has become necessary for us to withhold this mutual aid. Perchance there is none beside who knows us for a god, and none whom we know for such. Each man and woman is a veritable god or goddess, but to the mass of their fellows disguised. There is only one in each case who sees through the disguise. That one who does not stand so near to any man as to see the divinity in him is truly alone. I am perfectly sad at parting from you. I could better have the earth taken away from under my feet, than the thought of you from my mind. One while I think that some great injury has been done, with which you are implicated, again that you are no party to it. I fear that there may be incessant tragedies, that one may treat his fellow, as a god but receive somewhat less regard from him. I now almost for the first time *fear* this. Yet I believe that in the long run there is no such inequality.

Here we are in the backwoods of America repeating Hebrew prayers and psalms in which occur such words as *amen* and *selah*, the meaning of some of which we do not quite understand, reminding me of Moslem prayers in which, it seems, the same or similar words are used. How Mormon-like!

May 8, Friday: [Harvard Observatory](#) produced a collodion photograph of the surface of the moon.


ASTRONOMY



May 8, Friday: A third fine day.

The sugar maple at Barrett's is now in full bloom.

I finish the arbor to-night. This has been the third of these remarkably warm and beautiful [days]. I have worked all the while in my shirt-sleeves. Summer has suddenly come upon us, and the birds all together. Some boys have bathed in the river.

Walk to first stone bridge at sunset. *Salix alba*, possibly the 6th. It is a glorious evening. I scent the expanding willow leaves (for there are very few blossoms yet) fifteen rods off. Already hear the cheerful, sprightly note of the yellowbird amid them. It is perfectly warm and still, and the green grass reminds me of June. The air is full of the fragrance of willow leaves. The high water stretches smooth around. I hear the sound of Barrett's sawmill with singular distinctness. The ring of toads, the note of the yellowbird, the rich warble of the red-wing, [**Red-winged Blackbird**  *Agelaius phoeniceus*] the thrasher on the hillside, the robin's evening song, the woodpecker tapping some dead tree across the water; and I see countless little fuzzy gnats in the air, and dust over the road, between me and the departed sun. Perhaps the evenings of the 6th and 7th were as pleasant. But such an evening makes a crisis in the year. I must make haste home and go out on the water.

I paddle to the Wheeler meadow east of hill after sundown. From amid the alders, etc., I hear the mew of the catbird and the *yorrick* of Wilson's thrush. One bullfrog's faint *er-er-roonk* from a distance. (Perhaps the *Amphibia*, better than any creatures, celebrate the changes of temperature.) One *dump* note. It grows dark around. The full moon rises, and I paddle by its light. It is all evening for the soft-snoring, purring frogs (which I suspect to be *Rana palustris*). I get within a few feet of them as they sit along the edge of the river and meadow, but cannot see them. Their croak is very fine or rapid, and has a soft, purring sound at a little distance. I see them paddling in the water like toads.

Within a week I have had made a pair of corduroy pants, which cost when done \$1.⁶⁰. They are of that peculiar clay-color, reflecting the light from portions of their surface. They have this advantage, that, beside being very strong, they will look about as well three months hence as now,—or as ill, some would say. Most of my friends are disturbed by my wearing them. I can get four or five pairs for what one ordinary pair would cost in Boston, and each of the former will last two or three times as long under the same circumstances. The tailor said that the stuff was not made in this country; that it was worn by the Irish at home, and now they would not look at it, but others would not wear it, durable and cheap as it is, because it is worn by the Irish. Moreover, I like the color on other accounts. Anything but black clothes. I was pleased the other day to see a son of Concord return after an absence of eight years, not in a shining suit of black, with polished boots and a beaver or silk hat, as if on a furlough from human duties generally,—a mere clothes-horse,—but clad in an honest clay-colored suit and a



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snug every-day cap. It showed unusual manhood. Most returning sons come home dressed for the occasion. The birds and beasts are not afraid of me now. A mink came within twenty feet of me the other day as soon as my companion had left me, and if I had had my gray sack on as well as my corduroys, it would perhaps have come quite up to me. Even farmers' boys, returning to their native town, though not unfamiliar with homely and dirty clothes, make their appearance on this new stage in a go-to-meeting suit.

That was the spring of 1857, and I've got a story for you from the fall of 1957. In the passage of a calendar century some things change, and some things not. I was in Corpus Christi, Texas trying out living with my father instead of my mother in Indiana, the weather turned a bit chilly one day and I didn't have anything warm, so I stopped by a Goodwills and for fifty cents picked up a very nice, clean sports jacket. I thought its bold contrasting colors were fetching. My father saw this jacket and then it just disappeared. I went looking around the house for it endlessly, and finally he put his hand on my shoulder and, in a low tone, explained "With you having grown up with your mother, it's OK that you don't understand — but that's from the local nigger high school. I can't let you wear something like that — because you're my son." Now isn't that interesting! We have [Henry Thoreau](#) forever being accused of being prejudiced against the [Irish](#) yet there he was, the only person in his Concord 19th-Century ambience who wasn't being very careful not to dress like an Irishman.

November 18, Wednesday: After an afternoon visit to Dam Meadows, [Henry Thoreau](#) recorded that [Michael Flannery](#) was the hardest-working man he knew: "Before sunrise and long after sunset he is taxing his unwearable muscles. The result is a singular cheerfulness. He is always in good spirits."

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November 18, Wednesday: P.M. —To Dam Meadows. Going along the Bedford road at Moore's Swamp, I hear the dry rustling of seedy rattlesnake grass in the wind, a November sound, within a rod of me. The sunlight is a peculiarly thin and clear yellow, falling on the pale-brown bleaching herbage of the fields at this season. There is no redness in it. This is November sunlight. Much cold, slate-colored cloud, bare twigs seen gleaming toward the light like gossamer, pure green of pines whose old leaves have fallen, reddish or yellowish brown oak leaves rustling on the hillsides, very pale brown, bleaching, almost hoary fine grass or hay in the fields, akin to the frost which has killed it, and flakes of clear yellow sunlight falling on it here and there, —such is November.

