

MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE OF SELBORNE,



AND

THE REVEREND GILBERT WHITE



GILBERT WHITE
TORTOISE TIMOTHY

What impressed me, then and later, was Henry's knowledge of Natural History; a keen observer and great student of things, and a very pleasant talker. He reminded me more of Gilbert White of Selborne than any other character.

— George Keyes (born 1832)



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1720

July 18: [Gilbert White](#) was born in Selborne, England. His grandfather Gilbert White was the vicar there, his father John White was a naturalist.

The language of birds is very ancient, and, like other ancient modes of speech, very elliptical: little is said, but much is meant and understood.

– [Gilbert White](#)'s THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, as quoted on page 417 of William Least Heat-Moon's PrairyErth (a deep map) [Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991].

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1734

US financier and land speculator Robert Morris was born (he was, however, born in England rather than in America).

According to the later estimate of the naturalist Reverend [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne, England, [Tortoise Timothy](#) had hatched in this year “in the Province of Virginia in the midst of a Savanna that lay between a large [tobacco](#) plantation and a creek of the sea.” Since this tortoise had never laid an egg, the good Reverend presumed it to be male and had named it Timothy. Actually it was a female. Actually, also, it was a *Testudo ibera*, and thus would have originated in a similar emigrant manner as Robert Morris — not in Virginia in America but in Algeria in Africa.



As to whether the good Reverend had at least gotten the year of hatching of this testudo right, who can say? You will be able to view her carapace in the British Museum of Natural History, where the sign cautiously reads “Died in Selborne in 1794, after an existence of about 54 years in England ... formerly in the possession of the Rev. Gilbert White.”





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1740

According to the later estimate of the naturalist Reverend [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne, England, [Tortoise Timothy](#) had been captured in this year, after spending “my youthful days among my relations with much satisfaction, and [seeing] around me many venerable kinsmen.... Happy should I have been in the enjoyment of my native climate and the society of my friends had not a sea-boy, who was wandering around to see what he could pick up, surprised me as I was sunning myself under a bush; and whipping me into his wallet, carried me aboard his ship.” This surely was all conjecture on the good Reverend’s part, and the reality probably was that this testudo had been collected by a native Algerian and sold in the port to this sea-boy, but it was known that this testudo had been purchased by his Aunt Rebecca’s husband, a Mr. Snookes, for half a crown, and would be kept in her garden in Sussex until her death in March 1780.



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1743

After a preliminary education at Basingstoke, [Gilbert White](#) had gone on to Oriel College, Oxford, and in this year he received his BA degree. He was at this point an avid shootist. He was an erect, slender man, but 5' 3" tall (which puts him at the same altitude as St. Francis of Assisi, Voltaire, Gandhi, Sammy Davis, Jr., Daniel Ricketson, and Kim Jong Il of North Korea).


All nature is so full, that the district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined.

– [Gilbert White](#)'s THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, as quoted on page 4 of William Least Heat-Moon's PRAIRYERTH (A DEEP MAP) [Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991].

In consolation, we will offer that the good reverend was considerably taller than his garden [Tortoise Timothy](#) even when she stretched to her fullest extent to savor a blossom.

Table of Altitudes



Yoda	2 ' 0 "
Lavinia Warren	2 ' 8 "
Tom Thumb, Jr.	3 ' 4 "
Lucy (Australopithecus Afarensis)	3 ' 8 "
Hervé Villechaize ("Fantasy Island")	3 ' 11"
Charles Proteus Steinmetz	4 ' 0 "
Mary Moody Emerson per FBS (1)	4 ' 3 "
Alexander Pope	4 ' 6 "
Benjamin Lay	4 ' 7 "
 Gary Coleman ("Arnold Jackson")	4 ' 8 "
Queen Victoria with osteoporosis	4 ' 8 "
Queen Victoria as adult	4 ' 10 "
Margaret Mitchell	4 ' 10 "
length of newer military musket	4 ' 10"
Charlotte Brontë	4 ' 10-11"
Harriet Beecher Stowe	4 ' 11"
Laura Ingalls Wilder	4 ' 11"
 a rather tall adult Pygmy male	4 ' 11"
John Keats	5 ' 0 "
Clara Barton	5 ' 0 "
Isambard Kingdom Brunel	5 ' 0 "
Andrew Carnegie	5 ' 0 "
Thomas de Quincey	5 ' 0 "



