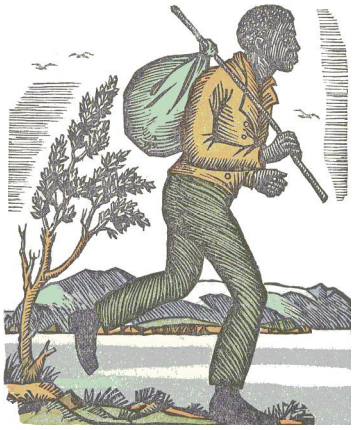
BASIL DORSEY (EPHRAIM COSTLY)



BASIL DORSEY EPHRAIM COSTLY

1810

 Prussia abolished Prussian serfdom.

Ephraim Costly was born as a slave at Libertytown in Frederick County, Maryland in a family that was the property of the white man Sabrick Sollers. This young slave's name would somehow become "Basil Dorsey." Sollers, who lived from August 24, 1772 to July 17, 1834, is several times mentioned in the record as having been this mulatto's father; Sollers had gotten married on December 25, 1806 with Mary Dorsey and there would also be legitimate white children.

BASIL DORSEY

EPHRAIM COSTLY

1832

Samuel Whitmarsh of Northampton put in his order to receive the latest silk machinery.

On an entirely unknown date the mulatto Virginia slave Basil Dorsey, property of Sabrick Sollers who may well have been his father (at this point he was presumably still known as Ephraim Costly), who would wind up in the Northampton vicinity working for one of these silk factories, got married with another slave, Louisa, who may also have been owned by Sabrick Sollers. (Dorsey would remarry after the death of this 1st wife and there would be children by both wives. The 2d wife Cynthia Dorsey would be a free woman of Massachusetts.)

1834

July 17, Thursday: Sabrick Sollers, the owner of Basil Dorsey and possibly also his father, died. Basil (who at this point was known as Ephraim Costly) had been promised his freedom upon the death of his master and possible father. When the estate would be probated, however, the settlement would provide for the sale of 18 of Soller's 23 slaves. Sollers' son Thomas Sollers paid $300 for Basil and offered him his freedom for $350. When Basil appealed to Richard Coale to be his bondsman for that amount, Sollers jacked up the price to $500.

1836

May 14, Saturday: The Liberator.

Richard Coale had been approached by Basil Dorsey to be his bondsman for $350 to purchase his manumission papers from his current owner, Sabrick Sollers's son Thomas Sollers. Thomas Sollers had then jacked up the purchase price to $500. Richard Coale urged Basil to seize his freedom and, according to one account, he did so on this day, traveling with his brothers Charles, William, and Thomas to Philadelphia by way of Gettysburg, Harrisburg, and Reading in Pennsylvania. The brother Thomas Dorsey stayed in Philadelphia while the brothers William, Thomas, and Basil found haven on Robert Purvis's farm in Byberry (now Bensalem) near Bristol in Bucks County. Basil would remain on that Purvis farm while his brothers William and Charles Dorsey would settle at neighboring farms.

The Treaty of Velasco.

READ THE FULL TEXT

BASIL DORSEY **EPHRAIM COSTLY**

1837

July: Slave hunters hired by Thomas Sollers tracked the escaped Virginia mulatto slave Basil Dorsey to his farm location of refuge in Pennsylvania and, with the aid of a local constable, took him under arrest to the jail in Bristol. When news of this capture reached Robert Purvis he obtained the services of a well-known trial lawyer, David Paul Brown. The brothers William and Charles Dorsey escaped because Robert Purvis's brother Joseph Purvis conveyed them to New Jersey. Purvis, who had arranged housing for Basil's 1st wife Louisa Dorsey and their children in Philadelphia, brought them to the courtroom in Doylestown in which their father faced trial. In the meantime Purvis organized local blacks to assist the prisoner should the judge rule in favor of the claimant. Sollers tried to settle the case by offering to sell manumission papers, at an again-increased cost of $800, but when Robert Purvis agreed to pay this amount, the price was again raised, this time to $1000. Basil exclaimed "No more offers! If the decision goes against me, I will cut my throat in the Court House. I will not go back into slavery." Judge Fox ordered that the prisoner to be released on a technicality, that the prosecutor was unable to prove to the court that slavery was indeed legal in Maryland. After the verdict Purvis and local blacks prevented another attempt to recapture Basil, taking him to New-York City.

The Reverend Joshua Leavitt, a Congregationalist minister, and David Ruggles, secretary of the New-York Vigilance Committee, are believed to have aided Basil in his flight once he reached New-York. The Reverend Leavitt likely directed Basil to Northampton, Massachusetts. Colonel Samuel Parsons took him from there to the Reverend Leavitt's father and brother Roger Hooker Leavitt in Charlemont, Massachusetts. While living in Charlemont, Basil paid 50 cents for a membership in the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society.

Samuel Ringgold Ward made his initial attempt at public speaking:

> I was selected to deliver an oration before a Literary Society of which I was a member. It was my first public attempt at public speaking. Among those present was Lewis Tappan, Esq.

TAPPAN FAMILY

1838

August 29, Wednesday: A 3d child, Charles Robert Dorsey, was born to Louisa Dorsey and Basil Dorsey.

Friend Stephen Wanton Gould wrote in his journal:

> *4th day 8th M 29 1838 / Information came to Town this Morning of the decease of our Friend Benjamin Mott, after he had eaten his breakfast & walked out round the door soon* [he] *came in leaning his head on a Chair Died immediately - A solemn Warning to all He was an Elder in Society & had been very useful. It seemed as if his concern for Truth & the Welfare of our Society, as the last time I was at his house he expressed much anxiety for its welfare & particularly that Ancient Quakerism should be supported adverting to Seasons of Early life when his mind had been affected by that spirit which visits the Youthful Mind. He particularly spoke of family opportunities which his Father Jacob Mott used to encourage & spent the time in sitting solidly together & in reading the Scriptures & writings of Friends he was Aged 80 Years 7 Months & two Days*
> *This Afternoon Nephew Thos D Rodman set some time with us & took tea, his visit was truly interesting*
>
> RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

November 7, Wednesday: Frédéric François Chopin, George Sand, her children, and her maidservant board ship in Barcelona heading toward the island of Mallorca.