The fine grass killed by the frost, withered and bleached till it is almost silvery, has clothed the fields for a long time.

Now, as in the spring, we rejoice in sheltered and sunny places. Some corn is left out still even.

What a mockery to turn cattle out into such pastures! Yet I see more in the fields now than earlier.

I hear a low concert from the edge of Gowing's Swamp, amid the maples, etc., —suppressed warblings from many flitting birds. With my glass I see only tree sparrows, and suppose it is they.

What I noticed for the thousandth time on the 15th was the waved surface of thin dark ice just frozen, as if it were a surface composed of large, perhaps triangular pieces raised at the edges; i. e., the filling up between the original shooting of the crystals —the midribs of the icy leaves— is on a lower plane. Flannery is the hardest-working man I know. Before sunrise and long after sunset he is taxing his unwearable muscles. The result is a singular cheerfulness. He is always in good spirits. He often overflows with his joy when you perceive no occasion for it. If only the gate sticks, some of it bubbles up and overflows in his passing comment on that accident. How much mere industry proves! There is a sparkle often in his passing remark, and his voice is really like that of a bird.

Crows will often come flying much out of their way to caw at me.

In one light, these are old and worn-out fields that I ramble over, and men have gone to law about them long before I was born, but I trust that I ramble over them in a new fashion and redeem them.

I noticed on the 15th that that peculiar moraine or horseback just this side of J.P. Brown's extends southerly of Nut Meadow Brook in the woods, maybe a third or a half a mile long in all.

The rocks laid bare here and there by ditching in the Dam Meadows are very white, having no lichens on them.



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The musquash should appear in the coat of arms of some of the States, it is so common. I do not go by any permanent pool but, sooner or later, I hear its plunge there. Hardly a bit of board floats in any ditch or pondhole but this creature has left its traces on it.

How singularly rivers in their sources overlap each other! There is the meadow behind Brooks Clark's and at the head of which Sted Buttrick's handsome maple lot stands, on the old Carlisle road. The stream which drains this empties into the Assabet at Dove Rock. A short distance west of this meadow, but a good deal more elevated, is Boaz's meadow, whose water finds its way, naturally or artificially, northeastward around the other, crossing the road just this side the lime-kiln, and empties into the Saw Mill Brook and so into the main river.

There are many ways of feeling one's pulse. In a healthy state the constant experience is a pleasurable sensation or sentiment. For instance, in such a state I find myself in perfect connection with nature, and the perception, or remembrance even, of any natural phenomena is attended with a gentle pleasurable excitement. Prevailing sights and sounds make the impression of beauty and music on me. But in sickness all is deranged. I had yesterday a kink in my back and a general cold, and as usual it amounted to a cessation of life. I lost for the time my rapport or relation to nature. Sympathy with nature is an evidence of perfect health. You cannot perceive beauty but with a serene mind. The cheaper your amusements, the safer and saner. They who think much of theatres, operas, and the like, are beside themselves. Each man's necessary path, though as obscure and apparently uneventful as that of a beetle in the grass, is the way to the deepest joys he is susceptible of; though he converses only with moles and fungi and disgraces his relatives, it is no matter if he knows what is steel to his flint.

Many a man who should rather describe his dinner imposes on us with a history of the Grand Khan.



December 6, Sunday: Flannery tells me he is cutting in Holbrook's Swamp, in the Great Meadows, a lonely place. He sees a fox repeatedly there, and also a white weasel, –once with a mouse in its mouth, in the swamp.

MICHAEL FLANNERY



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1858

August 20, Friday: Donati's [comet](#) was beginning to exhibit traces of a tail.

SKY EVENT

[Friend Daniel Ricketson](#)'s A HISTORY OF [NEW BEDFORD](#), INCLUDING A HISTORY OF THE OLD TOWNSHIP OF DARTMOUTH & THE PRESENT TOWNSHIPS OF WESTPORT, DARTMOUTH & FAIRHAVEN (this has been republished as of 1996 and is therefore not available for total download, but we do have online the version of

the Ricketson history of New Bedford that was published in 1803).¹²



VIEW THE PAGE IMAGES

In his biography of Thoreau, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn indicates that despite [Michael Flannery](#)'s early rising, "Up early enough to see a frost in August!" and abundant energy and cheerfulness and gratefulness for all the help given to him, the Flannery family would never be able to repay all of the money it had borrowed in the period of its crisis:

When Sophia left Concord to live and die in Bangor, among her cousins, she gave me a small note of hand, which Flannery had

12. Thoreau, in his letter to Ricketson on November 22, 1858, would comment that "I like the homeliness of it, that is, the good, old-fashioned way of writing as if you actually lived where you wrote." Emerson, in a letter to Ricketson on October 11, 1869, would comment that "It is written with good sense and with selection, and with affection."



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signed for money lent him in some pinch, with instructions to receive payment if he was able to pay, but in any case to give him up the note, which I did.

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August 20: Edward Hoar has found in his garden two or three specimens of what appears to be the *Veronica Buxbaumii*, which blossomed at least a month ago. Yet I should say the pods were turgid, and, though obcordate enough, I do not know in what sense they are “obcordate-triangular.” He found a *Viburnum dentatum* with leaves somewhat narrower than common and wedgeshaped at base. He has also the *Rudbeckia speciosa*, cultivated in a Concord garden.

Flannery tells me that at about four o'clock this morning he saw white frost on the grass in the low ground near Holbrook's meadow. Up early enough to see a frost in August!

MICHAEL FLANNERY

P. M. – To Poplar Hill and the Great Fields.

It is still cool weather with a northwest wind. This weather is a preface to autumn. There is more shadow in the landscape than a week ago, methinks, and the creak of the cricket sounds cool and steady.

The grass and foliage and landscape generally are of a more thought-inspiring color, suggest what some perchance would call a pleasing melancholy. In some meadows, as I look southwesterly, the aftermath looks a bright yellowish-green in patches. Both willows and poplars have leaves of a light color, at least beneath, contrasting with most other trees.

