

## HENRY'S RELATIVES



### UNCLE CHARLES JONES "J.C." DUNBAR<sup>1</sup>



In 1772, Mary Jones (1748-1830) had gotten married with the Reverend [Asa Dunbar](#) (1745-1787). They had had two children in New Hampshire, first [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) in 1780 in Weston and then Cynthia Dunbar in 1787 in Keene NH. A month after the birth of Cynthia Dunbar, the Reverend [Asa Dunbar](#) died at the age of 41. In 1798, 11 years later, the widowed [Mary Jones Dunbar](#) remarried with the widower Captain Jonas Minot and brought her children [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) and [Cynthia Dunbar](#) from Keene, New Hampshire with her to live on his farm in Concord, Massachusetts. By this time all nine of Captain Jonas Minot's children by his previous marriage were grown. The daughter [Cynthia Dunbar](#) lived on the Virginia Road farm some 14 years before her marriage in 1812 to John Thoreau. Since her own father the Reverend Asa Dunbar had died a month after her birth, Captain

1. Don't get confused between Thoreau's beloved uncle "J.C." [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) and his cousin [Charles Howard Dunbar](#) who lived in Haverhill, Massachusetts. There are two different generations here, and two quite separate people.



## **HENRY'S RELATIVES:**

## **UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR**

Jonas Minot was the only father figure she knew. After Captain Jonas Minot died in 1813, Mary Jones Dunbar Minot asked Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau and John Thoreau to administer her "widow's third" of the farm, but in 1818, less than a year after their 3d child David Henry Thoreau had been born there, they moved away.



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1780

February: [Charles Jones Dunbar](#), [Cynthia Dunbar](#)'s only brother, was born in Weston during the severest winter of the 18th Century. (As [Henry Thoreau](#) commented in his journal, his uncle would die in the winter of another great snow — a life bounded by great snows.)

There had been this series of heavy December snowstorms, and then there had followed a thawless January, coldest month in history. Except for the Great Road between Boston and Hartford, all highways were blocked for many weeks. All the shipping in all of New England's harbors were bottled up tight for four to six weeks. In southern Connecticut, 42 inches of snow blanketed the fields.



September 9, 1850: ... Charles grew up to be a remarkably eccentric man. He was of large frame athletic and celebrated for his feats of strength. His lungs were proportionably strong— There was a man who heard him named once, and asked it was the same Charles Dunbar—whom he remembered when he was a little boy to have heard hail a vessel from the shore of Maine as she was sailing by. He should never forget that man's name. ...

[CHARLES JONES DUNBAR](#)



January 15, 1853: ... Saw near Le Grosse's the 12 ult a shrike. He told me about seeing Uncle Charles once come to Barrett's mill with logs—leap over the yoke that drew them—and back again— It amused the boys. ...

[CHARLES JONES DUNBAR](#)

**“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,  
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY**

## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1821



[Charles Jones Dunbar](#) discovered a superior source of [graphite](#) near Bristol in New Hampshire and filed a mineral claim.



However, some legal details would limit the mineral lease to seven years, and they would need to move all the ore they could as quickly as they could. Deciding to send this stuff to market as [pencils](#),<sup>2</sup> he and Cyrus Stow of Concord would team up as Dunbar & Stow and would invite John Thoreau, Sr. to join them in 1823. Stow, and shortly afterward Dunbar, would for unknown reasons drop out of this manufacturing effort, and their firm would be reborn as the famous John Thoreau & Company. Either the Dunbar supply was more suitable than the supply available to the Salem pencilmakers, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Dixon, or the Thoreaus would be better at improving the process, for these high-quality Thoreau pencils, unlike the Dixon ones, would be saleable without bogus foreign labels. By 1824 the Thoreau pencils would be even of sufficient quality to achieve special notice at an exhibition of the Massachusetts Agricultural Society. Per the [New England Farmer](#), “the Lead Pencils exhibited by J. Thorough [sic] & Co, were superiour [sic] to any specimens exhibited in past years.”



Brad Dean has located the following passage pertaining to this discovery, in *COLLECTIONS, HISTORICAL AND MISCELLANEOUS: AND MONTHLY LITERARY JOURNAL...* edited by John Farmer (!) and Jacob P. Moore (Concord NH: Jacob B. Moore, 1823), Volume II, pages 30-31:

2. The mineral “graphite” is formed by the metamorphosis of carbonaceous sediments, and by the reaction of carbon compounds with hydrothermal solutions or magmatic fluids, or possibly by the crystallization of magmatic carbon. It consists of layered sheets of carbon-ring molecules, one atom thick. It is named in allusion to its use in writing: because these sheets are disconnected from each other, they shear readily when rubbed onto a rough surface, and, because carbon is black and insoluble, they leave a dark smear on paper. Graphite came to be used as a marker in 1564, when the purest deposit ever found was discovered in Cumberland, England. At first it was used in chunks, then the chunks were cut into small square-cornered sticks, then the sticks were wrapped in string to make it easier to hold them, then people began to glue the graphite sticks into grooves cut in small wands of wood. In 1795 a French chemist developed a way to economize the use of [graphite](#) by grinding it, mixing it with clay, and firing it in a kiln. It was mined in, among other places, New England and Ontario, until about 1918, when, since it was crushed to a powder anyway, the block mineral form was replaced by a cheaper powder produced from petroleum coke. The first American [pencils](#) were made in 1812. The wood used at the time was Eastern red cedar, although other species had to be found as that tree became over-exploited.



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

Plumbago, or Graphite.-This article has lately been discovered in the towns of Bristol and Francelstown in this state. In Bristol, it has been found of superior excellence, and is said to be very abundant. By the politeness of Mr. Charles S. Dunbar, the proprietor of the land which contains it, the editors have been furnished with several specimens, one of which, they sent to Dr. Mitchell of New-York, who, in a communication on the subject, speaks as follows:

Your specimen of Plumbago was cordially received. I set a value upon it, by reason of the native and Fredonian in source whence it came, and on account of its own apparent worth and excellence.

It is pleasing to find our landed proprietors inquiring somewhat below the surface, for the good things contained in the grants they received by superficial measurement. When they shall go deep into the matter, they will learn the importance of the French maxim, *approfondissez*, which, you know, means, go to the bottom of the subject. I trust the time is approaching when the purchaser of lands will require not merely a geometrical description, but a geological one; whereby the purchaser shall know that he gets so many acres free and clear; and moreover, such and so many strata nice and proper.

I congratulate you on the discovery of such a treasure in our country. Much is due to the Mines that supply us with pencils and crucibles.

Specimens have been furnished Professor Dana, of Dartmouth College, things equal to the celebrated Borrowdale ore. That which has been discovered in Francelstown is said to be of good quality. We are not informed whether it exists in large or small quantities. There has always been found in the south part of Francelstown, near Lewis's mills, some beautiful specimens of Rock Crystal.

**THE TASK OF THE HISTORIAN IS TO CREATE HINDSIGHT WHILE  
INTERCEPTING ANY ILLUSION OF FORESIGHT. NOTHING A HUMAN CAN  
SEE CAN EVER BE SEEN AS IF THROUGH THE EYE OF GOD.**

## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1823



March: [John Thoreau, Senior](#) left off teaching school at 6 Cornhill Court in [Boston](#), [David Henry Thoreau](#) was taken out of the Boston infant school, and the Thoreaus removed from Whitwell's house on Pinckney Street in Boston to rent space in the Jonas Hastings house in [Concord](#), built in about 1790, Deacon [William Parkman](#)'s brick house at the corner of Main Street and Walden Street,



where the father would go into the pencil-making business of Dunbar & Stow that was making use of graphite that [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) had discovered in 1821 near Bristol in New Hampshire, and also take up responsibility for the mill, milldam, race, and pond on Mill Brook just south of the "Milldam" district.

(Over the years the family would be living in nine different [Concord](#) buildings — nine, that is, in Concord alone, without adding in all the places they had lived elsewhere.)

We now know exactly where Henry's Uncle Charles had discovered the plumbago because Dr. Brad Dean has tracked down the following source information:

***Collections, Historical & Miscellaneous, and Monthly Literary Journal*. Vol. 2. Concord, N.H.: J. B. Moore, 1823. Edited by John Farmer and Jacob B. Moore.**

*Plumbago, or Graphite*.—This article has lately been discovered in the towns of Bristol and Frankestown in this State. In Bristol, it has been found of superior excellence, and is said to be very abundant. By the politeness of Mr. Charles S. Dunbar, the proprietor of the land which contains it, the editors have been furnished with several specimens, one of which, they sent to Dr. MITCHELL of New-York, who, in a communication on the subject, speaks as follows:

"Your specimen of Plumbago was cordially received. I set a value upon it, by reason of the native and Fredonian source whence it came, and on account of its own apparent worth and excellence.

"It is pleasing to find our landed proprietors inquiring somewhat below the surface, for the good things contained in the grants they received by *superficial* measurement.—When they shall go deep into the matter, they will learn the importance of the French maxim, *approfondeszez*, which, you know, means, *go to the bottom of the subject*. I trust the time is approaching when the purchaser of lands will require not merely a geometrical description, but a geological one; whereby the purchaser shall know that the gets so many acres *free and clear*, and moreover, such and so many strata *nice and proper*.

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## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

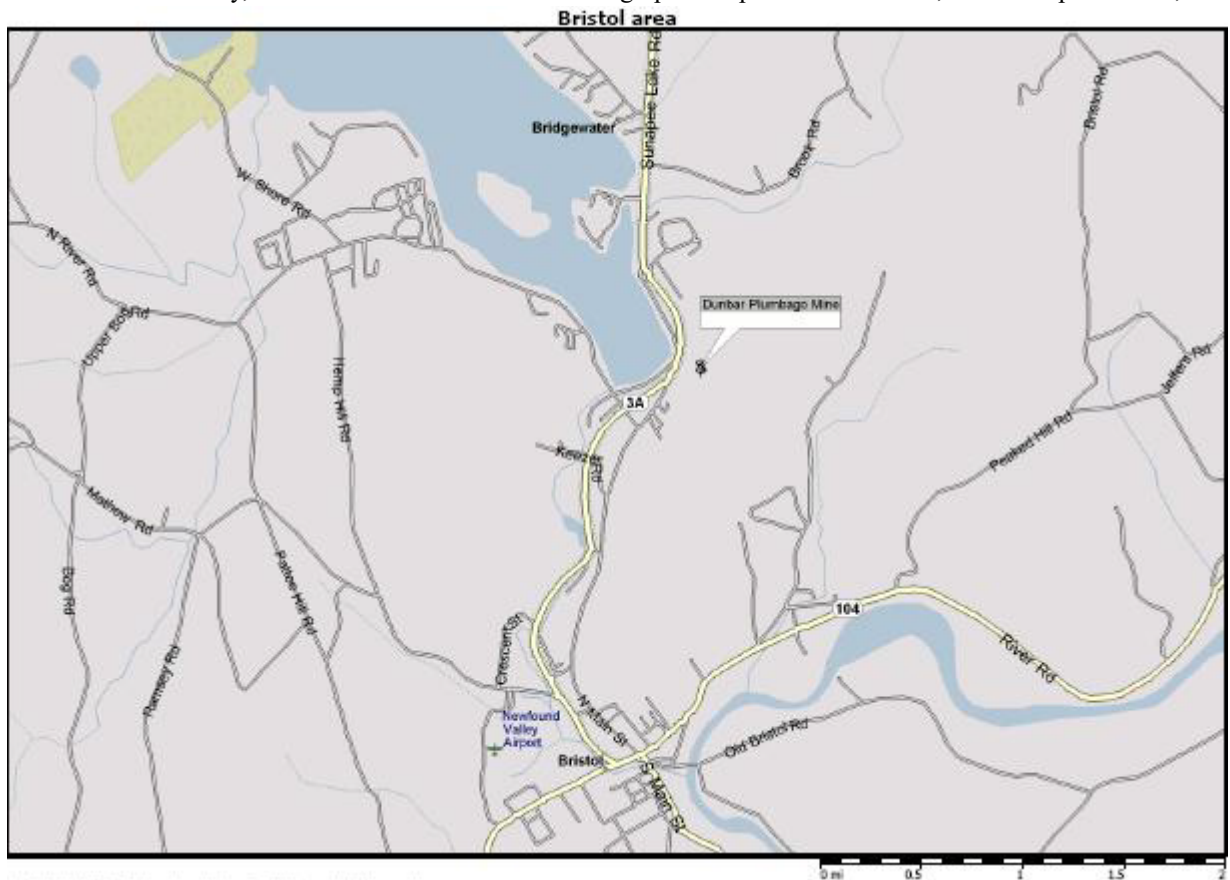
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## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

Which is to say, Uncle Charles had discovered the graphite deposit in the Bristol, New Hampshire area, here:



(Brad has visited the area and tells us there's nothing much there to be seen now, to mark the place where the graphite had been.)