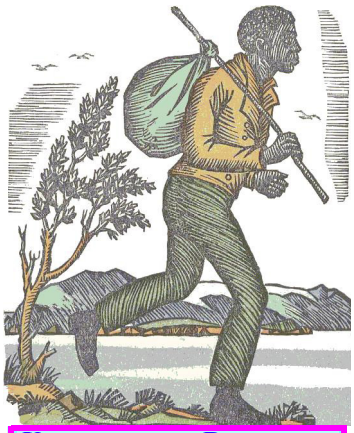
Louisa Dorsey died. The body would be placed in the Charlemont, Massachusetts cemetery.

BASIL DORSEY

EPHRAIM COSTLY

1844

A fugitive mulatto slave, Basil Dorsey, came with his family to shelter at the Association in to the village later to be known as Florence, Massachusetts, 3 miles northwest of Northampton.



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Association of Industry and Education had been established there in 1842 as a community of abolitionists and radical Garrisonian reformers. Garrison's brother-in-law George W. Benson, a founder of the NAEI, hired Basil as the teamster for his "Bensonville" Manufacturing Company.

1848

The last of the properties of the Association of Industry and Education, namely the old oil mill, the 4-story brick factory structure, its associated machine shops, and the establishment store, were disposed of for the round sum of $10,000 by Joseph C. Martin and Hall Judd to the last treasurer of the Association, Friend Samuel L. Hill. George W. Benson would be a particular friend to two of the forlorn black people who had been thus cut loose in a white-dominated rural society, Sojourner Truth and Basil Dorsey. He would help Truth obtain housing for herself, and would enable Dorsey to take over the "teaming," which is to say, the driving of draft animals, for his surviving cotton factory.

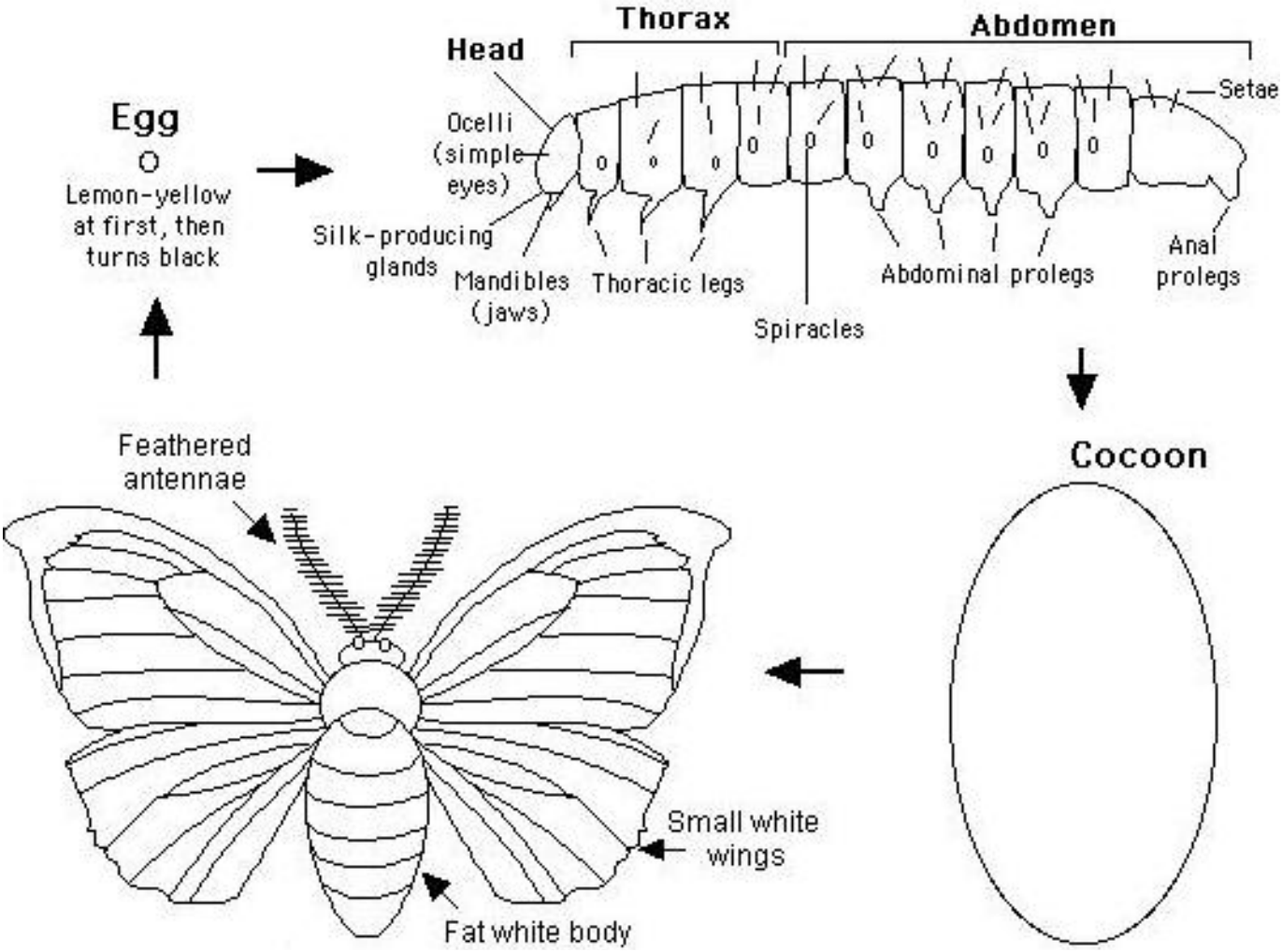
Nell Painter's photos of the silk mill in Florence, and of the house on one of Sojourner Truth's two lots there, do not have the appearance, to my eye, of period Daguerreotypes. Having been quite unable to find either in the local Northampton libraries or the college libraries **any** images contemporary with Truth's sojourn in Florence during that very early period of Daguerreotypy (I did come across a very rough sketch of the original oil mill that stood at that dam on the Mill River), I had driven past these addresses but had refrained from snapping present photos – it appeared to me that the structure now on that south lot of hers must be of later construction or at the very least quite extensively renovated, and I don't know that those outbuildings surrounding the core factory structure were in place before it was shifted from silk to cotton processing.