Generally there has been no drought this year. Nothing in the landscape suggests it. Yet no doubt these leaves are, compared with themselves six or eight weeks ago, as usual, “horny and dry,” as one remarks by my side.

You see them digging potatoes, with cart and barrels, in the fields on all hands, before they are fairly ripe, for fear of rot or a fall in the price, and I see the empty barrels coming back from market already.

Polygonum dumetorum, how long?

1859

Publication of the anonymous volume POPE OR PRESIDENT? STARTLING DISCOVERIES OF ROMANISM AS REVEALED BY ITS OWN WRITERS.

SURVEY OF AMERICAN ANTI-CATHOLICISM

In the Eliot Public School in [Boston](#)'s North End, a [Catholic](#) student, required to recite the Ten Commandments as per the King James translation of the BIBLE,¹³ caused a furor by refusing his teacher's demand. The teacher of course punished this student, the known ringleader of a group of students who had sadly fallen under the influence of one Father John Wiget, a parish priest. After about half an hour of being struck across the palm with a rattan cane, young Thomas Wall found that he had become able to read from the King James BIBLE — but on the following day some 300 [Irish](#) children would be truant.

13. The [Catholic](#) and Protestant translations of the commandments differ in significant details, such as in their numbering, and both differ substantially from Jewish interpretations, a Jewish reading of “Thou shalt not steal,” for instance, being that this one did not originally have to do with the theft of objects, which was covered adequately under “coveting one's neighbor's possessions,” but dealt instead probably with such activities as kidnapping.



1860

Frederick Douglass was not being overly impressed by the new Republican Party and its reliance upon the thinking of Hinton Rowan Helper. In a letter to his “British Anti-Slavery Friends” in this year, he explained that in the USA these Republicans were “only negatively anti-slavery.” He specified to them precisely what he meant by such a strange locution:

It is opposed to the political power of slavery, rather than to slavery itself.

Douglass was registering the Irish [Catholic](#) American hatred of American blacks, especially the ones who were free, and as one might expect, he was responding in kind:

Irish Catholics, and especially Irish Americans, are not simply ignored or critiqued, they are systematically cast out of Douglass’s circle.

- Richard Hardack, “The Slavery of Romanism: The Casting Out of the Irish in the Work of Frederick Douglass,” page 116, *LIBERATING SOJOURN*

His rhetoric was full of [drunken Irish](#), usually caught in the act of voting while needing to be propped up by two able-bodied helpers, but that wasn’t the worst of it for Douglass was not merely a victim of but also a master at racist rhetoric:

[W]e want no black Ireland in America. We want no aggrieved class.

[T]hese people lacked only a black skin and wooly hair, to complete their likeness to the plantation Negro. The open, uneducated mouth, ..., [etc., etc.]



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1861

The [Irish](#) population had fallen from 8,175,124 as of 1841 to some 5,800,000 at this point, due to the [Irish Potato Famine](#) and the accompanying epidemic and emigration.

Population Trends

	England / Wales	Ireland
1821	12,000,000	6,800,000
1831	13,900,000	7,770,000
1841	15,920,000	8,180,000
1845	about 16,700,000	about 8,300,000 (the year of the blight, to be followed by famine and then by fever and emigration)
1851	17,930,000	6,550,000
1861	20,070,000	5,800,000
1871	31,629,299	5,410,000
1881	35,026,108	5,170,000



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1872

July 31, Wednesday: At some point during the summer [Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau](#) had moved from Concord, Massachusetts to Bangor, Maine. Upon her departure, she had left with Franklin Benjamin Sanborn the outstanding note of obligation pertaining to a debt that the Flannery family of Concord owed to the Thoreau family, representing some of the money that [Henry Thoreau](#) had loaned to [Michael Flannery](#) in 1854, fully eighteen years before, so that he could bring his wife [Ann](#) and his little children over from Ireland as he so longed to do. Both [Michael and Ann Flannery](#) were still living, and they were in Concord, and all their children were now mature, and there seemed no reason why they should continue and continue to owe the remainder of this money. She had instructed Sanborn that if, for any reason, either inability to pay or unwillingness to pay, he was unable to collect on this note from the Flannery family, Sanborn should simply make a present of the note to them, thus discharging their obligation forever.¹⁴ Sophia wrote on this day from Bangor to her cousin Marianne (or Mary Anne) Mitchell Dunbar of Bridgewater about having left Concord, as well as about the Emerson home having burned.

[This is what the Emerson home looked like after it had been burned and restored:]



14. When asked later about [Thoreau](#), by historians collecting impressions, after both [Michael and Ann Flannery](#) were deceased, one of the Flannery sons and one of the grandsons would speak contemptuously of him: he had been lazy and insulting. Neither of these ingrates would refer to the manner in which Henry had helped their parents, or to the respect in which he had held [Michael](#), or to the friendship that had existed between them, or take any notice at all of this forgiven family debt.

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1883

October 31, Wednesday: [Ann Flannery](#), the wife of [Michael Flannery](#), died. She would be buried in St. Bernard's Cemetery, which is out the Bedford Road about a mile past [Concord's](#) Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. As soon as the family could afford to do so, it would put up a memorial stone:

Erected by
[MICHAEL FLANNERY](#),
in memory of his
beloved wife
[ANN FLANNERY](#),
Died Oct. 31, 1883,
Aged 72 yrs.
May her soul rest in peace Amen

1900

From the inscription on a gravestone at St. Bernard's Cemetery out Bedford Road about a mile or so past Sleepy Hollow Cemetery we learn that Ireland's, and [Concord's](#), [Michael Flannery](#) had been born at about the turn of the century, and had lived into the following century:

[MICHAEL FLANNERY](#)
1800, 1900.