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## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

This photograph of [Concord](#) Center, taken in about 1865, shows in the distance the Jonas Hastings house belonging to Deacon [William Parkman](#) in which the Thoreaus were to reside from 1823 to 1826, at the corner of Main and Walden Streets.



As you can see, initially the Hastings corner had projected out into what is now part of Main Street, so that the house would need to be moved backward to allow Main Street to be widened prior to the opening in 1873 of the newly constructed Concord Free Public Library. (The Hastings house would ultimately be taken down to



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## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

make way for the business block put up by pharmacist John C. Friend in 1892.)



### THOREAU RESIDENCES

[David Henry Thoreau](#) began to attend Miss Phœbe Wheeler's infant school. Here is a later reminiscence of this period in the life of the Thoreau family: "Mother reminds me that when we lived at the [Parkman house](#) she lost a ruff a yard and a half long and with an edging three yards long to it, which she had laid on the grass to whiten, and, looking for it, she saw a robin tugging at the tape string of a stay on the line. He would repeatedly get it in his mouth, fly off and be brought up when he got to the end of his tether. Miss Ward thereupon tore a fine linen handkerchief into strips and threw them out, and the robin carried them all off. She had no doubt that he took the ruff."



April 21, 1852: ... Was that a large shad bush where fathers mill used to be.? There is quite a water fall beyond. where the old dam was Where the rapids commence at the outlet of the pond, the water is singularly creased as it rushes to the fall



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

One of little David's toys, which he later said had really caught his attention, was a little pewter soldier (had it been cast at Concord's new lead factory?).

The Thoreau family, [John Thoreau, Senior](#) and [Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#) with the 5-year-old [David Henry Thoreau](#), and his older two siblings [Helen Louisa Thoreau](#) and [John Thoreau, Jr.](#) and his younger sibling [Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau](#), with their grandmother the widow [Mary Jones Dunbar Minot](#), spent a memorable pic nic day that March on the exposed sandbar at the mouth of the cove on [Walden Pond](#).<sup>3</sup> When [Henry](#) remembered this for [WALDEN](#), below, he remembered it as his having been four years old, but later he corrected this to his having been five years old:

[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.



3. The water level of [Walden Pond](#) would be correspondingly low again, and the sandbar again exposed, in the year 2002!

## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR



While he was still age 6, [David](#) would be tossed by a [Concord](#) cow.

[Henry](#) would also later record another childhood memory from approximately this period, of driving cattle down the lane past [Walden Pond](#). This has some historical context, which I will quote from page 140 of Ruth R. Wheeler's CONCORD: CLIMATE FOR FREEDOM:

After the Narragansett grants to veterans of King Philip's War, Concord farmers acquired pastures in New Ipswich, Ashburnham, Westminster, Templeton, and Holden, sometimes adjacent to farms owned by sons and cousins. Every May the dry cows and young stock were assembled and driven over the road to summer pasture. The men and boys made the drive on foot or on horseback and as roads improved a "democrat" or utility vehicle went along to hold oats for the horses, blankets, and a youngster or two. Farmers on the way would rent a fenced field to hold the stock at night and would allow the boys to sleep in the barn. Reciprocally, Concord farmers had fenced yards to hold overnight upcountry stock being driven to market. These were very small drives compared to those we see in pictures of the West, but they were usually a boy's first trip away from home: they stood for romance and adventure. During the nineteenth century, as Boston grew and became a busy seaport, traders gradually took over the business, buying up cows, driving them off to pasture, feeding them in the fall on the aftermath in Concord fields, and finally driving them down to stockyards in Watertown or dressing them off in Concord for salt beef. Of course, this gave farmers extra income as butchers, tanners, candlemakers, and coopers. Now picket fences became necessary in the village to keep stray animals out of one's yard.



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

Note that I am not saying that Thoreau's memory of driving cattle past [Walden Pond](#) would have had to have originated specifically in this Year of Our Lord 1822, nor that it was of such a large herd or over such a long distance, but only that it is likely that he would have held this memory in the context of such local cow business precisely as now an adult's memories of cows encountered on the farm during childhood would be held in the context of stories heard about the "Wild West" and about "cowboys" on "cattle drives."

Now that I have mentioned some Spring and Autumn business that Thoreau would have been observing in about this year of 1822, I will take the occasion, and mention some Winter business that he may well have been observing in about this year as well: Bear in mind that there were no snowplows in those days of sleighs and sledges. Public roads were not **plowed** during the winter, they were **packed**. The device that packed the snow was termed a "pung" and it was pulled by oxen rather than horses. If the snow was deep or wet, the pung would need to be pulled by several yoke of oxen. A good pack of snow on a road could sometimes assure smooth sleighing for the duration of the winter.

### THOREAU RESIDENCES

The remark about the [flute](#) at this point in [WALDEN](#) may remind us that [Thoreau](#)'s intent was, importantly, to see with "new infant eyes."



After August 6, 1845: ... Well now to-night my flute awakes the echoes over this very water, but one generation of pines has fallen and with their stumps I have cooked my supper, And a lusty growth of oaks and pines is rising all around its brim and preparing its wilder aspect for new infant eyes. ...

## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR



Per [Walter Roy Harding](#)'s THE DAYS OF [HENRY THOREAU](#): A BIOGRAPHY (NY: Knopf, 1966):

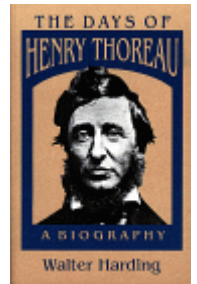
### "A Review From Professor Ross's Seminar"

**Chapter 1 (1817-1823)** -Downing gives a cursory account of the Thoreau and Dunbar heritage and more fully traces the nature and movement of the Thoreau family in the first five years of Henry's life.

Thoreau's father, John, while intellectual, "lived quietly, peacefully and contentedly in the shadow of his wife," Mrs. Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau, who was dynamic and outspoken with a strong love for nature and compassion for the downtrodden.

- 1st Helen -quiet, retiring, eventually a teacher.
- 2nd John Jr. -"his father turned inside out," personable, interested in ornithology, also taught.
- 3rd Henry (born July 12,1817) -speculative but not noticeably precocious.
- 4th Sophia -independent, talkative, ultimately took over father's business and edited Henry's posthumous publications.

The Thoreau's constantly struggled with debt, and in 1818 John Sr. gave up his farm outside [Concord](#) and moved into town. Later the same year he moved his family to Chelmsford where he opened a shop which soon failed and sent him packing to Boston to teach school.



### "A Review From Professor Ross's Seminar"

In 1823 uncle [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) discovered [graphite](#) in New Hampshire and invited [John Thoreau](#) to join Dunbar and Stow Pencil Makers back in [Concord](#). Henry's [Concord](#) youth was "typical of any small town American boy of the 19th century."

Henry attended Miss Phœbe Wheeler's private "infants" school, then the public grammar school, where he studied the Bible and English classics such as [William Shakespeare](#), [John Bunyan](#), Dr. Samuel Johnson and the Essayists.

Henry was considered "stupid" and "unsympathetic" by schoolmates he would not join in play, earning the nicknames "Judge" and "the fine scholar with the big nose." At school he was withdrawn and anti-social but he loved outdoor excursions.

From 1828-1834 Henry attended [Concord Academy](#) (Phineas Allen, preceptor). Allen taught the classics -[Virgil](#), Sallust, [Caesar](#), [Euripides](#), [Homer](#), Xenophon, [Voltaire](#), Molière and Racine in the original languages- and emphasized composition.

Henry also benefitted from the Concord Lyceum and particularly the natural history lectures presented there.

**HENRY'S RELATIVES:****UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR****"A Review From Professor Ross's Seminar"****WALTER HARDING'S BIOGRAPHY**

**Chapter 3 (1833-1837)** -Thoreau enters Harvard (president Josiah Quincy), having barely squeezed by his entrance exams and rooming with Charles S. Wheeler

Thoreau's Harvard curriculum: Greek (8 terms under Felton and Dunkin)-composition, grammar, "Greek Antiquities," Xenophon, Demosthenes, Aeschines, Sophocles, Euripides, Homer. Latin Grammar (8 terms under Beck and McKean)-composition, "Latin Antiquities," Livy, Horace, Cicero, Seneca, Juvenal. Mathematics (7 terms under Pierce and Lovering) English (8 terms under ET Channing, Giles, W&G Simmons)-grammar, rhetoric, logic, forensics, criticism, elocution, declamations, themes. Mental Philosophy (under Giles) [Paley](#), Stewart. Natural Philosophy (under Lovering)-astronomy. Intellectual Philosophy (under Bowen) Locke, Say, Story. Theology (2 terms under H Ware)-[Paley](#), Butler, New Testament. Modern Languages (voluntary) Italian (5 terms under Bachi) French (4 terms under Surault) German (4 terms under Bokum) Spanish (2 terms under Sales) Attended voluntary lectures on German and Northern literature (Longfellow), mineralogy (Webster), anatomy (Warren), natural history (Harris).

Thoreau was an above average student who made mixed impressions upon his classmates.

In the spring of '36 Thoreau withdrew due to illness -later taught for a brief period in Canton under the Rev. Orestes A. Brownson, a leading New England intellectual who Harding suggests profoundly influenced Thoreau.

(Robert L. Lace, January-March 1986)





## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

Allen, Gay Wilson. "A New Look at Emerson and Science," pages 58-78 in LITERATURE AND IDEAS IN AMERICA: ESSAYS IN MEMORY OF HARRY HAYDEN CLARK. Robert Falk, ed. Athens OH: Ohio UP, 1975

### "A Review From Professor Ross's Seminar"

Allen examines NATURE and [Waldo Emerson](#)'s attitudes toward science in the light of four of Emerson's early lectures. These lectures, given in 1833-34, were about science, and were titled "The Uses of Natural History," "On the Relation of Man to the Globe," "Water," and "The Naturalist." Allen's 1975 essay furthers the work done by Harry Hayden Clark in his 1931 essay "Emerson and Science;" Clark did not have access to these lectures.