BASIL DORSEY **EPHRAIM COSTLY**

1849

Basil Dorsey purchased Lot #12 of Bensonville Village Lots for $25 and built his 1st house, the house we can see today somewhat modified, on Nonotuck Street, Florence, Massachusetts.

There was plague among the silkworms of the Mediterranean region and the silk industry was hard hit, especially in southern France. The nation's silk production was declining to $^{1}/_{6}$th of its previous level:



France's Silk Production

Year	Kilograms
1805	350,000
Early 1850s	2,100,000
1865	back to 1805 levels

1850

Holyoke was incorporated and the first cotton mill there began operation. Settlement of the new city would proceed slowly over this decade. Several textile mills, some paper mills and a machine shop would be beginning production. The water power companies would be divesting themselves of their manufacturing assets.

As many as 35 African Americans, among them the fugitive mulatto slave Basil Dorsey, were living on what later became known as Nonotuck Street in what was then known as Bensonville. This town (later to be known as Florence), with a population of around 600, was just under 10% African American as of the 1850 federal census. Dorsey, age 40, is listed with his wife Cynthia Dorsey, age 19, their 1st child Louisa Dorsey, age 4 months, and 2 children from Dorsey's earlier marriage, Charles Dorsey and John Dorsey. He was the team-master for the cotton factory in Northampton, and had at this point saved up some $50.[1] It was hard for him to make a decent salary, among other reasons because he was fearful of going into any larger city in New England, where there were greater numbers of strangers. To be able to take merchandise into Boston without running afoul of the roving slavecatchers would be of great value to him. Therefore a collection was taken up and the Southern white family from whom Dorsey had escaped was paid off with that accumulated $50 savings plus this money collected locally — and eventually Dorsey would receive a manumission document.

October 22, Tuesday: With the ink barely dry on the nation's new federal Fugitive Slave Act, Basil Dorsey, with 9 other self-proclaimed fugitives from slavery, published a call for local residents to come to their aid and resist any effort to return them to the South. Local citizens were concerned that Dorsey was at risk in his travels as teamster and raised $150 to purchase his freedom.

1. To get a sense of what that would amount to in today's money, consult <http://www.measuringworth.com/exchange/>

1851

May 14, Wednesday: The Erie Railroad opened its 483-mile link between Piedmont NY near the port of New York and Dunkirk on the Great Lakes. On the celebratory train, President Millard Fillmore and cabinet, and a number of governors, senators, and businessmen, rode along with the Erie board of directors. Secretary of State Daniel Webster insisted on having his rocking-chair lashed on an open flatcar so he could better enjoy the scenery.

The manumission papers of Basil Dorsey were purchased for $150, 15 years after his escape from slavery in Virginia:

CHATTEL RECORD OF BALTIMORE COUNTY (BILL OF SALE)

Know all men by these presents, That I, Thomas E. Sollers of Frederick County, and State of Maryland, for and in consideration of the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars lawful money of the United States, in hand paid by George Griscom, of the city of Philadelphia, in the State of Pennsylvania, Attorney at Law, at or before the sealing and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged: Have granted, bargained and sold, and by these presents do grant, bargain and sell, unto the said George Griscom, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, one Mulatto man, named Ephraim Costly, otherwise and now called Basil Dorsey, age about forty-three years, a slave for life. (The said Ephraim Costly, otherwise and now called Basil Dorsey, as aforesaid, having been born a slave for life of Sabrick Sollers, late of said Frederick County, in the State of Maryland, and raised by the said Sabrick Sollers, and owned by him as such slave for life until the decease of said Sabrick Sollers, after which he became the property, as such slave for life, of the said Thomas B. Sollers, (who is a son and one of the heirs at Law of said Sabrick Sollers, deceased), and is now a fugitive from service from said State of Maryland.)

To Have and To Hold the said described Mulatto Man Ephraim Costly, otherwise and now called Basil Dorsey, a slave for life as aforesaid to the said George Griscom, his Executors, Administrators and Assigns forever, and the said Thomas E. Sollers, for himself, his Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, the said Mulatto Man Ephraim Costly, otherwise Basil Dorsey, unto the said George Griscom, his Executors, Administrators and Assigns, against him the said Thomas E. Sollers, his Executors and Administrators, and against all and every other person or persons whatsoever, shall and will warrant and forever defend by these presents.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my Hand and Seal this Fourteenth of May, Eight Hundred and fifty-one, signed, sealed and delivered.

Thomas E. Sollers. (seal.)

In the presence of
P. Gorsuch.

STATE OF MARYLAND, } S.S.
CITY OF BALTIMORE, }

Be it Remembered, That on this fourteenth day of May, 1851 before the Subscriber, a Justice of the Peace for said state and city,

appears Thomas E. Sollers and acknowledges the above Instrument of Writing to be his act and deed, according to the true intent and meaning thereof, and also at the same time personally appeared George Griscom and made oath on the Holy Evangels of Almighty God that the consideration set forth therin is true and bona fide as set forth.

P. GORSUCH.

1852

In London, Lajos Kossuth became an intimate of Giuseppe Mazzini, and joined his revolutionary committee.

ITALY

Thomas Mayne Reid, Jr.'s THE YOUNG VOYAGEURS; OR, THE BOY HUNTERS IN THE NORTH. The author engaged in a plan for Kossuth to travel incognito across Europe as his man-servant "James Hawkins" under a Foreign Office passport "for the free passage of Captain Mayne Reid, British subject, travelling on the Continent with a man-servant."