Per [Pat Flannery](#), presumably a son of [Michael Flannery](#), as recorded in C.T. Ramsey's "A Pilgrimage to the Haunts of Thoreau" ([New England Magazine](#) LI for April 1914, page 68): "*You know my father worked for Henry's father when he was in the pencil business. Father helped to furnish the graphite. I tell ye, that fellow Henry was a lazy lad, and it was well he could write an essay on economy as they say he did — many a piece of pie he ate from my pail.*"



1936

November: Any number of readers have been thrown off stride by the manner in which [Henry Thoreau](#) critiqued a hapless family of [Irish](#) ecological refugees in the “Baker Farm” chapter of [WALDEN](#), and have drawn an adverse conclusion as to Thoreau’s general sociability. But consider, this book had begun with a pointed discussion of household economy, of aims and manners of living. The record is more complex than what is contained in just this one chapter, in regard to Thoreau’s attitudes toward and dealings with people, common or otherwise, and such a mere excerpt should not be tendentiously taken out of its evocative context to make a point that could only be sustained by carefully disregarding other evidence. What comes to light in the aggregate, not only on the basis of Thoreau’s own reports but also on the basis of the testimonies of the many who knew him, is that he was a gentle and considerate man whose dealings with common people were predominantly marked by neighborly interest and fellow feeling. Although [WALDEN](#) happens to have become the primary repository of his cultural legacy, in fact Thoreau didn’t spend his whole life as a youth at Walden Pond, or crowing about that early experiment in living, or condemning others for failing to live as skillfully as he himself lived. He had found that he had several more lives to live, and had been in the process of living them, when snuffed by TB in 1862 — howevermuch the popular imagination seems intent upon containing this changing person at Walden Pond and in the years 1845-1846. There was so much more, and part of this is the nature and extent of Thoreau’s relations with his neighbors and passing strangers (including runaway slaves and poor Irishmen) during the years that he was no longer elaborating his early manuscript A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS while in residence at Walden Pond.

MEN OF CONCORD AS PORTRAYED IN THE JOURNAL OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU, ed. [Francis Henry Allen](#) with illustrations by [Newell Convers Wyeth](#), issued in this year, is simply a 240-page compilation of excerpts from the JOURNAL in which Thoreau is allowed to describe and discuss, and report his walks and talks with, various of his neighbors, as a corrective for this general misperception of Thoreau’s neighborliness:

Many readers, thinking of [Henry Thoreau](#) as the staunch individualist, the apostle of wild nature, the rebel against man-made institutions, the “hermit of Walden,” forget that he had any but the most formal relations with human beings outside of his own family. And yet his JOURNAL records many and many a conversation with fellow-townsmen, and its readers encounter much shrewd and understanding comment on the ways and manners of this and that individual or group. He talked familiarly with farmers, hunters, and fishermen — as familiarly as he did with his friend [Ellery Channing](#), with [Edward Sherman Hoar](#), [Friend Daniel Ricketson](#), and H.G.O. Blake. [Dr. Edward Waldo Emerson](#), in his

HENRY DAVID THOREAU AS REMEMBERED BY A YOUNG FRIEND

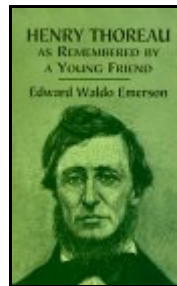
has testified to the regard in which Thoreau’s humbler neighbors held him.... [A]fter speaking of Thoreau’s propensity for taking the other side in conversation “for the joy of the intellectual fencing,” Dr. Emerson goes on to say: “Thoreau held this trait in check with women and children, and with humble people who were no match for him. With them he was simple, gentle, friendly, and amusing.” “His simple, direct speech and look and bearing were such that no plain, common man would put him down in his



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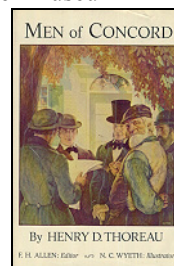
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books as a fool, or visionary, or helpless, as the scholar, writer, or reformer would often be regarded by him.... He loved to talk with all kinds and conditions of men if they had no hypocrisy or pretense about them, and though high in his standard of virtue, and most severe with himself, could be charitable to the failings of humble fellow-men." A man who lived on a farm and had worked in the Thoreaus' [plumbago](#)-mill told Dr. Emerson that Thoreau was the best friend he ever had. "He was always straight in his ways: and was very particular to be agreeable.... When I saw him crossing my field I always wanted to go and have a talk with him.... He liked to talk as long as you did, and what he said was new."



Although the matter was not publicized, MEN OF CONCORD's pen-and-ink drawings had been done by his son Andrew Wyeth, rather than by the painter himself. Wyeth hoped to induce the [Concord Free Public Library](#) to pay him \$5,000 for the entire set of a dozen original painted panels that had been used to create this book, but that was something that would not come about. The paintings would be sold individually on the general market, and eventually the library would come into possession of five of them, "The Carpenters Repairing Hubbard's Bridge," "Thoreau and Miss Mary Emerson," "Johnny and His Woodchuck-Skin Cap," "Fishing Through the Ice," and "The Muskrat Hunters...." Other of the paintings would go to:

- pen-and-ink drawings — privately held
- jacket illustration — Brandywine River Museum



- endpaper illustration — Canajoharie Library and Art Museum
- "Mr. Alcott in the Granary Burying Ground" — Boston Athenaeum
- "A Man of a Certain Probity..." — privately held
- "Barefooted Brooks Clark Building Wall" — privately held
- "Thoreau and the Three Reformers" — privately held
- "Barefooted Brooks Clark Building Wall" — privately held
- "Thoreau Fishing" — location unknown