The first lecture, "The Uses of Natural History," was, Allen says, a "preliminary sketch" for NATURE. In this lecture Emerson elaborated on the uses of nature much as he did in NATURE: how nature contributes to human health (beauty, rest); to civilization (with due Emersonian skepticism about technology); to knowledge of truth (here Allen discusses the influence of geology on Emerson: how the age of the earth and the slowness of earth's transformative processes confuted traditional religious doctrine); and to self-understanding (nature as language that God speaks to humanity – nature as image or metaphor of mind) (60-64).

Emerson's second lecture, "On the Relation of Man to the Globe," was also a preliminary sketch for NATURE. In this lecture, Allen says,

Emerson drew heavily on his readings in geology, along with some biology and chemistry, and attempted to demonstrate how marvelously the world is adapted for human life. (64)

Emerson's sources included Laplace, Mitscherlich, Cuvier; his arguments echoed Lamarck (evolution, nature adapted to humans) and [the Reverend William] Paley (argument from design) (64-67).

The third lecture, "Water," was Emerson's "most technical" according to Allen, which is, perhaps, why it is not discussed at any length. It is also not assessed for its scientific accuracy. Allen does say that Emerson "read up on the geological effects of water, the laws of thermodynamics, the hydrostatic press, and related subjects" (67).

Allen says that Emerson's fourth lecture, "The Naturalist," "made a strong plea for a recognition of the importance of science in education" (60). Emerson "emphasized particularly the study of nature to promote esthetic and moral growth" (67). Emerson wanted science for the poet and poetry for the scientist; the fundamental search for the *causa causans* (67-69). He was reading Gray and other technical sources, observing nature, and reading philosophers of science, especially Coleridge and Goethe (68).

Allen says that the value of these lectures is not merely the light they shed on Nature but what they reveal about "his reading and thinking about science before he had fused his ideas thus derived with the Neoplatonic and 'transcendental' ideas of Plotinus, Swedenborg, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, and seventeenth-century English Platonists" (69).

**HENRY'S RELATIVES:****UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR****"A Review From Professor Ross's Seminar"**

Allen concludes that [Waldo Emerson](#)'s theory of nature in NATURE is derived far more from Neoplatonism than modern scientific knowledge, but Emerson was not turning his back on science; he wanted instead to spiritualize science, to base science on the theory that the physical world is an emanation of spirit, "the apparition of God" (Chapter 6), or "a projection of God in the unconscious." (70)

Allen contends that Emerson's theory anticipates Phenomenology in its emphasis on mind/world interactions and correspondences. Science, Allen says, continued to have a "pervasive influence" on Emerson's thought even after 1836:

Indeed, the two most basic concepts in his philosophy, which he never doubted, were "compensation" and "polarity," both derived from scientific "laws," i.e. for every action there is a reaction, and the phenomena of negative and positive poles in electrodynamics. To these might also be added "circularity," which translated into poetic metaphors the principle of "conservation of energy." (75)

One could argue, I think, that these scientific laws were themselves "derived from" philosophical and metaphysical speculations (e.g. Kant); their life-long conceptual importance to Emerson, in other words, does not seem precisely described as scientific.

[Cecily F. Brown, March 1992]

**HENRY'S RELATIVES:****UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR****1828**

➡ It would have been at about this point in time that the 7-year claim which [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) had made on the [graphite](#) deposit which he had discovered near Bristol in New Hampshire in 1821 ➡ would have expired. After this point the Thoreau family would need to begin purchasing this raw material on the open market.



**LIFE IS LIVED FORWARD BUT UNDERSTOOD BACKWARD?  
— NO, THAT'S GIVING TOO MUCH TO THE HISTORIAN'S STORIES.  
LIFE ISN'T TO BE UNDERSTOOD EITHER FORWARD OR BACKWARD.**

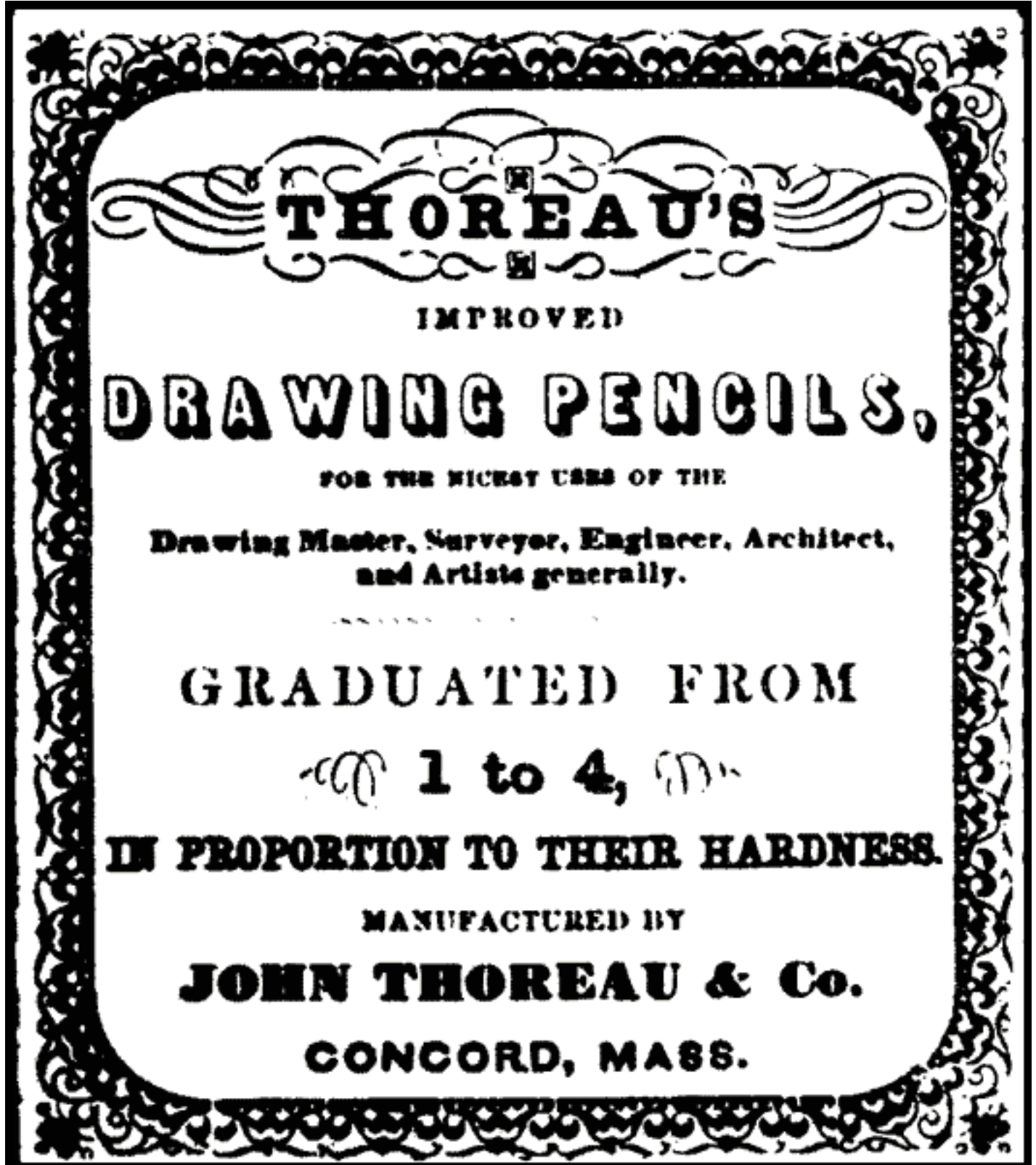
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**HENRY'S RELATIVES:**

**UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR**



**THOREAU'S**  
IMPROVED  
**DRAWING PENCILS,**  
FOR THE NICEST USES OF THE  
Drawing Master, Surveyor, Engineer, Architect,  
and Artists generally.

GRADUATED FROM  
1 to 4,  
IN PROPORTION TO THEIR HARDNESS.

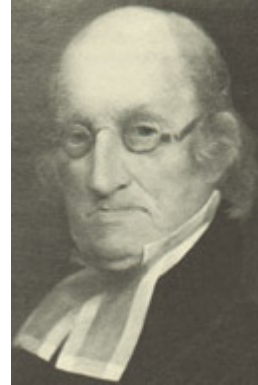
MANUFACTURED BY  
**JOHN THOREAU & Co.**  
CONCORD, MASS.

## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR



The “little band” of nine religious reactionaries of [Concord](#), led by Deacon [John White](#), established a “Trinitarian” society and put its new church across the brook from the old church, on Walden Street. By 1830, the [Reverend Ezra Ripley](#) would no longer have a monopoly on the religious life of Concord and thus it would become possible for people to “sign off” from paying the parish tax to his church.



### THE DEACONS OF CONCORD

Even [Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#) was for a time involved in this defection. Professor Robert A. Gross describes it in his “Faith in the Boardinghouse: New Views of Thoreau Family Religion”:<sup>4</sup>

True to their stepmother [Mrs. Rebecca Kettell Thoreau](#)’s example, [Elizabeth Orrock Thoreau](#), [Jane Thoreau](#), and [Maria Thoreau](#) made public professions of faith over the years from 1801 to 1818. So did [Cynthia Dunbar](#) in 1811. All single women in their late teens and early twenties, they entered a pious sisterhood. In a pattern common in New England Congregationalism, seven out of ten members of the Concord church were women. But in 1826 the “Misses Thoreau,” as they were often called in the town records, bolted from the Reverend [Ezra Ripley](#) fold. No longer willing to suppress misgivings over the parson’s “liberal” preaching, they enlisted in the orthodox fight to restore “the primitive faith of the new England pilgrims.” Elizabeth, Jane, and Maria Thoreau were among the “little band” of nine doughty dissenters who deserted Ripley’s flock in May 1826 and founded a Trinitarian church. Soon they were recruiting their kin. In April 1827, sister-in-law [Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#) sought and won approval to leave the First Church in anticipation of joining its rival. But, as it turned out, she never did. Fourteen months later, she returned to the family pew in the First Church, having “changed

4. Robert A. Gross. “Faith in the Boardinghouse: New Views of Thoreau Family Religion,” [Thoreau Society Bulletin](#), Winter 2005



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

her mind," as the Reverend Ripley happily noted in the church records. According to Walter Harding, who drew on the oral memories collected by Edward Emerson, the stumbling-block was the official creed that all members of the Trinitarian church were obliged to embrace. Cynthia Thoreau refused to accept it "verbatim," and the church would not allow her "staunch independence." By contrast, the creed proved no problem for her siblings: brother [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) began worshipping with the Trinitarians in 1829, sister [Louisa Dunbar](#) joined them six years later. In a Calvinist family circle, Cynthia and her husband [John Thoreau, Senior](#) stood alone.

## THE FUTURE CAN BE EASILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT







## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

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1829



The Trinitarian Congregationalists began a Sabbath School in the factory district along the Assabet River in “West [Concord](#).”