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE (initially being issued in London by Chapman and Hall as 2 volumes octavo in blind-stamped brown cloth with spines lettered in gilt, prior to being printed in America) there was talk of the reading of THE DIAL:

> Being much alone, during my recovery, I read interminably [page 677] in Mr. Emerson's Essays, the Dial, Carlyle's works, George Sand's romances, (lent me by Zenobia,) and other books which one or another of the brethren or sisterhood had brought with them. Agreeing in little else, most of these utterances were like the cry of some solitary sentinel, whose station was on the outposts of the advance-guard of human progression; or, sometimes, the voice came sadly from among the shattered ruins of the past, but yet had a hopeful echo in the future. They were well adapted (better, at least, than any other intellectual products, the volatile essence of which had heretofore tinctured a printed page) to pilgrims like ourselves, whose present bivouac was considerably farther into the waste of chaos than any mortal army of crusaders had ever marched before. Fourier's works, also, in a series of horribly tedious volumes, attracted a good deal of my attention, from the analogy which I could not but recognize between his system and our own. There was far less resemblance, it is true, than the world chose to imagine; inasmuch as the two theories differed, as widely as the zenith from the nadir, in their main principles.

There was also talk of the reading of Waldo Emerson's essays:

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At some point during this year the proud author sat for his portrait in the studio of G.P.A. Healy at West Street and Washington Street in Boston. His new book was in part about "the Juvenalian and Thoreauvian ideology of Blithedale," an experiment in community which was "in spite of its Edenic pretensions, located in an area of market gardens catering to the needs of the expanding 'New England metropolis'."

> When "Wakefield" was published in 1836, most of Hawthorne's audience, like Hawthorne himself, would only have known of the conditions of urban life treated in the sketch by having read about them. Hawthorne takes advantage of the exoticism of a European metropolitan setting, just as Poe was to have done a few years later in "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Yet by 1852, when THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE was published, the urbanization of American was no longer an abstract possibility; it was, thanks to economic growth, industrial development, and large-scale immigration, an increasingly insistent reality. The intellectual and social movements represented by the Blithedale community were, in large measure, a response to these historic changes. The process of urbanization is therefore never entirely out of sight in THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE. Expressing the ideas implicit in the agrarian experiment, Coverdale offers several standard Transcendentalist criticisms of urban life. Driving through the streets of Boston, he describes "how the buildings, on either side, seemed to press too closely upon us, insomuch that our mighty hearts found barely room enough to throb between them" (3:11). Observing how the snow falling upon the city is blackened by smoke, and molded by boots, Coverdale makes it into a metaphor for the way in which human nature is corrupted by the "falsehood, formality, and error" (3:11) of city life. In

> addition, Coverdale identifies cities as the sources of the "selfish competition," which powers the "weary treadmill of established society" (3:19). Yet, although Coverdale will occasionally express the Juvenalian and Thoreauvian ideology of Blithedale, he implicitly recognizes, late in the book, that it may be futile to attempt to arrest the advance of urban civilization. When he observes a crowd at a village lyceum, it seems to him to be "rather suburban than rural" (3:197). The decline of authentic rusticity has been implied earlier when we learn that Blithedale, in spite of its Edenic pretensions, is located in an area of market gardens catering to the needs of the expanding "New England metropolis." From the very beginning of THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE, we know that the utopian experiment has failed and that Coverdale has returned to the urban existence he originally fled.

Bensonville, Massachusetts, just north of Northampton, was renamed Florence. Subsequent to George W. Benson's departure Bensonville Manufacturing would become Greenville Manufacturing, with Basil Dorsey remaining as head teamster under its new president J.P. Williston, a Northampton abolitionist.

During this year Kossuth was fundraising practically everywhere in America, including in the First Church at Northampton. He had a letter of introduction to the Motts of Philadelphia, and they invited him to dinner at their home. The Governor's advisers insisted that he call there only for an informal chat while refraining from breaking bread with any such notorious abolitionists — lest news of such an indiscretion get out and he be embarrassed. During his visit and chat, Friend Lucretia somehow formed the opinion that although this politician was afraid to say so, in his heart he would have to be opposed to human slavery in any form. (Madam Pulzysky, Kossuth's sister, also visited the Motts, and by way of contrast she was willing to argue the advantages of human slavery with them.)

What sort of man was this Kossuth? Utterly ruthless. Cold-blooded murder was not beyond him, when the result would prove useful. When he had needed to safeguard the royal gems of Hungary, for instance, including the crown of St. Stephen which was held to be necessary for the coronation of any true king of Hungary, he had had them buried at a spot on the banks of the Danube, and he had employed for this work "a detachment of prisoners who were shot after the concealment was complete." His plot was that this portable property was to be recovered later, packed in marmalade, and carried via Constantinople to "the well-known Philhellene" of Boston, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe. However, when it came to be time, during this year, to dig up the jewels and pack them in marmalade for shipment to Boston, the man whom he would entrust to do this would betray his trust. –Eventually the jewels, including the crown of St. Stephen, would come into the control of the government of Austria.

Kossuth somehow suborned the cooperation of William James Stillman in his abortive scheme to recover the jewels, and this American artist sailed off to Hungary on this wild-goose chase.