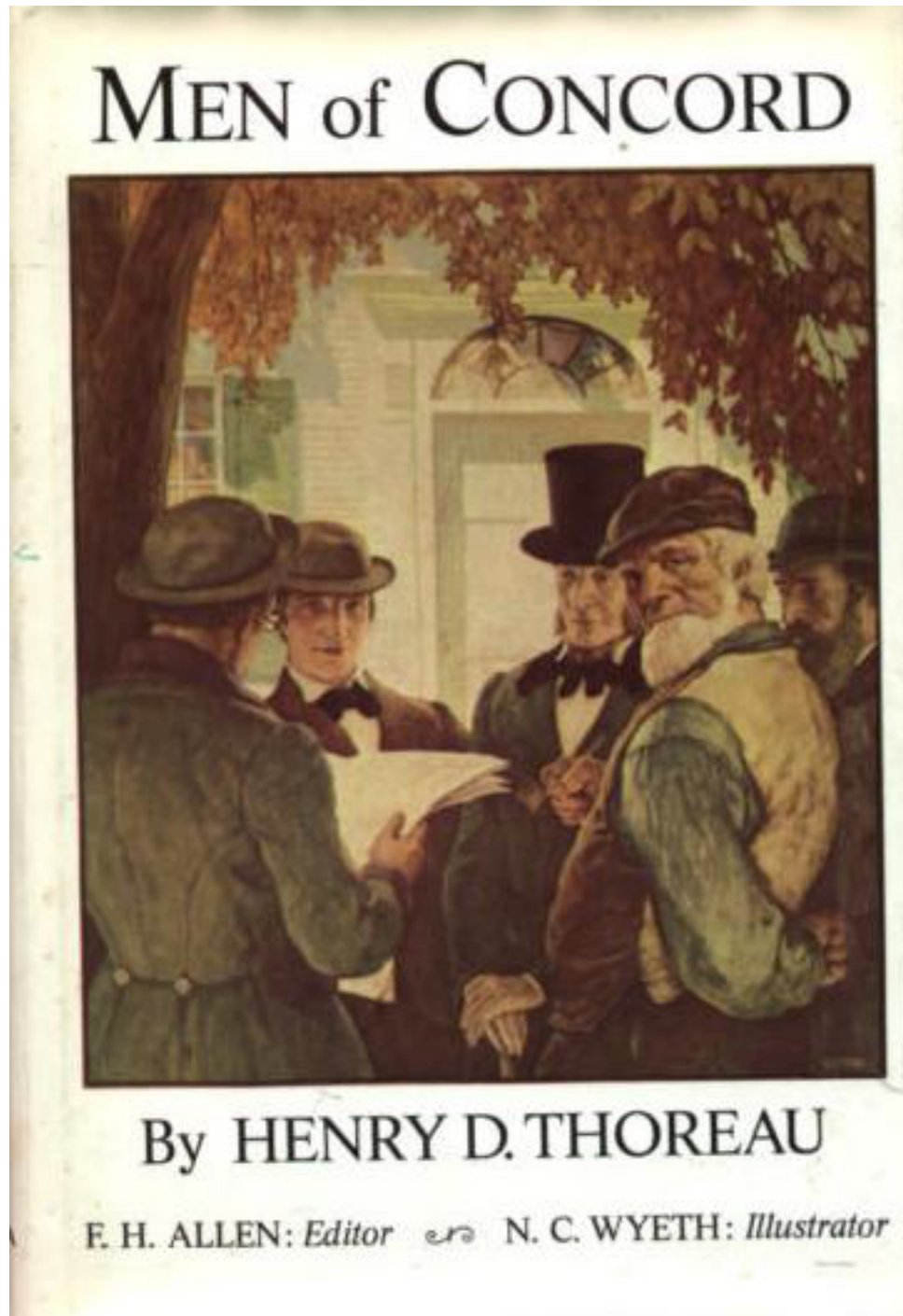
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According to the Preface, “Wyeth was a lifelong admirer of Thoreau, whose spirit has become a part of him. His work for this book, therefore, is a tribute from an intellectual disciple to an author who has had an important formative influence on his character and work.” One of the pieces of material selected is from the journal of February 13, 1841:

A Lean Farm



February 13, 1841: My neighbor says that his hill-farm is poor stuff and “only fit to hold the world together.” He deserves that God should give him better for so brave a treatment of his gifts, instead of humbly putting up therewith. It is a sort of stay, or gore or gusset, and he will not be blinded by modesty or gratitude, but sees it for what it is; knowing his neighbor’s fertile land, he calls his by its right name. But perhaps my farmer forgets that his lean soil has sharpened his wits. This is a crop it was good for, and beside, you see the heavens at a lesser angle from the hill than from the vale.

1978

Fall: George E. Ryan’s “Shanties and Shiftlessness: The Immigrant Irish of Henry Thoreau” (Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies 13: 54-78).

I suppose it is only natural that an article written by someone of Irish descent for an Irish magazine might be a bit biased, but how can you take someone seriously who writes,

Torn from their homeland by famine and subjugation, as well as a desperate passion to survive, these fugitives from an unsophisticated and alien culture [the Irish] indulged in habits of speech, dress, and deportment, to say nothing of values both religious and personal, that were causes for local amusement if not outright wonder and amazement.

Ryan seems to enjoy quoting everything Thoreau ever wrote about the Irish in order to decide exactly what his opinion was. Was he exasperated by them, Ryan asks. Indifferent? Or supportive? Before we can learn the answer we are forced to plow through twenty-four pages of quotes by, not only Thoreau himself, but also by Emerson, Hawthorne, Channing (who were prejudiced against them), Fuller, Alcott, Whittier, and Whitman (Irish supporters). Ryan quotes from Emerson’s journal,

I think it cannot be maintained by any candid person that the African races have ever occupied or do promise ever to occupy any very high place in the human family. Their present condition is the strongest proof that they cannot. The Irish cannot; the American Indian cannot; the Chinese cannot. Before the energy of the Caucasian race, all other races have quailed and done obeisance.

After quoting praises by Fuller and Alcott, Ryan quotes passages from poems by Whittier to prove that he had “a familiarity with Ireland’s culture and a sympathy with her people” (and then





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remembering his subject) "ingredients rarely found in the writings of Thoreau."