Now here's something I'll bet you didn't see coming: [Henry Thoreau](#)'s favorite uncle [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) began worshiping with the Trinitarians.

**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.**



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1839



August 1, Thursday: [Waldo Emerson](#) reported that “Last night came to me a beautiful poem from [Henry Thoreau](#), ‘Sympathy.’ The purest strain & the loftiest, I think, that has yet pealed from this unpoetic American forest.”

### COMMENTARY:

[I am going to include several pages of commentary here, because the above was the poem that would become the controversial “To a Gentle Boy.”]

There’ve been Gay Pride parades in which posters of [Henry Thoreau](#) have been proudly carried. The evidence that he was gay was that he wrote a poem to one of his students, the little brother of the girl to whom he proposed marriage, and from the circumstance that after she turned him down he never did marry. Let us go into this in order to see that it is a simpleminded and as wrong as the idea of long standing, that Thoreau had no sense of humor. This is going to be a bit complicated, so pay attention. [William Sewell](#) [[Willem Séwel Amsterdammer](#)] published THE HISTORY OF THE RISE, INCREASE AND PROGRESS OF THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE CALLED QUAKERS in English as a corrective to Gerard Croese’s HISTORY OF QUAKERISM. The records of the Salem library show that [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#) used their edition of this book for a week in 1828 and a month in 1829. The book recounted the activities of some of his ancestors, such as his great-great-great-grandfather William Hathorne (1607-1681) who sailed on the *Arbella* in 1630, settling in Dorchester in New England and then moving to Salem, who served at the rank of major in wars against the Americans, who became a magistrate and judge of the Puritans, and who had one Anne Coleman whipped out of the town of Salem for being a [Quaker](#):



...naked from the waist upward, and bound to the tail of a cart, is dragged through the Main-street at the pace of a brisk walk, while the constable follows with a whip of knotted cords. A strong-armed fellow is that constable; and each time that he flourishes his lash in the air, you see a frown wrinkling and twisting his brow, and, at the same instant, a smile upon his lips. He loves his business, faithful officer that he is, and puts his soul into every stroke, zealous to fulfill the injunction of Major Hawthorne’s warrant, in the spirit and to the letter. There came down a stroke that has drawn blood! Ten such stripes are to be given in Salem, ten in Boston, and ten in Dedham; and, with those thirty stripes of blood upon her, she is to be driven into the forest.... Heaven grant that, as the rain of so many years has wept upon it, time after time, and washed it all away, so there may have been a dew of mercy, to cleanse this cruel blood-stain out of the record of the persecutor’s life!

And such as William’s son John Hathorne (1641-1717), a chip off the old block, a colonel in the Massachusetts militia and a deputy to the General Court in Boston who was a magistrate during the Salem witch episode which featured one person being tortured to death and 19 [hanged](#). [Hawthorne](#) was much stimulated by the blood curse that Sarah Good had placed on her executioners, “God will give you Blood to drink.” His tale “The

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"Gentle Boy" of 1831 made reference to this history.



Let us thank God for having given us such ancestors; and let each successive generation thank him, not less fervently, for being one step further from them in the march of the ages.

This was [Hawthorne](#) in 1840, according to a portrait painter, Samuel Stillman Osgood:



"The Gentle Boy" was published anonymously in a gift annual of [The Token](#) magazine in 1831, and then republished under Hawthorne's name as a part of TWICE-TOLD TALES in 1832 and 1837 after deletion of the detail that, in being attacked by a gang of vicious Puritan children, the gentle [Quaker](#) boy had been struck in "a tender part." The book THE GENTLE BOY: A TWICE-TOLD TALE, when published in 1839, was dedicated to [Sophia Amelia Peabody](#) (to become [Sophia Peabody Hawthorne](#)), some of whose ancestors are also in Sewel's history, and included a drawing by her. Printing was interrupted briefly to make the boy's countenance more gentle in the engraved version of the drawing.

In 1842 [Nathaniel](#) and Sophia Peabody got married and moved to Concord, where [Thoreau](#) had just prepared for them a large garden. Although Hawthorne was vague on the spelling of Thoreau's name, and his bride thought Thoreau repulsively ugly, Thoreau visited them several times in the Old Manse where [Waldo Emerson](#) had penned "Nature," and for \$7.<sup>00</sup> sold them the boat he and his brother had used on their famous trip – so that they could row out and pluck pond lilies. Although Thoreau read little fiction, he could not have been unaware of their newly republished "Gentle Boy" story, at least by its title.

With this background, we can now consider the gay speculation about the poem Thoreau wrote to his pupil Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr., "Once there was a gentle boy." Is this poem's emphasis on the nonmasculine characteristics of a young boy to be interpreted as evidence of a homoerotic longing on Thoreau's part, or, since the age of eleven is not the age of sexual maturity, interpreted as evidence of an incipient pederasty? No, because the poem's use of "gentle boy" might well have been a deliberate tie-in to the Hawthorne story. We must ask, what might have been the motivation for calling this particular story to Edmund's attention? There are several reasons having nothing to do with sexuality or with [Thoreau](#)'s personal needs. The nonviolent [Quaker](#) boy in the story is treated with utter viciousness by a gang of local Puritan children, and in particular by one boy whom he had nursed with kindness and attention during an illness. Was Edmund, a visitor in Concord, having trouble being accepted by some of the local children in Thoreau's school? This historian [William Sewell](#) referred to by [Hawthorne](#), was he one of Edmund's ancestors? Were some of the people described in that history Sewall ancestors, as some were Ha(w)thorne ancestors and some Peabody ancestors? If so, the Thoreau family would surely have been aware of it, since they had known intimately at least three generations of the Sewall family starting with Mrs. Joseph Ward, Cynthia Thoreau's star boarder, the widow of a colonel in the American revolutionary army, the mother of Caroline Ward who in turn was the mother of Ellen Devereux Sewall and Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr.

Hawthorne's story is of a boy in an adoptive family, a "little quiet, lovely boy" who is heartsick for his parents.

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In the tale, in the face of the most extreme religious persecution of Friends by Puritans, the boy's birth mother had violated her "duties of the present life" by "fixing her attention wholly on" her future life: she left her child with this Puritan family to venture on a "mistaken errand" of "unbridled fanaticism." That is, after being whipped out of town by the Puritans, she followed a spirit leading to become a traveling Friend. At the end, the boy's mother returns to him.

[Hawthorne](#)'s tale involves the hanging of an innocent person. Would this have been of interest to Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr.? Yes, for a Sewall was involved in the hanging of the nineteen witches in Salem on September 22, 1692. This Samuel Sewall was a lifelong bigot (he once refused to sell a plot of land because the bidders wanted to build a church, and they were Protestants but not of his own denomination) but he was worse than a bigot: not only did he hang women for being in league with the devil, he helped condemn and hang one of his Harvard peers, the Reverend George Burrough –whom he had once heard preach on the Sermon on the Mount– for being in league with the devil. It was an interesting period, a period in which one could lose control of oneself and cry out during the Puritan service, and be suspected of having acquired a taint of [Quakerism](#), and be placed in great personal danger. And that was an interesting day, August 16, 1692: an arresting officer for the court, one John Willard, was "cried out upon" for doubting the guilt of the accused, and was hanged beside the Reverend Burrough. We find this in Sewall's diary:



*Mr. Burrough by his Speech, Prayer, protestation of his Innocence, did much move unthinking persons, which occasions their speaking hardly concerning his being executed.*

A few years later, after some bad events in his family, Samuel suffered pangs of conscience: a public fast was declared for January 14, 1697 and he stood in Old South Church in Boston while the minister read a statement that the Sewall family had been cursed of God because of the trials, and that he took "the Blame and shame" upon himself. The twelve jurors were in attendance to acknowledge that they had "unwittingly and unwillingly" brought "upon ourselves and this people of the Lord the guilt of innocent blood."

This Puritan's son, the Reverend Joseph Sewall, was the father of Samuel Sewall, who was the father of Samuel Sewall, Jr., who was the father of the Reverend Edmund Quincy Sewall, Sr., who was of course Master Edmund Quincy Sewall, Jr.'s father. It is an interesting question, how a teacher can help a young man like this venture into his manhood, after the decency of manliness has been utterly destroyed as an option for him in such a manner, by the indecency of a male ancestor. I would suggest that teacher [Thoreau](#)'s tactic – to emphasize to this lad Edmund the nominally feminine virtue of gentleness by providing him with a poem into which to grow – constitutes a legitimate and even profound maneuver on extremely difficult terrain. I would suggest, in addition, that those who seek to appropriate Thoreau by interpreting this "Once there was a gentle boy" poem as evidence of an unconscious erotic impulse are, in effect, debasing him. Debasing him not by accusing him of homosexuality – for it is not base to be gay – but by interpreting a complex and difficult situation in a manner that is merely simpleminded and doctrinaire. I want to emphasize the open-endedness of the questions involved: was Edmund, the new boy in town, having the sort of trouble with his peers that would have caused him to be in the situation of the gentle boy in the [Hawthorne](#) tale – ganged up against, beaten as a sissy? The American Antiquarian Society in Worcester has preserved pages of Edmund's Concord journal that may contain an answer. And what exactly was the perception of a blood guilt and an inherited shame

5. According to Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges's 1988 *A DICTIONARY OF SURNAMES* (Oxford UP), "Sewall" is a variant of "Sewell," which can be from the Old English "Sigeweald," meaning government by right of conquest, or "Sœ-weald" [œ with - over it], meaning rule over the sea – an appropriate name for a family that included some wealthy shipbuilders in Maine! The same dictionary of surnames denies Thoreau's derivation of his name from Thor, the god of lightning, giving "Thoreau," "Thoret," "Thoré," and "Thorez" as variants of "Thorel," a nickname for a strong or violent individual (like Uncle "J.C." [Charles Jones Dunbar](#)!), from the Old French "t(h)or(el)" meaning bull. However, this dictionary allows that the name may also have originated in a diminutive of an aphetic short form of the given name "Maturin," or that it may be from a medieval given name which was an aphetic short form of various names such as "Victor" and "Salvador" ("Salvador" is equivalent to the Hebrew "Yehoshua"), or that it may be related to an Italian/Spanish nickname for a lusty person, or metonymic occupational name for a tender of bulls: "Toro!" (Now going to a bullfight in Spain and rooting for the bull, something I had the opportunity to do when I was a teenager, couldn't be the same for me.)

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among the Sewels and Sewells and Seawells and Sewalls? We should be led by this story, not into considerations of eroticism among 19th-Century virgins (which would be a mere shallow –not demeaning, surely, but surely both appropriative and dismissive– sidetrack) but into a full consideration of how a compassionate and concerned teacher like Henry Thoreau can help a young male pupil grow to maturity even in a situation in which the option “manhood” has for this pupil been virtually eliminated – by the foul deed and foul mind of a Samuel Sewall, his blood ancestor.