According to page 153 and pages 161-6 of Larry J. Reynolds's influence study EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY RENAISSANCE (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), virtually everything about Henry Thoreau during this period is to be accounted for in terms of the manifold influences upon him and upon the times, of European revolutionaries such as Kossuth here:

Faced with this threat of mental contamination, our guy allegedly has become literally obsessed with maintaining his self-concept and his self-satisfaction:

> Thoreau, stirred by Lajos Kossuth's visit and news of European affairs, returned to the manuscript of WALDEN and revised and expanded it throughout 1852. Although engaged by current events, Thoreau fought a spiritual battle to remain aloof, "to preserve the mind's chastity" by reading "not the Times" but "the Eternities." Imagining that he had won, he celebrated his victory in WALDEN.... Kossuth's visit to the United States and Concord brought to a head a struggle Thoreau had been engaged in for some time. During the years following the European revolutions of 1848-1849, Thoreau struggled to develop his spiritual side and rid himself of what he considered a degrading interest in current events. He also tried to communicate to Waldo Emerson and the world his own capacity for heroism. After the disappointing reception of A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS in the summer of 1849, Thoreau had become uncertain about how to proceed with his life. Setting the third draft of WALDEN aside as unpublishable, he studied Hinduism, visited Cape Cod several times, took a trip to Canada, and began his Indian book project. The next year, 1851, he started to focus his energies, and, as Lewis Leary has said, these twelve months were a watershed in his life, a time of consolidation, of self-discovery, of preparation for some important new effort. "I find myself uncommonly prepared for **some** literary work...," he wrote in his journal on September 7, 1851. "I am prepared not so much for contemplation, as for forceful expression." Subsequently, 1852 became Thoreau's *annus mirabilis*, the year his months of living deliberately yielded a value of its own, he lavished upon it the care and craft that turned it into his richest literary achievement; he also wrote at this time most of his essay "Life without Principle," which, as Walter Harding has observed, "contains virtually all the fundamental principles upon which he based his life"; and, more important, he radically revised and reshaped WALDEN, changing it from a factual account of his life in the woods into the embryo of a profound spiritual

autobiography, illuminated by the idea of spiritual renewal, shaped and informed by the cycle of the seasons.

The catalyst for the metamorphosis of WALDEN was Thoreau's desire to resolve, in writing if not in fact, the conflict he felt between the spiritual and the animal in himself. On the one hand, his recent communion with nature had yielded, as it had in his youth, transcendence — not of the world of material fact, but rather of the world of trivial fact. At times he achieved a state of pure spirituality in the woods. On August 17, 1851, for example, he recorded in his journal, "My heart leaps into my mouth at the sound of the wind in the woods. I, whose life was but yesterday so desultory and shallow, suddenly recover my spirits, my spirituality, through my hearing.... I did not despair of worthier moods, and now I have occasion to be grateful for the flood of life that is flowing over me." At such times, he reexperienced the ecstasy of his youth, when, as he put it, "the morning and the evening were sweet to me, and I led a life aloof from society of men." Despite these experiences, which he valued greatly, another aspect of Thoreau's personality cared about society, cared passionately about justice, about the actions of governments, about the fate of actual men in the nineteenth century. This part of him, however, he associated with his impure animal nature, and he sought to purge it.

Thoreau had no way of knowing whether the body was Margaret Fuller's or not, but she was surely on his mind, and her endeavor to convince others of the legitimacy of her "title" may have been as well. His description, which obviously contrasts with his earlier one, reveals the power and significance the facts possessed in his eyes. Here as always he cared too much about the human to dismiss its annihilation with convincing disdain.

During the last months of 1850 and all of 1851, Thoreau dedicated himself to living deliberately, to fronting what he called the essential. During these months, he spent many hours walking through the fields and woods of Concord, recording his observations in his journal. At the same time, he read the newspapers and found himself engaged by what he found. The political news from Europe focused upon the failure of the republican movement, the reaction and reprisals, the futile attempts by exiles such as Mazzini and Kossuth to enlist aid in the struggle for a new round of upheavals. Austria, meanwhile, charged that the United States, especially its new Secretary of State Daniel Webster, was encouraging anti-Austrian sentiment and intruding in the affairs of Europe. On November 17, 1850, Thoreau revealed both his disdain for the news of the day and his concern about its power to capture his attention: "It is a strange age of the world this, when empires, kingdoms, and republics come a-begging to our doors and utter their complaints at our elbows. I cannot take up a newspaper but I find that some wretched government or other, hard pushed and on its last legs, is interceding with me, the reader, to vote for it, — more importunate than an Italian beggar." At times the newspapers contributed to the problem he called "the village," which kept him from getting to the woods in spirit, although he walked miles into it bodily. One way he tried to overcome this problem was through the process of diminution, which can be seen in the following outburst of May 1, 1851: "Nations! What are nations? Tartars! and Huns! and Chinamen! Like insects they swarm. The

historian strives in vain to make them memorable. It is for want of a man that there are so many men." Quoting from "The Spirit of Lodin," ... he claims to "look down from my height on nations, / And they become ashes before me." By adopting an Olympian point of view, Thoreau elevates himself and diminishes men both in size and importance. Like Waldo Emerson in the "Mind and Manners" lectures, he also reaffirms his belief that the regeneration of the self, the building up of the single solitary soul, is far more important than the activities of masses of men, be they parties, tribes, or nations.

Throughout 1851, as Thoreau continued to read the papers, he developed a loathing for them linked to that part of himself unable to ignore them. The news, he came to assert, could profane the "very *sanctum sanctorum*" of the mind:

> I find it so difficult to dispose of the few facts which to me are significant, that I hesitate to burden my mind with the most insignificant, which only a divine mind could illustrate. Such is, for the most part, the news, — in newspapers and conversation. It is important to preserve the mind's chastity in this respect.... By all manners of boards and traps, threatening the extreme penalty of the divine law, ... it behooves us to preserve the purity and sanctity of the mind.... It is so hard to forget what it is worse than useless to remember. If I am to be a channel or thoroughfare, I prefer that it be of the mountain springs, and not the town sewers, — the Parnassian streams.

"I do not think much of the actual," he wrote himself. "It is something which we have long since done with. It is a sort of vomit in which the unclean love to wallow." During the writing of the 4th version of WALDEN, which coincided with Kossuth's tour of the country, Thoreau created a myth about himself as someone who had risen above the affairs of men, someone who felt the animal dying out in him and the spiritual being established.