Moving right along, Ryan describes all of Thoreau's Irish acquaintances and his attitudes towards each. A few he liked - Johnnie Riordan and Michael Flannery- and a few he did not like. After quoting Thoreau on his visit to John Field's hut, Ryan draws the conclusion that "Thoreau's language is unsympathetic and hostile, his detail too consciously adverse to suggest irony or genuine objectivity." Following the quotations about the important Irish in Thoreau's life, Ryan gives examples of "relatively insignificant" Irish references and then digresses to cite one critic who claims that the hound, bay horse, and turtle-dove metaphor may have its origins in an old Irish fairy tale called "The Story of Conn-eda; or the Golden Apples of Lough Erne." However, he observes that the myth does not include turtle-doves or bay horses, and none of the animals is lost in quite the same way as in Thoreau's version.

Parable


Even if Thoreau did not like the Irish, the Irish liked him, according to Ryan. Both Yeats and the artist-author Paul Henry were inspired after reading [WALDEN](#). So what was Thoreau's attitude towards the Irish? Ryan quotes Walter Harding's theory that at first Thoreau was scornful of the Irish but his opinions changed as he became better acquainted with them. Finally he could appreciate their industry, cheerfulness, camaraderie, and honesty.



1994

October 16, Sunday: It was revealed, in the L.A. Times, that Henry David Thoreau did not discover Walden Pond.

An anonymous article appeared on the last page of Part II: TRAVELING IN STYLE in the Los Angeles Times Magazine, citing Hawthorne's AMERICAN NOTEBOOKS as evidence that:



Sometimes the footsteps of the famous overlap. When Henry David Thoreau built his cabin in 1845 at Walden Pond, near Concord, Mass., the pond itself and the surrounding woods were already well-known to his contemporaries. Ralph Waldo Emerson owned the land on which the pond stood, and Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the writer and editor Margaret Fuller and other literary lights of the time frequented the area. ... Hawthorne ... describes a stroll through the autumn-bright woods and a visit to the pond in the early 1840s. The most surprising aspect of the account, which was written in 1843, is the author's discovery of a small settlement of environmentally sensitive Irish railroad workers living at the edge of the pond.

The reference of course is to October 6, 1843 when Mr. Famous Fictioner went for a hike in the bucolic countryside around and about Concord:

I took a solitary walk to Walden Pond. ... Walden Pond was clear and beautiful, as usual.

In the course of his excursion the gent discovered something of great interest and relevance, that even some Irish day-laborers have a life and loved ones and need to have somewhere for their families to lay their heads. Per the record, he got lost on his way home to the Old Manse:

According to my invariable custom, I mistook my way, and emerging upon a road, I turned my back, instead of my face, toward Concord....

This has now all been replayed for us in this Sunday newspaper. The anonymous article, allegedly or ostensibly dealing with early literary appreciation of the aesthetics of hiking through the woods to "**Walden Pond**," faces an advertisement of a cruise from La-La Land to Puerto Vallarta, Mazatlán,¹⁵ and Cabo San Lucas on the good ship *Nordic Prince*, and a cruise to Catalina and then Ensenada on its sister ship *Viking Serenade*, and headlines the idea that

15. Minus, of course, the Spanish acute accent in the Times newspaper, which does not truck with foreigners or their languages.



***Thoreau Didn't Invent
This Celebrated Body of Water.
Years Before He Moved There,
Another Noted Writer Enjoyed Its Charms.***

Following such an egregious headline, the article in the Times inserted the above anonymous remarks in italic type. Well, one shouldn't come down too hard on the efforts of some newspaper peckerwood, who is obviously merely attempting to draw a paycheck by devising some sort of "news-hook" for a freebie citation from public-domain 19th Century sources, intended merely as another page-filler between the pretty travel ads.

–But who, in the first place, is it, specifically, by name, who has had this idea that is here headlined, that Thoreau did “**Invent**” Walden Pond, that “**Celebrated Body of Water**”? And why precisely is it, that we should now be temporizing about the First Literary Appreciation of a body of water that has existed in that precise spot since the melting of the buried blocks of ice left behind by the latest glacial era, something like 10,000 years ago? And how is it that this news maven has created the perception that before Thoreau went out to Walden Pond to build his shanty in late March of the following spring season, it was “*literary lights of the time*” such as Emerson, Hawthorne, and Fuller who had “*frequented the area*”? Presumably this newsie is unaware that Thoreau was “frequenting” that pond as a little child as much as two decades before Hawthorne had ever even visited Concord:

WALDEN: When I was four years old, as I well remember, I was brought from Boston to this my native town, through these very woods and this field, to the pond. It is one of the oldest scenes stamped on my memory. And now to-night my flute has waked the echoes over that very water. The pines still stand here older than I; or, if some have fallen, I have cooked my supper with their stumps, and a new growth is rising all around, preparing another aspect for new infant eyes. Almost the same johnswort springs from the same perennial root in this pasture, and even I have at length helped to clothe that fabulous landscape of my infant dreams, and one of the results of my presence and influence is seen in these bean leaves, corn blades, and potato vines.



and presumably this newsie is likewise unaware that it was the adult surveyor of woodlots Thoreau who had in fact recommended to Emerson that he purchase these several woodlots with some frontage on Walden Pond,¹⁶ and is likewise unaware that Thoreau had had his little homemade boat *Red Jacket* on Walden Pond for some years and had, long before, taken literary light Fuller for a row on this pond in this boat, and is likewise oblivious to the fact that Thoreau had written about his experiences at Walden Pond many, many times in his journal before the Hawthornes ever considered moving to Concord for the cheap rent at the vacant Old Manse,¹⁷ and writing about his daily experiences in his own unpublished journal, not to speak of the fact that at the juncture at which Hawthorne witnessed these oh-so-picturesque shacks for the first time, these families of “railroad workers” which they had sheltered from the elements were needing –quite unbeknownst to the

16. Not, incidentally, “*the land on which the pond stood*,” a phrase which is quite remarkable not only as an impoverished simplification but also as an impoverished metaphor. And anyway, Emerson did not begin to purchase these woodlots with money from his dead wife's estate until about a year after this initial visit by Hawthorne, so here again our hapless news flack has gotten his or her chronology back-assward.