We need to begin to take into account various of the cultural influences upon Thoreau which we have not previously been considering due to the fact that few people read the dead languages anymore. There's quite a body of ancient evidence to indicate that the poet [Virgil](#) may well have been by inclination a pederast, and the scholar S. Lilja confirms that Virgil's apparent sexual persona does inform a great deal of his poetry, including of course his AENEID. If one refers to John F. Makowski's "Nisus and Euryalus: a Platonic Relationship," in



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Classical Journal (1985) 1-15, and also to J. Griffin's LATIN POETS AND ROMAN LIFE, one finds that:

- In Virgil's autobiographical poetry of the *Catalepton*, poems 5 and 7, in which he sings of Sextus his *cura curarum* and of the boy aptly named Pothos, poems for the authenticity of which Buechler and Richmond indicate that there is now strong consensus, Thoreau could have read of a sexuality seems to have been grounded in life experience rather than merely to have been following in the literary convention we now term "posing as sodomites."
- In Donatus's life of Virgil, Thoreau could have read: "(sc. Vergilius) libidinis in pueros pronioris, quorum maxime dilexit Ceбетem et Alexandrum, quem secunda bucolicorum ecloga Alexim appellat, donatum sibi ab Asinio Pollione, utrumque non ineruditum, Ceбетem vero et poetam." Donatus goes on to say that Virgil, invited by a friend to partake of a heterosexual liaison, "verum pertinacissime recusasse."
- Apuleius Apologia 10 pretty much agrees with the picture presented to Thoreau by Donatus.
- By the time of Martial a joking tradition was in place that the Muse behind Virgil's prodigious poetic output was his Alexis, his love slave, given to him (note the divergence from Servius) by Maecenas rather than by Pollio. See epigrams 5.6, 6.68, 7.29, 8.56, 8.73 in which he attributes the sad state of contemporary poetry to the failure of patrons to provide poets with beautiful boys *a la* Maecenas and Virgil. This material was available to Thoreau.
- [Juvenal](#) echoes this tradition in Satire 7.69.
- In Philargyrius, Thoreau could have read: "*Alexim dicunt Alexandrum, qui fuit servus Asinii Pollionis, quem Vergilius, rogatus ad prandium cum vidisset in ministerio omnium pulcherrimum, dilexit eumque dono accepit. Caesarem quidam acceperunt, formosum in operibus et gloria. alii puerum Caesaris, quem si laudasset, gratem rem Caesari fecisset. nam Vergilius dicitur in pueros habuisse amorem: nec enim turpiter eum diligebat. alii Corydona, Asinii Pollionis puerum adamatum a Vergilio ferunt, eumque a domino datum. .*"
- What did Servius mean to say to Thoreau, and to us, when he offered that Virgil had not loved boys *turpiter* (disgracefully)? Possibly Servius meant that Virgil had been able to do so without loss of personal dignity (the courting of the beloved, whether woman or boy, could involve erotic service that was seen as beneath the dignity of a free man), the other that he did so without ever achieving, or perhaps even pursuing, physical consummation (which would have taken the form of sodomizing the lad if he was willing to submit, but Dover's GREEK HOMOSEXUALITY --which seems to be in large part valid for Roman society as well-- shows that nice boys were supposed to say **no** in thunder and that men who insisted upon using their penises might have to settle for intercrural satisfaction). We should probably take into account as well the poetry of a man who died in the same year as Virgil, [Albius Tibullus](#), from whom Thoreau would quote (or would suppose he was quoting) in [WALDEN](#). What is conventionally known as "Book 1" of Tibullus contains poems on his beloved Delia but also several on a beloved boy named Marathus (4, 8, 9); these can offer some insight into the process of courting a boy. Another possibility, of course, is simply that Virgil's love had nothing cruel or abusive about it, but perhaps the most plausible explanation for judging a liaison as *turpis* is the man's loss of dignity in becoming enslaved to the object of his desire, his loss of face. Two examples that come to mind from Virgil's own time are Anthony's passion for [Cleopatra](#) and Maecenas's scandalous affair with the ballet-dancer Bathyllus.



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Horsfall's COMPANION TO THE STUDY OF VIRGIL summarizes the "evidence" such as it is. Although he demonstrates that there is not one detail in the ancient LIVES OF VIRGIL that can be taken at face value, the persistent availability of such materials about the life of Virgil has been such as to make this a moot point. Whether true or false it has obviously had an influence, and may well have had an influence of some sort on [Thoreau](#). Those scholars could all be found to have been mistaken, and yet we will still need to deal with the manner in which Virgil was being received during the first half of the 19th Century, and I am not certain that we have done that, and of course it is important, in dealing with a situation such as Thoreau's temporary involvement with the gentle young Sewall boy, that we most carefully do that. In none of these texts, nor in Servius, would Thoreau have been able to find any suggestion of a condemnation of what Virgil was projecting as being his proclivities.

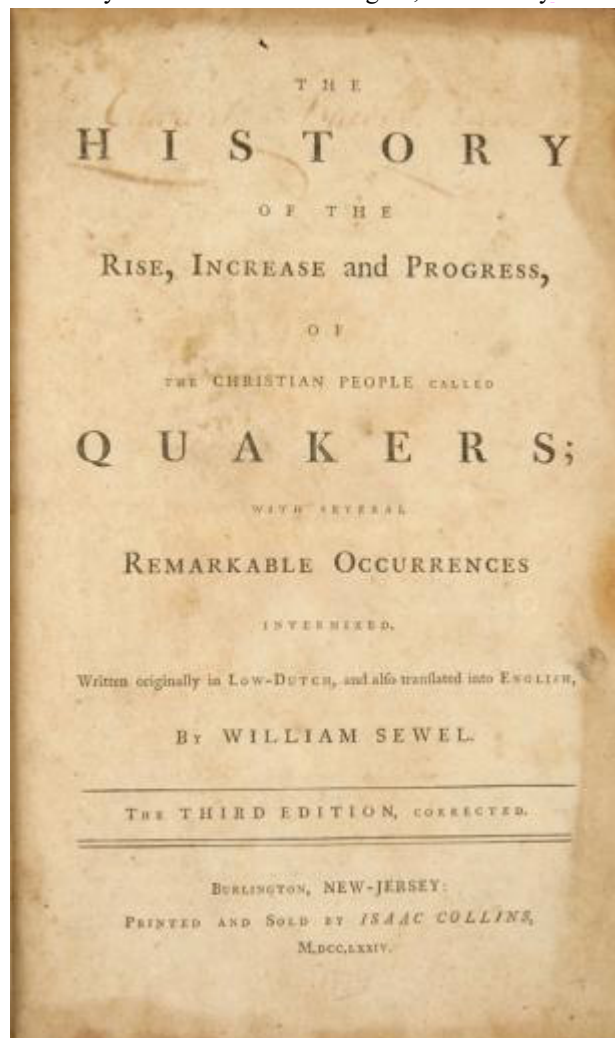
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[William Sewell](#). THE HISTORY OF THE RISE, INCREASE AND PROGRESS, OF THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE CALLED [QUAKERS](#); WITH SEVERAL REMARKABLE OCCURRENCES INTERMIXED, WRITTEN ORIGINALLY IN LOW-DUTCH, AND ALSO TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH, BY WILLIAM SEWEL. THE THIRD EDITION, CORRECTED. The title varies slightly from edition to edition (1722, 1725, 1728, 1774, 1776, 1811, 1844), for instance ...WITH SEVERAL REMARKABLE OCCURRENCES INTERMIXED, TO WHICH IS PREFIXED A BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR, COMPILED FROM VARIOUS SOURCES, and WRITTEN ORIGINALLY IN LOW DUTCH, AND TRANSLATED BY HIMSELF INTO ENGLISH, Baker & Crane, No. 158 Pearl-Street, New-York. The author's name was, according to [Alexander Chalmers](#)'s GENERAL BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY of 1812-1817, Volume 27, page 361, a recognized variant of "Sewell": there was a Henry Sewall who spelled his name also as Sewell and Seawell, and there was a loyalist "Sewall" who changed the family name to "Sewell" in London in order to confuse the American authorities and better protect his children in America –and his American properties– after being proscribed. Among recorded immigrants, the "United States Index to Records of Aliens' Declarations" show a proportion of 1 Sewel, 11 Sewalls, and 30 Sewells. Henry Thoreau first encountered this book in this 1774 3d edition prepared and sold by Isaac Collins of Burlington, New-Jersey:



WM. SEWEL'S 3D ED., VOL. I

WM. SEWEL'S 3D ED., VOL. II



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1843



July 7, Saturday: [Henry Thoreau](#) wrote from [Staten Island](#) to [Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#).

To: Cynthia Thoreau  
From: HDT  
Date: 7 July 1843

Staten Island July 7<sup>th</sup>

Dear Mother,

*I was very glad to get your letter and papers. Tell Father that circumstantial letters make very substantial reading, at any rate. I like to know even how the sun shines and garden grows with you.*

*I did not get my money in Boston and probably shall not at all.— Tell Sophia that I have pressed some blossoms of the tulip tree for her. They look somewhat like white lilies. The magnolia too is in blossom here. Pray have you the Seventeen year locust in Concord? The air here is filled with their din. They come out of the ground at first in an imperfect state, and crawling up the shrubs and plants, the perfect insect burst out through the back. They are doing great damage to the fruit and forest trees. The latter are covered with dead twigs which in the distance look like the blossoms of the chestnut. They bore every twig of last year's grow thin order to deposit their eggs in it. In a few weeks the eggs will be hatched, and the worms fall to the ground and enter it — and in 1860 make their appearance again. I conversed about their coming this season before they arrived. They do no injury to the leaves, but beside boring the twigs — suck their sap for sustenance. Their din is heard by those who sail along the shore — from the distant woods. Phar-r-r-aoh — Pha-r-r-aoh. They are departing now. Dogs, cats and chickens subsist mainly upon them in some places. I have not been to N.Y. for more than three weeks.— I have had an interesting letter from Mr Lane, describing their new prospects.— My pupil and I are getting on apace, He is remarkably well advanced in Latin and is well advancing. Your letter has just arrived. I was not aware that it was so long since I wrote home; I only knew that I had sent five or six letters to the town. It is very refreshing to hear from you — though it is not all good news— But I trust that Stearns Wheeler is not dead— I should be slow to believe it. He was made to work very well in this world. There need be no tragedy in his death. The demon which is said to haunt the Jones family — hovering over their eye lids with wings steeped in juice of poppies — has commenced another campaign against me. I am “clear Jones” in this respect at least. But he finds little encouragement in my atmosphere I assure you — for I do not once fairly lose myself — except in those hours of truce allotted to rest by immemorial custom. However, this skirmishing interferes sadly with my literary projects — and I am apt to think it a good day's work if I maintain a soldier's eye till night-fall. Very well it does not matter much in what wars we serve — whether in the Highlands or the Lowlands— Everywhere we get soldiers's pay still.*



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*Give my love to Aunt Louisa – whose benignant face I sometimes see right in the wall – as naturally and necessarily shining on my path as some star – of unaccountably greater age and higher orbit than myself. Let it be inquired by her of George Minott – as from me – for she sees him – If he has seen any pigeons yet – and tell him there are plenty of Jack-snipes here.— As for William P. the “worthy young man” – as I live, my eyes have not fallen on him yet. I have not had the influenza – though here are its head-quarters – unless my first week’s cold was it. Tell Helen I shall write to her soon. I have heard Lucretia Motte— This is badly written – but the worse the writing the sooner you get it this time – from Yr Affectionate Son H. D. T.*