In WALDEN, the European revolutions of 1848-1849, the reaction and reprisals that followed, all the attention given in the newspapers to Kossuth's visit, to Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*, to a possible war between France and Great Britain, all these go unmentioned, and the absence reveals how earnestly, perhaps even how desperately, Thoreau sought to diminish their importance to his life. In his journals we see his fascination with and antagonism toward the news of national and international affairs. He devotes half of his essay "Life without Principle," moreover, to a castigation of the news, telling the reader about its dangers, its foulness, its profanity — even mentioning Kossuth by name and ridiculing the "stir" about him: "That excitement about Kossuth, consider how characteristic, but superficial, it was!... For all the fruit of that stir we have the Kossuth hat."[2] In WALDEN, however, he purifies his book and his *persona* by ignoring contemporary world affairs. Characterizing himself (untruthfully) as one "who rarely looks into the newspapers," he claims that "nothing new

2. The Kossuth hat was a black, low-crowned felt hat with left brim fastened to crown, having a peacock feather. The story of its "invention" by John Nicholas Genin (1819-1878) and its rise to high fashion is told in Donald S. Spencer's LOUIS KOSSUTH AND YOUNG AMERICA — A STUDY IN SECTIONALISM AND FOREIGN POLICY, 1848-1852 (Columbia, London: U of Missouri P, 1977, pages 59-61). This proprietor of a hat shop on Broadway in New-York next to the American Museum, Genin, also designed a best-selling Jenny Lind Riding Hat.

does ever happen in foreign parts, a French revolution not excepted."

Thoreau's struggle to achieve an oriental aloofness from the affairs of men seems to have first become a serious endeavor for him in the summer of 1850, when Emerson asked him to go to Fire Island to retrieve the body and possessions of Margaret Fuller. As Robert D. Richardson, Jr. has pointed out, "Death gave life a new imperative for Thoreau." Despite Fuller's rejections of his DIAL contributions in the early 1840s, Thoreau became her friend and admirer, and during her last summer in Concord, he took her boat riding at dawn on the river. The task he faced at Fire Island thus could not have been pleasant, yet in his journal and in letters to others, he strove to project a philosophical serenity about what he found. In a letter to his admirer H.G.O. Blake, he wrote that he had in his pocket a button torn from the coat of Giovanni Angelo, *marchése d'Ossoli*: "Held up, it intercept the light, — and actual button, — and yet all the life it is connected with is less substantial to me, and interests me less, than my faintest dream. Our thoughts are the epochs in our lives: all else is but a journal of the winds that blew while we were here." Thoreau had not known Ossoli, so his aloof serenity here comes easily; he had known Fuller though, and his attempt to rise above the fact of her death shows strain.

When Thoreau arrived at the site of the wreck, Fuller's body had not been found, but he stayed in the area and a week later learned that something once human had washed ashore. As he approached it, he saw bones, and in the draft of this letter to Blake he asserted, "There was nothing at all remarkable about them. They were simply some bones lying on the beach. They would not detain the walker there more than so much seaweed. I should think that the fates would not take the trouble to show me any bones again, I so slightly appreciated the favor." He recalled the experience in his journal some three months later, however, and there revealed the difficulty he had in dismissing what he had seen: "I once went in search of the relics of a human body...," he wrote, "which had been cast up the day before on the beach, though the sharks had stripped off the flesh.... It was as conspicuous on that sandy plain as if a generation had labored to pile up a cairn there.... It reigned over the shore. That dead body possessed the shore as no living one could. It showed a title to the sands which no living ruler could."

In the winter of 1851-1852, Thoreau's struggle to assure his own purity became obsessive. Sherman Paul has traced his dissatisfaction with himself to surveying, which Thoreau found trivial and coarsening. Mary Elkins Moller has speculated that Thoreau was also having sexual fantasies about Mrs. Lidian Emerson and felt ashamed of them. Whatever the truth of these views (and I think the second takes Thoreau's references to chastity too literally), the fact remains that Thoreau at this time was also struggling to escape from his interest in current events. Surprisingly, this private denouncer of the press had become a subscriber to Horace Greeley's Weekly Tribune, a fact that heightened the tension he felt about preserving his mind's chastity. On January 20, 1852, he wrote,

> I do not know but it is too much to read one newspaper in a week, for I now take the weekly Tribune, and for a

> few days past, it seems to me, I have not dwelt in Concord; the sun, the clouds, the snow, the trees say not so much to me. You cannot serve two masters.... To read the things distant and sounding betrays us into slighting these which are then apparently near and small. We learn to look abroad for our mind and spirit's daily nutriment, and what is this dull town to me? ...All summer and far into the fall I unconsciously went by the newspapers and the news, and now I find it was because the morning and the evening were full of news to me. My walks were full of incidents. I attended not to the affairs of Europe, but to my own affairs in Concord fields.

Thoreau's quest for purity and serenity had become particularly difficult because of the excitement surrounding Lajos Kossuth's visit and the new interest Waldo Emerson had taken in things Thoreau considered trivial, including Kossuth. The gradual estrangement of the two men may have begun while Emerson was in England in 1847-1848, writing letters home for Lidian and Thoreau which were little more than catalogues of the great people he had met. Although we know this was his way of providing himself a record of his activities, it probably disappointed. After his return from Europe, Emerson had lectured throughout the country, praising England and its people, but when he engaged Thoreau in a conversation on the topic, Henry, not surprisingly, said that the English were "mere soldiers" and their business was "winding up." In the summer of 1851, Emerson, unaware of the new scope and grandeur of Thoreau's journal, unaware of the growth in his spiritual development, wrote off his friend as one who "will not stick." "He is a boy," Emerson added, "& will be an old boy. Pounding beans is good to the end of pounding Empires, but not, if at the end of years, it is only beans."