17. Not all of which he bothered to pay, by the way.

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A 19th-Century Irish shanty in the Merrimack Valley

self-centered Hawthorne—to abandon their habitations and shoulder what of their scant possessions they could carry upon their backs, and trudge on down the American tracks which they had helped to construct and beneath which some of them in fact lay buried — because the heavy work in this area had been completed and they were all by that time without steady work and, if they had elected to remain there in bucolic Walden Woods next to bucolic Walden Pond, behind the Concord Poor Farm to which they were of course not eligible to have recourse, they would have eventually starved or frozen (whichever came first). Perhaps the newshawks are also innocent of an understanding that, as Thoreau most carefully described in [WALDEN: OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#), one of these shanties Hawthorne saw, the one pertaining to the departing James Collins family, would be purchased by Thoreau for its construction materials to use in the creation of his own anti-desperation shanty, on the hill-edge down on Bay Henry, etc., etc.

Such analyses seem entirely to avoid the fact that one object of Thoreau's constructing this shanty was to demonstrate that it was possible, with care, to construct a healthful and clean and comfortable abode at an expense that anyone might afford, **and thus to furnish these impoverished refugees of the potato famine with an inspirational model for imitation.**¹⁸ And if "*the surrounding woods were already well-known to his* [Thoreau's] *contemporaries*" then we are left with an interesting "how-cum" about Hawthorne getting himself so turned around and lost in these surrounding woods at the end of this quoted piece from his notebooks that, as the newspaper confesses, he had to ask for directions and had to be offered a lift back home to civilization! Just precisely how compatible is that with such terminology as "*already well-known*"? —Face it, most members of the Brahmin overcaste of "*literary lights of the time*," with which Henry Thoreau the offspring of a peasant or tradesfamily had to deal, wouldn't have been able to find their own asses had they been privileged to hunt with both hands. Over and above all that, we may marvel at the casualness of the newspaper's characterization

18. In fact Emerson eventually sold Thoreau's empty shanty to one of them, his drunken Irish gardener, to shelter this man's family.



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of these desperately poor families of refugees of a foreign famine, forced to attempt to live on this sandy, virtually barren soil among the pines in dark Walden Woods where they could not conceivably have created productive cottage gardens, while their men had labored for like \$0.⁷³ the day for 18 hours of exhausting and quite dangerous rude labor, as, now get this, “*environmentally sensitive*.” Come on, newspaper people, “*environmentally sensitive*,” that’s for proper WASPs whose lives are not at constant risk, people who suppose that they can save the planet by sorting out their green empties from their clear empties — people like the ones who purchase your cruise tickets on the *Viking Serenade* and the *Nordic Prince* and the *Love Boat*! While one is at this sort of historical redactionism one might as well characterize the nigger-hating, nigger-baiting “Plug Ugly” Irish mob actions of the Boston urban hub of this period as having been, in actuality, mere prototype protests against the wickedness of chattel slavery!

As a retort to this sort of newspaper-PC rewriting of history, a retort which might also be able to pass muster as an attempt at good humor, we might mention that among these “*environmentally sensitive*” Irishmen it was little Johnny of Concord’s Irish Riordan Family who was the most environmentally sensitive of all — because in the New England turn of seasons it was getting cold and his little toes were turning blue.¹⁹ If one perceives anything at all about “sensitivity” in the quoted passage from Hawthorne’s literary notebook, it is not sensitivity but insensitivity which one perceives — originally, we can here perceive very starkly that author’s notorious insensitivity to the problems of others, and, now, we are given an opportunity to perceive this news person’s utter insensitivity to Hawthorne’s having chosen to depict the plight of these refugees as merely picturesque.

1995

February 16, Thursday: Burt Bledstein, Co-Editor of the list H-Ideas, wrote us about his perception of [Henry Thoreau](#)’s prejudice against the [Irish](#), citing various culled proof texts:

Date: Thu, 16 Feb 1995 07:10:34 CST
From: Burt Bledstein <bjb@uic.edu>
Subject: Reply: Inclusive Thoreau

Austin Meredith wrote about Thoreau: “I am dealing with a guy

19. Refer to Thoreau’s poem about Johnny’s plight during the early winter of 1850 and to his carrying a cloak to Johnny in the late winter of 1851-1852: “I found that the shanty was warmed by the simple social relations of the Irish.” Thoreau’s good attitude of compassion and involvement contrasts sufficiently with Hawthorne’s attitude of aestheticism and disengagement to remind one of the following distinction which Simone Weil drew during World War II in her New York notebook:



Natural piety consists in helping someone in misfortune so as not to be obliged to think about him any more, or for the pleasure of feeling the distance between him and oneself. It is a form of cruelty which is contrary only in its outward effects to cruelty in the ordinary sense. Such, no doubt, was the clemency of Caesar. Compassion consists in paying attention to an afflicted man and identifying oneself with him in thought. It then follows that one feeds him automatically if he is hungry, just as one feeds oneself. Bread given in this way is the effect and the sign of compassion.



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here who despite his status as a dead white male could be said to be absolutely the most sensitive to all issues of race and gender and class, the very best that anyone could ever hope, and yet in Thoreau studies it remains very common for him to be presumed to have been both sexist and elitist." If Austin is telling us that passing judgement on Thoreau based either on a sociological category or repressing Thoreau on his race and class observations is shallow, gratuitous, and/or "academic crap," I would agree with him. This scholarship tells us more about the "sensitivities" of today than Thoreau. Thoreau was an observer and commentator of his time. Humanizing Thoreau by seriously listening to his words—and not falling short by means of the social categories and conventional wisdom ("common sense is common nonsense")—requires the contemporary scholar to address Thoreau's self-conscious "sensitivity." "The very best that anyone could ever hope!" comments Austin.

Listen to Thoreau in his journals on the "shiftless Irishman, John Field," the thirsty Hugh Quail or the simple MacCarty ("a gray-headed boy, good for nothing but to eat his dinner. These Irishman have no heads.")