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Thoreau was being attacked by the family tendency to [narcolepsy](#), so strongly present in his uncle [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) that he described in [WALDEN](#) how once his uncle went to sleep while shaving himself with a straight razor, and had to have something to do of a Sunday such as rubbing the sprouts off stored potatoes to keep from going to sleep:

[WALDEN](#): Breed's hut was standing only a dozen years ago, though it had long been unoccupied. It was about the size of mine. It was set on fire by mischievous boys, one Election night, if I do not mistake. I lived on the edge of the village then, and had just lost myself over Davenant's Gondibert, that winter that I labored with a lethargy, -which, by the way, I never knew whether to regard as a family complaint, having an uncle who goes to sleep shaving himself, and is obliged to sprout potatoes in a cellar Sundays, in order to keep awake and keep the Sabbath, or as the consequence of my attempt to read Chalmers' collection of English poetry without skipping. It fairly overcame my Nervii. I had just sunk my head on this when the bells rung fire, and in hot haste the engines rolled that way, led by a straggling troop of men and boys, and I among the foremost, for I had leaped the brook. We thought it was far south over the woods, -we who had run to fires before, - barn, shop, or dwelling-house, or all together. "It's Baker's barn," cried one. "It is the Codman Place," affirmed another. And then fresh sparks went up above the wood, as if the roof fell in, and we all shouted "Concord to the rescue!" Wagons shot past with furious speed and crushing loads, bearing, perchance, among the rest, the agent of the Insurance Company, who was bound to go however far; and ever and anon the engine bell tinkled behind, more slow and sure, and rearmost of all, as it was afterward whispered, came they who set the fire and gave the alarm. Thus we kept on like true idealists, rejecting the evidence of our senses, until at a turn in the road we heard crackling and actually felt the heat of the fire from over the wall, and realized, alas! that we were there. The very nearness of the fire but cooled our ardor. At first we thought to throw a frog-pond on to it; but concluded to let it burn, it was so far gone and so worthless. So we stood round our engine, jostled one another, expressed our sentiments through speaking trumpets, or in lower tone referred to the great conflagrations which the world has witness, including Bascom's shop, and, between ourselves we thought that, were we there in season with our "tub", and a full frog-pond by, we could turn that threatened last and universal one into another flood. We finally retreated without doing any mischief, -returned to sleep and Gondibert. But as for Gondibert, I would except that passage in the preface about wit being the soul's powder, -"but most of mankind are strangers to wit, as Indians are to powder."



PEOPLE O  
WALDEN

INSURANCE

NARCOLEPSY

ALEXANDER CHALMERS

BASCOM & COLE



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*The demon which is said to haunt the Jones family, hovering over their eyelids with wings steeped in juice of poppies, has commenced another campaign against me. I am "clear Jones" in this respect at least.*

**Thoreau was  
"clear Jones"  
in one respect  
at least ...**

According to [Franklin Benjamin Sanborn](#), Uncle [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) had been in the practice of mimicking a currently popular ventriloquist, magician, and juggler named Potter. In corroboration of this he quoted a snippet from Thoreau's journal:



Ever since I knew him he could swallow his nose. One of his tricks was to swallow the knives and forks and some of the plates at a tavern table, and offer to give them up if the landlord would charge nothing for his meal. He could do anything with cards, yet did not gamble. Uncle Charles should have been in Concord in 1843, when Daniel Webster was there. What a whetter-up of his memory that event would have been! ...



March 28, 1856: Uncle Charles buried at Haverhill. He was born in February, 1780, the winter of the Great Snow, and he died in the winter of another great snow, —a life bounded by great snows. ...

**DUNBAR FAMILY**

**HENRY'S  
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Consider WALDEN's "If they had not been overcome with drowsiness ...":

**WALDEN:** That man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way. After a partial cessation of his sensuous life, the soul of man, or its organs rather, are reinvigorated each day, and his Genius tries again what noble life it can make. All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere. The Vedas say, "All intelligences awake with the morning." Poetry and art, and the fairest and most memorable of the actions of men, date from such an hour. All poets and heroes, like Memnon, are the children of Aurora, and emit their music at sunrise. To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep. Why is it that men give so poor an account of their day if they have not been slumbering? They are not such poor calculators. If they had not been overcome with drowsiness they would have performed something. The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?

**NARCOLEPSY**

While Thoreau was living on Staten Island and putting up with the stodgy William Emersons in 1843 the "clear Jones" in him had become so drowsy, or narcoleptic, that in his efforts to counteract this he even tried making spare change by selling magazine subscriptions door to door.

## PHILIP CAFARO ON AWAKENING IN WALDEN<sup>6</sup>

PAGES 19-21: WALDEN anchors its ethical discussions in powerful, richly extended metaphors: morality as economy, morality as cultivation, morality as flourishing. Just as we must pay particular attention to first principles and initial arguments in works of academic philosophy, so here we must attend to these key orienting metaphors. One of the most important equates morality with awakening.

Two calls to wakefulness bracket the text of WALDEN: the epigraph's crowing of the cock and the text's final sentences: "There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star." In between, Thoreau returns to the theme often, asking us, for example, to awaken to the fact that we have choices in life, or describing his literary labors and itinerant naturalizing in terms of alert wakefulness. The metaphor's most extended use occurs midway through WALDEN's second chapter, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For."

"Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself," Thoreau begins, once again emphasizing our free choice of whether or not to engage life's opportunities. "I have been as



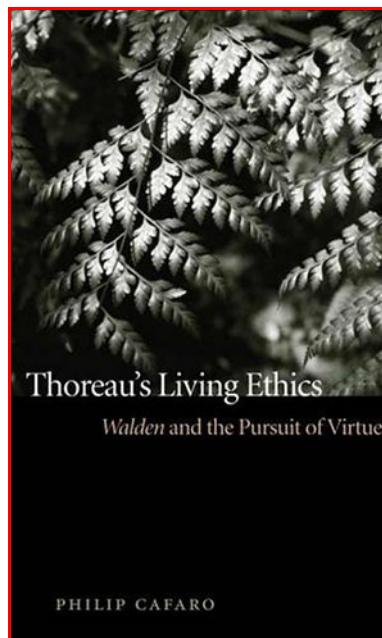
## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did." The sacrament's power comes from its bodily immediacy — what could be more immediate than a plunge, first thing in the morning, into a clear, cold pond? — and its ability to thrust us into the state of excitement and awareness it celebrates. If you doubt that wakefulness is a matter of degree, such a plunge will instantly dispel these worries! The metaphor's power comes from how literally Thoreau takes it, here at the start of the discussion, and from the diverse ways it transcends that literal meaning, in what follows. The passage continues: "The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour. Then there is least somnolence in us; and for an hour, at least, some part of us awakes which slumbers all the rest of the day and night." Now Thoreau begins to speak metaphorically, yet the statement also seems literally true to experience. Waking from a full night's sleep, early, before the neighbors begin bustling about, we may feel a freshness within and without, a hopefulness and sense of possibility that even the best days, as they fill up with details, somehow obscure. Morning is a natural beginning; making the effort to wake with the world, at dawn, emphasizes this.

Then again, how we will experience our mornings remains to some extent open, no matter when we arise. We may all have to get up eventually, to some degree, but the spirit in which we do so can make all the difference. "Little is to be expected of that day, if it can be called a day, to which we are not awakened by our Genius, but by the mechanical nudgings of some servitor, are not awakened by our own newly acquired force and aspirations from within ... to a higher life than we fell asleep from." Hope is the key to true awakening: hope, anchored in feelings of excitement and in the belief that we can live better lives than we ever have before. "We must learn to reawaken and keep

6. [Philip Cafaro](#). THOREAU'S LIVING ETHICS: WALDEN AND THE PURSUIT OF VIRTUE. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2004





## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

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ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn."

Thoreau's admonition speaks directly to anyone who has ever unwillingly dragged himself or herself out of bed to the shrilling of an alarm clock. But I think that to fully appreciate "awakening" as a metaphor for personal renewal, you need to have watched a sunrise recently and felt the radiance on your face, the sense of promise warming your bones. We must anchor our metaphors in personal experience. The more we do so, the truer they will prove themselves, if indeed they are true.

Just as the metaphor of "awakening" allows us to descend more fully into our experience, it points to its transcendence: to an ability to look beyond experience, hopefully. The passage continues: "To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep." To call moral reform, the improvement of character, an effort to throw off sleep emphasizes yet again that this opportunity is widely available; in a sense, it is as easy as waking up. It isn't for lack of some esoteric knowledge that we fail to live better lives, but for lack of effort.

But Thoreau's "moral reform" is quite different from the common conception, in his day or ours. It is personal, not social; it does not ask for justice toward others, but that we be just **toward ourselves** and develop our highest faculties. "The millions are awake enough for physical labor," Thoreau continues, "but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life." If that is so, we have all of us - including the author of WALDEN- mostly been sleepwalking through life. "I have never yet met a man who was quite awake," Thoreau asserts. "How could I have looked him in the face?"

The power of the metaphor, I think, comes from its juxtaposition of the ease and the difficulty of waking up. If we could continue after our dip in the pond, piling sacrament upon sacrament, and be fully alive, truly grateful, completely aware, for just one day - what a day it would be! And, the metaphor suggests, we might simply wake up and **see** the right path to all this, as easily as we wake up and see the world waking up outside our window. For these are the great miracles, of course: the living, changing, lovely world; our ability to see and understand and appreciate it. The goal seems so near! To really think, really create, really live, means to be **present**, the way we are when we plunge into a pond and **WAKE UP**. Yet we continue to slumber. Again, the power of the metaphor comes from its juxtaposition of incremental and heroic striving, and Thoreau's blurring of the line between them. It is as if, like some con man or "traveling patterer," he and his metaphor have signed us up to purchase something that we are not sure we want, despite its obvious goodness, despite lacking any clear reason to remain suspicious. "Who would not be early to rise, and rise earlier and earlier every successive day of his life, until he became unspeakably healthy, wealthy, and wise?" Yet we prefer endurance to excellence.



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1850

September 9, Sunday: The *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* published the 2d of the two installments of *Das Judenthum in der Musik* prepared anonymously by Richard Wagner.

ANTISEMITISM

The "Compromise of 1850" legislation was enacted in the United States federal Congress. California was admitted as the 31st state, and as a free state; Utah and New Mexico were created territories without a decision on slavery. Slavery was abolished in the District of Columbia (which of course did not mandate that any of the slaves there become free). The idea of allowing a fugitive slave to have a trial by jury was no longer to be tolerated. The compromise was endorsed by the Reverend Professor Francis Bowen.