In a like manner, Thoreau at about this time began to see that his friend would continue to disappoint him. He bristles at Emerson's patronizing attitude; he disagreed with his treatment of Margaret Fuller in the MEMOIRS; and most of all he resented his new worldliness. In ENGLISH TRAITS (1856) Emerson, drawing on his lectures of 1848-1850, would celebrate the manners of the British aristocracy and assert that "whatever tends to form manners or to finish men, has a great value. Every one who has tasted the delight of friendship will respect every social guard which our manners can establish." For Thoreau, there was "something devilish in manners" that could come between friends, and writing of Emerson in the winter of 1851, he complained, "One of the best men I know often offends me by uttering made words — the very best words, of course, or dinner speeches, most smooth and gracious and fluent repartees.... O would you but be simple and downright! Would you but cease your palaver! It is the misfortune of being a gentleman and famous." As Joel Porte has observed, the failure of A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS and Emerson's "manifest success" had probably contributed to Thoreau's bitterness.

A pushy little ultra-conservative mofo, the Reverend Professor Francis Bowen had what was termed at the time "a remarkable talent for giving offense." Precisely while Kossuth was riding the crest of the wave of American political correctness, Bowen publicly denounced that revolutionary. (***Nota Bene***: This differs from Henry Thoreau's reaction not merely as public denunciation differs from private distaste but also as cheap motivation differs from abundant reason.)

But this is all very easy to figure out, at least as far as Larry J. Reynolds is concerned — what has happened was merely that Kossuth has come between Waldo Emerson and Thoreau! – Wow, now that we understand that, it all becomes perfectly clear. Continuing to quote, from pages 166-70 of this extraordinarily confident EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONS AND THE AMERICAN LITERARY RENAISSANCE influence study:

> In the early months of 1852, Kossuth's visit to Concord widened the separation between Thoreau and Emerson into a permanent gulf. As Thoreau spent more and more time communing with nature, trying to cleanse himself of what he called the "news," Emerson saw fit to criticize him for these efforts. Frustrated, Thoreau declared in his journal, "I have got to that pass with my friend that our words do not pass with each other for what they are worth. We speak in vain; there is none to hear. He finds fault with me that I walk alone, when I pine for want of a companion; that I commit my thoughts to a diary even on my walks, instead of seeking to share them generously with a friend; curses my practice even." Emerson, who would soon lecture on the "Conduct of Life" in Canada and then deliver his "Address to Kossuth" in Concord, could not see the heroism in Thoreau's aloofness. Thoreau, meanwhile, who sought to become a better man through his solitary walks, felt unappreciated and frustrated. On May 4, in an entry both defensive and immodest, he dismissed the great Kossuth and those like Emerson who honored him:
>
> > This excitement about Kossuth is not interesting to me, it is so superficial. It is only another kind of dancing or of politics. Men are making speeches to him all over the country, but each expresses only the thought, or the want of thought, of the multitude. No man stands on truth.... You can pass your hand under the largest mob, a nation in revolution even, and, however solid a bulk they may make, like a hail-cloud in the atmosphere, you may not meet so much as a cobweb of support. They may not rest, even by a point, on eternal foundations. But an individual standing on truth you cannot pass your hand under, for his foundations reach to the centre of the universe. So superficial these men and their doings, it is life on a leaf or a chip which has nothing but air or water beneath.
>
> The length and tone of this entry reveals the importance of the matter to him; obviously, he considers himself the "individual standing on truth," whose depth far exceeds that of any "nation in revolution" or military hero. And one week later, during the excitement surrounding Kossuth's visit to Concord, during the afternoon of Emerson's speech and reception, Thoreau, in order to show how little he thought of these matters, entered only the following in his journal: "P.M. — **Kossuth here**."
>
> All of Thoreau's struggle with current events, with Kossuth's visit, with Emerson's worldliness and disesteem lay behind the important fourth version of WALDEN. As he revised and expanded his manuscript throughout 1852, Thoreau endowed his persona with

a serene aloofness, creating a hero interested in eternal truths, not pointless political ones. Having discovered that "a sane and growing man revolutionizes every day" and that no "institutions of man can survive a morning experience," he fashioned an answer to his best friend, who thought Kossuth a great man and Henry Thoreau an unsociable boy.

As he revised WALDEN, Thoreau made major additions.... The thrust of almost all of these additions is to show how nature, which is holy and heroic, can bestow those virtues on one who practices chastity. His central statement on chastity was added, of course, to "Higher Laws" and asserts that "we are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as out higher nature slumbers.... Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it. Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open.... He is blessed who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day, and the divine being established. Not surprisingly, Thoreau presents himself as having achieved this assuredness. He is among the blessed.

The chastity Thoreau has in mind is as much intellectual as physical, and to attain it one must abstain not merely from sexual intercourse but also from trivial thoughts and interests. In his addition to "Solitude" he explains the process it involves: "By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent." The result is a feeling of doubleness, whereby a person "may be either a drift-wood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it." He admits that "this doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes," but he makes it clear that it is worth the price. In "The Ponds" he adds paragraphs stressing the "serenity and purity" of Walden and suggests a correspondence between it and himself. "Many men have been likened to it," he writes, "But few deserve that honor." That he has earned the honor through his way of life is a point made repeatedly. In his addition to "Baker Farm", Thoreau highlights the blessedness which communion with nature has accorded him. Like Walt Whitman's persona in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," or more recently Loren Eiseley's star thrower, Thoreau's hero becomes literally illuminated by nature. He stands one day at the base "of a rainbow's arch, which filled the lower stratum of the atmosphere, tinged the grass and leaves around, and dazzling [him] as if [he] looked through colored crystal." TO emphasize the religious implications of the experience, he adds, "As I walked on the railroad causeway, I used to wonder at the halo of light around my shadow, and would fain fancy myself one of the elect." In the additions to the "Conclusion," Thoreau makes explicit the successful effort to achieve spiritual renewal through aloofness. "I delight to come to my bearings, —" he declares, "not walk in procession with pomp and parade, in a conspicuous place, but to walk even with the Builder of the universe, if I may, — not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by."