The "shovel-handed Irish" work hard and mean well, but "this fellow (MacCarty) was sure to do the wrong thing from the best motives."

John Field's wife, "with round, greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition one day; the never absent mop in hand, and yet no effects of it visible anywhere. The chickens, like members of the family, stalked about the room, too much humanized to roast well."

(See Dale T. Knobel, PADDY AND THE REPUBLIC: ETHNICITY AND NATIONALITY IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA: Wesleyan 1986)

Listen to an "elitist" Thoreau on vocations, professions, careers, even making a living. (See Nicholas K. Bromell, BY THE SWEAT OF THE BROW: LITERATURE AND LABOR IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA: University of Chicago, 1993). In conclusion, a humanized Thoreau has played a role in my recent work as an historian because his sensual perceptions were strenuous, biased, and timely. Indeed, "sensitivity" is best double edged, a reason to include not exclude.

Burt Bledstein, Co-Editor: H-Ideas

February 17, Friday: I responded to the email of the previous day from Burt Bledstein, Co-Editor of the list H-Ideas, about his citing of proof texts in regard to [Henry Thoreau's](#) prejudice against the [Irish](#), asking for permission to publish his comments — and he responded in the affirmative:

Date: Fri, 17 Feb 1995 09:17:07 -0800 (PST)

To: Burt Bledstein <bjb@uic.edu>

Subject: Thoreau on the H-IDEAS list on the Internet

Professor Bledstein, would it be allright for us to insert your comments into the "Stack of the Artist of Kouroo" hypertextspace, perhaps in our file "ThoreauOnTheIrish.frame"? I think some of the sources which you cite have not yet been mentioned in this context, and of course we are attempting to



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be as very inclusive as is humanly possible.

Date: Fri, 17 Feb 1995 11:30:15 CST

From: "Burt Bledstein" <bjb@uic.edu>

Re: Thoreau on the H-IDEAS list on the Internet

Austin: Of course you have my permission. Burt Bledstein

February 18, Saturday: I provided Burt Bledstein, Co-Editor of the list H-Ideas, with alternative proof texts suggesting that [Henry Thoreau](#) had not been prejudiced against the [Irish](#), and spoke in general terms about the tendency in current scholarship to "cherry-pick" those proof texts that justify one's own position:

Date: Sat, 18 Feb 1995 07:24:41 -0800 (PST)

To: Burt Bledstein <bjb@uic.edu>

Subject: Your snips of Thoreau comments about the Irish

I might mention that one of the functions that this "Stack of the Artist of Kouroo" is designed to fulfill is the function of making the sort of scholarship which goes through an author looking for "proof texts" so easy as to become trivial, with the hope that as it becomes trivial and mechanical it will of necessity fall into disfavor and disuse. I really do not favor such scholarship, and hope that we will soon see the end of it. Thoreau in fact wrote each and every one of those words you quoted. Yet putting those snippets together with the exclusion of other remarks, and omitting the context of the Irish ecological disaster of the 1840s (I am also a veteran of a similar ecological disaster, as I began life as a fugitive from the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and in my childhood in San Diego encountered the vicious California prejudice against its victims, the "Okies") and omitting the fact that persecution by the English, and starvation and humiliation, had had the most unfortunate impact upon Irish social life and morals and character and probity (for instance omitting to consider the very serious problem which New England was having at that time with the violent hatred of and contempt for free black Americans which was all too typical of the besotted street-roaming, cudgel-waving Irish mob in places like Boston), really does put Thoreau at serious jeopardy of being misunderstood. In blunt words, I didn't think your presenting such snippets arbitrarily to the list out of context while suppressing other favorable remarks was very much at all by way of a scholarly contribution. Were you to enter the hypertextspace of this project, you would encounter a Thoreau who, when presented at greater length and with greater thoroughness within his context, turns out to have been the most considerate gentleman, who gave people his full and undivided attention even when, or particularly when, they were in a socially unfavored category. One of the little factoids you would learn is that when a particular fabric had become associated in the public mind with the Irish, so that the non-Irish residents of the Boston area would not be caught dead wearing an item of apparel made of that particular fabric for fear of being suspected of being in sympathy with those people, Thoreau deliberately chose to wear pants made of that particular



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fabric. This I take to be a public gesture of solidarity with the oppressed which must have been at some personal cost in that social context. I cite here only one small token of the many examples given within this 20,000,000-link hypertextspace. Within this research tool you would also be able to learn of a loan made by Thoreau to help a local laborer send home to Ireland to bring his wife over, a touching poem written about a lad to whom Thoreau gave some of his clothing, etc. Thoreau even placed the needs of the Irish ahead of the ecological needs of his beloved Walden Woods.

Yes indeed, Thoreau was frustrated at the fact that some of the problems of the impactful Irish hordes flowing through Concord were problems which they themselves were causing. Yet in a very heart-warming manner he never permitted himself to establish any sort of social stand-off distance between himself and these new people whom he came to know so intimately, and this refusal to establish any arbitrary social distance was, so far as I have been able to determine, utterly unique for his time and place. Were you to disagree with this material in the hypertextspace, you would of course be entirely free to establish your own nodes and links tagged with your own name, in which you could explore a contrary hypothesis. I might suggest, however, that the competition would be severe, and that the old sort of scholarship – scholarship in which what one does is simply go through a large corpus of writings and abstract out any little snippets which seem to be supporting one's case while ignoring other materials the effect of which would be to contest one's case – would be scholarship which would impress no-one, scholarship which in such an environment would simply *not wash*.

Be of good cheer, we are raising the scholarship ante here at this project.



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: August 14, 2013



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ARRGH AUTOMATED RESearch REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, upon someone's request we have pulled it out of the hat of a pirate that has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (depicted above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of data modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture. This is data mining. To respond to such a request for information, we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the program has obvious deficiencies and so we need to go back into the data modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and do a recompile of the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process which you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place your requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.
Arrgh.