Phineas Taylor Barnum generated enormous publicity for Jenny Lind's tour by auctioning off the best seats to her initial concert at Castle Garden in New-York. The Herald had it that:

The report of the auction on Saturday of tickets to Jenny Lind's first concert, published in yesterday's Herald, has excited a good deal of interest in the city and the auction is the subject of conversation everywhere, particularly in reference to the first ticket, purchased by Genin, the hatter, whose establishment is next door to Barnum's Museum, in Broadway. Some say it is a juggle and that there has been an understanding between him and Barnum. But that does not account for the "bids" made by five others, who all seemed anxious to get it. There is a better solution of the mystery than to charge it to Peter Funk. It was not that the first choice was one iota better than the second, which sold for twenty five dollars, or than another, which long afterwards was purchased adjoining the two hundred and twenty five dollar seats, for ten dollars, for, in point of fact, the seat selected by Mr. Genin, right under where Jenny Lind will stand when she sings, is by no means the best seat, and the choice shows that Mr. Genin is a far greater adept in hat-making than in music; and we may add that but very few showed a good judgment in the selection of the choice seats for which they paid so high, the best seats being yet to be sold. But Genin would not, probably, give three dollars even for a seat on the stage to hear the Nightingale sing, if he had not some other object in view than the pleasure it would give him. We will be asked what can that object be? We answer - Genin has found out a secret by which a few men in this city have realized large fortunes. He has begun to study the philosophy of advertising, and being an enterprising fellow, he calculated that he would test the truth of the philosophy by a practical application, and resolved to give five hundred dollars for the choice seat in the whole house to Jenny Lind's first concert, rather than lose so fine a chance of advancing his interests. One gentleman asked him why he gave so much for a ticket, and if he was not a fool for doing so? "No," said he, "I will make it pay." Another came up, immediately after the sale, and offered him \$50 premium on it if he would transfer it, and allow his name to go forth to the public as the purchaser. Genin said he would not give it for \$500. We have the secret of the value of the ticket, in the fact of the kind of men who were his chief competitors for it. They were three patent medicine doctors, who have made fortunes by



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

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advertising, and regarded this as a trump card, knowing that the name of Jenny Lind would attract attention all over the country, and that their advertisements, being connected therewith, would be sure to be read. Genin calculated that this auction would be attended by a reporter from the Herald, and that if he bought the first choice ticket, his name and establishment would be recorded, and would come before a hundred times as many readers as it could by any other means. We understand he is about to follow up this idea on the night of the concert, and that he will sit in the front of the audience with an immense hat suspended over his head. Truly it is a Yankee notion. The ticket is worth \$1000 to him. We think we have now explained the secret of Genin's determination to have the first ticket. But why did the people cheer him so vehemently? For two reasons. First, for his ingenuity in advertising, by paying for a ticket to a concert, a sum that was never paid before, even in England; and secondly, because the first choice was taken from the upper ten by a tradesman. And here was a capital idea of Barnum's for putting the people against the aristocracy in a rivalry of dollars. He is a brick in his way and deserves to make money.

The federal legislature enacted the payment of "creditors of the late Republic of Texas." Speculators who had bought up huge amounts of Republic-of-Texas notes bribed certain legislators to vote against this payment initially (in order to scare out the weaker holders of the notes so they would not profit), and then to subsequently vote for this payment. By knowing how the corrupt deal was going to go down, these insiders would gain enormously. One of those who profited from this insider trading was [Francis Joseph Grund](#), who as a Washington DC insider had gotten wind of this corruption in time to get aboard for the ultimate payoff.

A compromise enabled California to enter the Union as our 31st state with [slavery](#) forbidden, by making Utah and New Mexico territories without any decision pro or con as to slavery.



"It is simply crazy that there should ever have come into being a world with such a sin in it, in which a man is set apart because of his color – the superficial fact about a human being. Who could **want** such a world? For an American fighting for his love of country, that the last hope of earth should from its beginning have swallowed [slavery](#), is an irony so withering, a justice so intimate in its rebuke of pride, as to measure only with God."



– Stanley Cavell, MUST WE MEAN WHAT WE SAY?  
1976, page 141



September 9, 1850: There is a little grove in a swampy place in Conantum where some rare things grow –several Bass trees –two kinds of ash –Sassafras –Maidenhair fern –the white-berried plant –ivory? –&c &c and the Sweet viburnum? in the hedge nearby.

This will be called the wet year of 1850 The river is as high now Sep. 9th as in the spring– And hence the prospects and the reflections seen from the village are something novel.

Roman wormwood, Pigweed Amaranth, Polygonum and one or two coarse kinds of grass reign now in the cultivated fields

Though the potatoes have man with all his implements on their side, these rowdy & rampant weeds completely bury them between the last hoeing & the digging.– The potatoes hardly succeed with the utmost care. These weeds only ask to be let alone a little while. I judge that they have not got the rot. I sympathize with all this luxuriant growth of weeds such is the year. The weeds grow as if in sport & frolic

You might say Green as Green briar

I do not know whether the practice of putting Indigo Weed about horses' tackling to keep off flies is well

## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

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founded but I hope it is, for I have been pleased to notice that wherever I have occasion to tie a horse I am sure to find Indigo weed not far off – and therefore this which is so universally dispersed would be the fittest weed for this purpose.

The thistle is now in bloom –which every child is eager to clutch once –just a child's handful.

–I sympathize with the berries now *{MS torn}* found anybody. *{Four-fifths page missing}*

The Prunella – Self-heal Small purplish flowered plant of low grounds

Fragrant Life Everlasting.

*{Four-fifths page missing}* street & the village & the state in which he lived A voice seemed to say to him Why do you stay here and live this mean dusty moiling life when a worthy & glorious existence is possible for you?" But how to come out of this and actually migrate thither– All that he could think of was to practice some new austerity. To let his mind descend into his body & redeem it. To treat himself with ever increasing respect. He had been abusing himself– Those same stars twinkle over other fields than this

### CHARLES DUNBAR

Charles grew up to be a remarkably eccentric man He was of large frame athletic and celebrated for his feats of strength. His lungs were proportionably strong– There was a man who heard him named once, and asked it was the same Charles Dunbar – whom he remembered when he was a little boy to have heard hail a vessel from the shore of maine as she was sailing by. He should never forget that man's name.

It was well grassed and delicate flowers grew in the middle of the road–

I saw a delicate flower had grown up 2 feet high

Between the horse's path & the wheel track

Which *Dakin*'s & Maynards wagons had

Passed over many a time

An inch more to right or left had sealed its fate.

Or an inch higher. And yet it lived & flourished

As much as if it had a thousand acres

of untrodden space around it –and never

knew the danger it incurred.

It did not borrow trouble nor invite an

Evil fate by apprehending it.

For though the distant market wagon

Every other day – inevitably rolled

This way – it just as inevitably rolled

In those ruts– And the same

Charioteer who steered the flower

Upward – guided the horse & cart aside from it.

There were other flowers which you would say

Incurred less danger grew more out of the way

Which no cart rattled near no walker daily passed

But at length one rambling deviously

For no rut restrained plucked them

And then it appeared that they stood

directly in his way though he had come

from farther than the market wagon–

And then it appeared that this brave flower – which grew between the wheel & horse – did actually stand farther out of the way than that which stood in the wide prairie where the man of science plucked it.

To day I climbed a handsome rounded hill

Covered with hickory trees wishing to see

The country from its top – for low hills

show unexpected prospects– I looked

many miles over a woody low-land

Toward Marlborough Framingham & Sudbury

And as I sat amid the hickory trees

and the young sumacks enjoying the prospect– A neat herd of cows approached – of unusually fair proportions and smooth clean skins, evidently petted by their owner – who had carefully selected them– One more confiding heifer the fairest of the herd did by degrees approach as if to take some morsel from our hands – while our hearts leaped to our mouths with expectation & delight She by degrees drew near with her fair limbs progressive making pretence of browsing – nearer & nearer till there was wafted toward us the cowy fragrance cream of all the daries, that ever were or will be – and then she raised her gentle muzzle toward us – and snuffed an honest recognition within hand's reach– I saw 'twas possible for his herd to inspire with love the herdsman. She was as delicately featured as a hind– Her hide was mingled white and fawn color – and on her muzzles tip there was a white spot not bigger than a daisy And on her side toward me the map of Asia plain to see.

Farewell Dear Heifer though thou forgettest me, my prayer to Heaven shall be that thou may'st not forget thyself. There was a whole bucolic in her snuff I saw her name was sumack– And by the kindred spots I knew her mother More sedate & matronly – with full grown bag – and on her sides was Asia great & small– The plains of Tartary even to the pole – while on her daughter it was Asia Minor.– She not disposed to wanton with





## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

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the herdsman. And as I walked she followed me & took an apple from my hand and seemed to care more for the hand than apple. So innocent a face as I have rarely seen on any creature And I have looked in face of many heifers And as she took the apple from my hand I caught the apple from her eye. She smelled as sweet as the clethra blossom. There was no sinister expression And for horns though she had them they were so well disposed in the right place bent neither up nor down I do not now remember she had any – no horn was held toward me–



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1853

January 15, Saturday: The magazine Scientific American, The Advocate of Industry, and Journal of Scientific, Mechanical and other Improvements reported an event at the brewery of Mr. Sietz in Easton, Pennsylvania. A hand, Phillip Winner, fell into an ale vat left open for gas to escape, "and when removed life was extinct."



January 15th: 9 Am to woods. The starry flakes or crystals, like everything that falls from heaven to earth – have – partially melted–, coalesced & lost their regularity and beauty. A good part of the snow has fallen from the trees. See one or two short trails of meadow mice – apparently they work now under the snow – but when the sun has melted & settled & the cold somewhat consolidated the snow they come out on the surface? As you walk in the woods you hear the rustling sound of limbs & leaves that are relieved of their burden and of the falling snow. Young ever- greens look like statues partially covered with white veils. Saw near Le Grosse's the 12 ult a shrike. He told me about seeing Uncle Charles once come to Barrett's mill with logs – leap over the yoke that drew them – and back again– It amused the boys. True words are those – as Trench says – transport – rapture ravishment, ecstasy – these are the words I want. This is the effect of music– I am rapt away by it –out of myself– These are truly poetical words. I am inspired – elevated – expanded– I am on the mount. Mrs Ripley told me this Pm that Russell had decided that that green (& sometimes yellow dust) on the underside of stones in walls was a decaying state of *Lepraria chlorina* a lichen – the yellow another species of *Lepraria*. Science suggests the value of mutual intelligence. I have long known this dust – but as I did not know the name of it, i.e. what others called & therefore could not conveniently speak of it– It has suggested less to me & I have made less use of it. I now first feel as if I had got hold of it  
In Carlisle & Boxboro they go to Church as of old – they are still pagans *Pagani* – or villagers

RICHARD CHENEVIX TRENCH  
CHARLES JONES DUNBAR

Dr. Alfred I. Tauber would feel it possible to extrapolate from the above in arriving at an understanding of Thoreau's appreciation of the relationship between time and eternity.



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1855

October 23, Tuesday: Cousin [Charles Howard Dunbar](#) reported that, at the recent Cattle Show in Haverhill, his horse had drawn 5,286 pounds up the hill from Hale's factory.