The place he would sit, of course, is far above men and their doings, which diminishes them in his eyes. And this particular view is the one dramatized in his most famous addition, the classic battle of the ants in "Brute Neighbors." The episode

comes from an entry made in his journal on January 22, 1852, while Kossuth was visiting Washington and while Horace Greeley in his Tribune and James Watson Webb in his Courier and Enquirer were debating the nature of the Hungarian War. Thoreau, like most of his contemporaries, found himself engaged (against his will, however) by what called "the great controversy now going on in the world between the despotic and the republican principle," and this is why he associates the two tribes of warring ants with the European revolutionary scene and calls them "the red republicans and the black despots or imperialists." His description of their war has become famous because of its frequent use in anthologies, and is surely right when he says that one reason for its selection is that it is "easily taken from its context."

Raymond Adams errs though in adding that "it is an episode that hardly has so much as a context." By virtue of both its hidden connection to revolutionary Europe and its subtle connection to the theme of spiritual serenity, the episode is part of larger contexts that shaped its features.

As Thoreau describes the battle of the ants, he reveals that side of his personality engaged by physical heroism in the actual world. The ferocity and resolve of the combatants, the mutilation and gore that attend their life-and-death struggle thoroughly engage him. "I felt for the rest of that day," he admits, "as if I had had my feelings excited and harrowed by witnessing the struggle, the ferocity and carnage, of a human battle before my door." On the other hand, through the use of the mock-heroic, Thoreau generates an irony that allows him to stress once more the spiritual side of his persona, the side that dismisses politics, revolutions, and wars as trivial. The mother of a single red ant, we are told, has charged her son "to return with his shield or upon it," and the fighting ants, the narrator speculates, could, not to his surprise, have "had their respective musical bands stationed on some eminent chip, and played their national airs the while, to excite the slow and cheer the dying combatants." With such irony Thoreau diminishes the importance, not of the ants, but of the men they resemble. Just as he claimed that Kossuth and his American admirers were involved in "life on a leaf or a chip," he here brings the metaphor to life and makes the same statement about warring nations. The purpose of this addition, and of his others, is to show that true heroism is associated with aloof serenity, not brutal warfare.

When Thoreau revised his journal entry for inclusion in WALDEN, he claimed the ant battle occurred "in the Presidency of James Knox Polk, five years before the passage of Daniel Webster's Fugitive-Slave Bill," thus making it contemporaneous with his stay at the pond and registering his criticism, as he had in "Civil Disobedience," of the Mexican War. Ultimately, the issue of slavery disturbed him far more than revolution in Europe, and he found it difficult to resist the temptation to speak out against it. In later versions of WALDEN, Thoreau expanded upon the ideas he introduced in 1852, extending his treatment of the triumph of the spiritual over the animal and filling out his account of the progress of the seasons, which, of course, complements the theme of renewal. Meanwhile, paradoxically, he remained a deeply passionate man, more engaged than others of

> his acquaintance by the "trivial Nineteenth Century." When the slave Anthony Burns was arrested in 1854, Thoreau, burning with rage, publicly denounced the Massachusetts authorities in his inflammatory "Slavery in Massachusetts": "I walk toward one of our ponds," he thundered, "but what signifies the beauty of nature when men are base? ...Who can be serene in a country where both the rulers and the ruled are without principle? The remembrance of my country spoils my walk. My thoughts are murder to the State, and involuntarily go plotting against her." Five years later, of course, he stepped forward to defend John Brown more ardently than anyone else in the country. Clearly then, in 1852, when Thoreau endowed the persona of WALDEN with remarkable purity and serenity, he was mythologizing himself; he was, in response to the "*tintinnabulum* from without," creating a new kind of hero for a revolutionary age.

Have we got this very clear now? According to Larry J. Reynolds, it has been demonstrated that Thoreau, a boy playing at life, was not merely fighting a spiritual battle to remain aloof but indeed was fantasizing that he had won this battle, and celebrating his final victory. But Thoreau has been detected as nevertheless full of bitterness, as resentful, as feeling unappreciated and frustrated. Fundamentally a "defensive and immodest" pretense rather than any sort of record of a spiritual journey, WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS merely celebrated cheaply in words what its author could not accomplish in fact: the big win in a struggle between the spiritual in its author and the warrior-wannabee. This is Thoreau as a mere self-deluding boy who, when confronted by a real life hero out of the real world of struggle, struggles to stand "aloof" in order to console himself by considering himself to be the true hero, to be indeed the "individual standing on truth" whose real worth far exceeds the appreciation offered to any such mere celebrity wrapped up in mere mundane push-and-shove concerns. It is hard to imagine that Reynolds is not terming Thoreau a self-deluded coward.

FIGURING OUT WHAT AMOUNTS TO A "HISTORICAL CONTEXT" IS WHAT THE CRAFT OF HISTORICIZING AMOUNTS TO, AND THIS NECESSITATES DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE SET OF EVENTS THAT MUST HAVE TAKEN PLACE BEFORE EVENT E COULD BECOME POSSIBLE, AND MOST CAREFULLY DISTINGUISHING THEM FROM ANOTHER SET OF EVENTS THAT COULD NOT POSSIBLY OCCUR UNTIL SUBSEQUENT TO EVENT E.

1867

April 2, Tuesday: A biographical sketch published in the Hampshire Gazette described an incident that had occurred while Basil Dorsey was accompanying Roger Hooker and the Reverend Joshua Leavitt on a train trip to Albany. Other white passengers demanded that the conductor remove the mulatto Dorsey to the black section. The mulatto refused and "divesting himself of his hat and coat threatened to pitch through the window any man who should molest him."

1872

February 15, Thursday: Although the Correspondenica teatral in Valladolid, Spain contained the 1st extant notice of a concert by Isaac Albeniz: “Words fail us in praising such mastery, such feeling, such perfection ... he will be one of the glories of Spanish art,” this actually had not been his 1st performance.

Basil Dorsey died in Florence, Massachusetts.

“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: December 29, 2017

BASIL DORSEY EPHRAIM COSTLY

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, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.

Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in

the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology — but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary "writerly" process 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.

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