[DUNBAR FAMILY](#)

According to [Franklin Benjamin Sanborn](#), [Henry Thoreau](#)'s Uncle [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) had been in the practice of mimicking a currently popular ventriloquist, magician, and juggler named Potter. In corroboration of this he quoted a snippet from Thoreau's journal:



People are talking about my uncle Charles. George Minott [a sort of cousin of the Thoreaus] tells how he heard Tilly Brown once asking him to show him a peculiar inside lock in wrestling. "Now, don't hurt me, - don't throw me hard." He struck his antagonist inside his knees with his feet, and so deprived him of his legs. Edmund Hosmer remembers his tricks in the bar-room, shuffling cards, etc.; he could do anything with cards, yet he did not gamble. He would toss up his hat, twirling it over and over, and catch it on his head invariably. He once wanted to live at Hosmer's, but the latter was afraid of him. "Can't we study up something?" he asked. Hosmer asked him into the house, and brought out apples and cider, and uncle Charles talked. "You!" said he, "I burst the bully of Haverhill." He wanted to wrestle, would not be put off. "Well, we won't wrestle in the house." So they went out to the yard, and a crowd got round. "Come, spread some straw here," said uncle Charles, - "I don't want to hurt him." He threw him at once. They tried again; he told them to spread more straw, and he "burst" him. Uncle Charles used to say that he had n't a single tooth in his head. The fact was they were all double, and I have heard that he lost about all of them by the time he was twenty-one. Ever since I knew him he could swallow his nose. He had a strong head, and never got drunk; would drink gin sometimes, but not to excess. Did not use tobacco, except snuff out of another's box, sometimes; was very neat in his person; was not profane, though vulgar.



Now is the time for chestnuts. A stone cast against the trees shakes them down in showers upon one's head and shoulders. But I cannot excuse myself for using the stone. It is not innocent, it is not just, so to maltreat the tree that feeds us. I am not disturbed by considering that if I thus shorten its life I shall not enjoy its fruit so long, but am prompted to a more innocent course by motives purely of humanity. I sympathize with the tree, yet I heaved a big stone against the trunks like a robber, — not too good to commit murder. I trust that I shall never do it again. These gifts should be accepted, not merely with gentleness, but with a certain humble gratitude. The tree whose fruit we would obtain should not be too rudely shaken even. It is not a time of distress, when a little haste and violence even might be pardoned. It is worse than boorish, it is criminal, to inflict an unnecessary injury on the tree that feeds or shadows us. Old trees are our parents, and our parents' parents, perchance. If you would learn the secrets of Nature, you must practice more humanity than others. The thought that I was robbing myself by injuring the tree did not occur to me, but I was affected as if I had cast a rock at a sentient being, — with a duller sense than my own, it is true, but yet a distant relation. Behold a man cutting down a tree to come at the fruit! What is the moral of such an act?



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1856

March 27, Thursday: Death of [Charles Jones Dunbar](#), [Henry Thoreau](#)'s favorite uncle, [Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau](#)'s eccentric brother.

The Reverend Samuel J. May, Jr. wrote from the Anti-Slavery Office to Mrs. [Elizabeth Buffum Chase](#):

*As W. Phillips can give no time to the [R.I.](#) Convention, until the last week in April, we have, after conferring with [Providence](#) friends, fixed upon the 25th, 26th, and 27th of that month as the days.*

*A. Fairbanks gives me no encouragement about the formation of a State Society. It seems to me to be, like Immediate Emancipation itself, one of the first things to be done. Action, in this country, to be effective, must be organized.*

*Nor is it a very numerous Society that is wanted. We are not politicians -thank God- I hope we are not "Know nothings" in any sense; we are not striving to form a great Lodge or body, every man of which shall talk, and move, and vote, to order.*

*I began my note chiefly to say that I propose appointing a meeting for S.S. Foster at Pawtucket on Sunday, April 6th, and I think he will stop and see you on the Saturday evening previous, as you desired. I am not sure who the best person in Pawtucket for me to write to is, since Daniel Mitchell has gone. Will you give me your opinion as to the three best places for S.S.F. to spend the three Sundays in, which are all he can give to R.I.?*

[ASA FAIRBANKS](#)

[RHODE ISLAND](#)



[STEPHEN S. FOSTER](#)



March 27. Uncle Charles died this morning, about midnight, aged seventy-six.

The frost is now entirely out in some parts of the New Burying-Ground, the sexton tells me, - half-way up the hill which slopes to the south, unless it is bare of snow, he says. In our garden, where it chances to be bare, two or more rods from the house, I was able to dig through the slight frost. In another place near by I could not.

The river is now open in reaches of twenty or thirty rods, where the ice has disappeared by melting.

Elijah Wood, Senior, about seventy, tells me he does not remember that the river was ever frozen so long, nor that so much snow lay on the ground so long. People do not remember when there was so much old snow on the ground at this date.



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

March 28, Friday: By the evening of this day the US Army had restored order at burned-out [Fort Cascades](#) on the Columbia River, and taken a number of native prisoners.



March 28: Uncle Charles buried. He was born in February, 1780, the winter of the Great Snow, and he died in the winter of another great snow, — a life bounded by great snows.

Cold, and the earth stiff again, after fifteen days of steady warm and, for the most part, sunny days (without rain), in which the snow and ice have rapidly melted.

Sam Barrett tells me that a boy caught a crow in his neighborhood the other day in a trap set for mink. Its leg was broken. He brought it home under his arm, and laid it down in a shop, thinking to keep it there alive. It looked up sidewise, as it lay seemingly helpless on the floor, but, the door being open, all at once, to their surprise, it lifted itself on its wings and flitted out and away without the least trouble. Many crows have been caught in mink-traps the past winter, they have been compelled to visit the few openings in brooks, etc., so much for food.

Barrett has suffered all winter for want of water.

I think to say to my friend, There is but one interval between us. You are on one side of it, I on the other. You know as much about it as I, -how wide, how impassable it is. I will endeavor not to blame you. Do not blame me. There is nothing to be said about it. Recognize the truth, and pass over the intervals that are bridged.

Farewell, my friends, my path inclines to this side the mountain, yours to that. For a long time you have appeared further and further off to me. I see that you will at length disappear altogether. For a season my path seems lonely without you. The meadows are like barren ground. The memory of me is steadily passing away from you. My path grows narrower and steeper, and the night is approaching. Yet I have faith that, in the definite future, new suns will rise, and new plains expand before me, and I trust that I shall therein encounter pilgrims who bear that same virtue that I recognized in you, who will be that very virtue that was you. I accept the everlasting and salutary law, which was promulgated as much that spring that I first knew you, as this that I seem to lose you.

My former friends, I visit you as one walks amid the columns of a ruined temple. You belong to an era, a civilization and glory, long past. I recognize still your fair proportions, notwithstanding the convulsions which we have felt, and the weeds and jackals that have sprung up around. I come here to be reminded of the past, to read your inscriptions, the hieroglyphics, the sacred writings. We are no longer the representatives of our former selves.

Love is a thirst that is never slaked. Under the coarsest rind, the sweetest meat. If you would read a friend aright, you must be able to read through something thicker and opaquer than horn. If you can read a friend, all languages will be easy to you. Enemies publish themselves. They declare war. The friend never declares his love.

According to [Franklin Benjamin Sanborn](#), [Charles Jones Dunbar](#) had been in the practice of mimicking a currently popular ventriloquist, magician, and juggler named [Richard Potter](#). In corroboration of this he quoted a snippet from [Thoreau](#)'s journal:



People are talking about my uncle Charles. George Minott [a sort of cousin of the Thoreaus] tells how he heard Tilly Brown once asking him to show him a peculiar inside lock in wrestling. "Now, don't hurt me, - don't throw me hard." He struck his antagonist inside his knees with his feet, and so deprived him of his legs. Edmund Hosmer remembers his tricks in the bar-room, shuffling cards, etc.; he could do anything with cards, yet he did not gamble. He would toss up his hat, twirling it over and over, and catch it on his head invariably. He once wanted to live at Hosmer's, but the latter was afraid of him. "Can't we study up something?" he asked. Hosmer asked him into the house, and brought out apples and cider, and uncle Charles talked. "You!" said he, "I burst the bully of Haverhill." He wanted to wrestle, would not be put off. "Well, we won't wrestle in the house." So they went out to the yard, and a crowd got round. "Come, spread some straw here," said uncle Charles, - "I don't want to hurt him." He threw him at once. They tried again; he told them to spread more straw, and he "burst" him. Uncle Charles used to say that he had n't a single tooth in his head. The fact was they were all double, and I have heard that he lost about all of them by the time he was twenty-one. Ever since I knew him he could swallow his nose. He had a strong head, and never got drunk; would drink gin sometimes, but not to excess. Did not use tobacco, except snuff out of another's box, sometimes; was very neat in his person; was not

## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

profane, though vulgar.



According to Sanborn, one of Charles's tricks was to swallow the knives and forks and some of the plates at a tavern table, and offer to give them up if the landlord would charge nothing for his meal. He continued that Charles could do anything with cards, yet did not gamble. He wished that Charles had been in Concord in 1843 when Daniel Webster was there — what a whetter-up of his memory that event would have been!



**HENRY'S RELATIVES:**

**UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR**







**HENRY'S RELATIVES:**

**UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR**

**1918**

Up to this point mineral [graphite](#) had been ground, mixed with clay, and fired in a kiln. It had been mined in the hill country of England, in Sri Lanka, in Madagascar, in North Korea, in the Sonora province of [Mexico](#), near the town of Bristol in New Hampshire beginning in 1821 (the small deposit discovered and claimed by [Charles Jones Dunbar](#)), in New York, in the Ontario province of [Canada](#), and, beginning in 1856, in Siberia near the border of [China](#). By this year the block mineral form that needed to be finely ground had been fully superseded by a derivative of petroleum coke which because it could be brought into existence already in the condition of a fine powder was inherently not only of much higher quality but also much cheaper to produce.



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1948

Fall: [Walter Roy Harding](#) placed an amusing piece about [Henry Thoreau](#)'s favorite uncle [Charles Jones Dunbar](#), "Uncle Charlie Comes to Concord," in the magazine [Nature Outlook](#):

<http://www.walden.org/Institute/thoreau/about2/H/WalterHarding/UncleCharlie.htm>



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

1971

A couple of amazing things were accomplished by America's white people in this year, to rectify their past errors:

- The first was a scenario straight out of [George Orwell](#)'s *1984*, with its "Ministry of Truth": For a [nativist](#) fantasy and environmental warning film entitled "Home" being made by the Southern [Baptist](#) Radio and Television Commission, a [Texas](#) screenwriter named Ted Perry created a politically correct environmentalist speech for "Chief Seattle" to have delivered as of 1854. In this creation he had the actor playing Headman Seattle (See-Ahth of the Susquamish) describe birds not from his own region of the country, had him describe from his personal experience American bison See-ahth had surely never been within 800 miles of, and had him deliver reminiscences about white people indiscriminately shooting these bison from the windows of trains — trains magically running on transcontinental tracks that had not yet been surveyed as of 1854 and that would not be laid down for over a decade. (An environmentalist "Letter from Chief Seattle to President Franklin Pierce" has also been created out of this material, but I am not sure who invented this portion of our national story, or when. I'll have to admit, however, that the idea of a letter is a neat credibility touch, isn't it? How can we doubt if there is somewhere, misfiled in a Presidential Library, a preserved document?)



- The other was that the remaining deformed and mutilated body parts of *Taoyateduta*, Headman Little Crow V who had during his lifetime been Headman Little Crow IV of the Woodland Dakota tribes (parts recognizable due to the double row of teeth, and to the shattered forearm bones), were taken out of their case and off public display at the Minnesota Historical Society and given to a grandson, Jesse Wakeman, so he could inter them decently in a family cemetery.

DIGGING UP THE DEAD



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

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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: March 19, 2016



**HENRY'S RELATIVES:**

**UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR**

# **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



## HENRY'S RELATIVES:

## UNCLE CHARLES DUNBAR

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.

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