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Stephen A. Douglas	5' 0 "
Danny DeVito	5' 0 "
Immanuel Kant	5' 0 "
William Wilberforce	5' 0 "
Mae West	5' 0 "
Mother Teresa	5' 0 "
Deng Xiaoping	5' 0 "
Dred Scott	5' 0 " (±)
Captain William Bligh of HMS <i>Bounty</i>	5' 0 " (±)
Harriet Tubman	5' 0 " (±)
Mary Moody Emerson per FBS (2)	5' 0 " (±)
John Brown of Providence, Rhode Island	5' 0 " (+)
Bette Midler	5' 1 "
Jemmy Button	5' 2 "
Margaret Mead	5' 2 "
R. Buckminster "Bucky" Fuller	5' 2 "
Yuri Gagarin the astronaut	5' 2 "
William Walker	5' 2 "
Horatio Alger, Jr.	5' 2 "
length of older military musket	5' 2 "
the artist formerly known as Prince	5' 2 1/2 "
typical female of Thoreau's period	5' 2 1/2 "
Francis of Assisi	5' 3 "
Voltaire	5' 3 "
Mohandas Gandhi	5' 3 "
Sammy Davis, Jr.	5' 3 "
Kahlil Gibran	5' 3 "
Friend Daniel Ricketson	5' 3 "
The Reverend Gilbert White	5' 3 "
Nikita Khrushchev	5' 3 "
Sammy Davis, Jr.	5' 3 "
Truman Capote	5' 3 "
Kim Jong Il (North Korea)	5' 3 "
Stephen A. "Little Giant" Douglas	5' 4 "
Francisco Franco	5' 4 "
President James Madison	5' 4 "
Iosef Vissarionovich Dzugashvili "Stalin"	5' 4 "
Alan Ladd	5' 4 "
Pablo Picasso	5' 4 "
Truman Capote	5' 4 "





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Queen Elizabeth	5' 4 "
Ludwig van Beethoven	5' 4 "
Typical Homo Erectus	5' 4 "
typical Neanderthal adult male	5' 4 ¹ / ₂ "
Alan Ladd	5' 4 ¹ / ₂ "
<i>comte de Buffon</i>	5' 5 " (-)
Captain Nathaniel Gordon	5' 5 "
Charles Manson	5' 5 "
Audie Murphy	5' 5 "
Harry Houdini	5' 5 "
Hung Hsiu-ch'üan 洪秀全	5' 5 "
Marilyn Monroe	5' 5 ¹ / ₂ "
T.E. Lawrence "of Arabia"	5' 5 ¹ / ₂ "
average runaway male American slave	5' 5-6 "
Charles Dickens	5' 6? "
President Benjamin Harrison	5' 6 "
President Martin Van Buren	5' 6 "
James Smithson	5' 6 "
Louisa May Alcott	5' 6 "
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe	5' 6 ¹ / ₂ "
Napoleon Bonaparte	5' 6 ¹ / ₂ "
Emily Brontë	5' 6-7 "
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	5' ? "
average height, seaman of 1812	5' 6.85 "
Oliver Reed Smoot, Jr.	5' 7 "
minimum height, British soldier	5' 7 "
President John Adams	5' 7 "
President John Quincy Adams	5' 7 "
President William McKinley	5' 7 "
"Charley" Parkhurst (a female)	5' 7 "
Henry Thoreau	5' 7 "
the average male of Thoreau's period	5' 7 ¹ / ₂ "
Edgar Allan Poe	5' 8 "
President Ulysses S. Grant	5' 8 "
President William H. Harrison	5' 8 "
President James Polk	5' 8 "
President Zachary Taylor	5' 8 "
average height, soldier of 1812	5' 8.35 "
President Rutherford B. Hayes	5' 8 ¹ / ₂ "
President Millard Fillmore	5' 9 "





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President Harry S Truman	5 ' 9 "
President Jimmy Carter	5 ' 9 ¹ / ₂ "
Herman Melville	5 ' 9 ³ / ₄ "
Calvin Coolidge	5 ' 10"
Andrew Johnson	5 ' 10"
Theodore Roosevelt	5 ' 10"
Thomas Paine	5 ' 10"
Franklin Pierce	5 ' 10"
Abby May Alcott	5 ' 10"
Reverend Henry C. Wright	5 ' 10"
Nathaniel Hawthorne	5 ' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Louis "Deerfoot" Bennett	5 ' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Friend John Greenleaf Whittier	5 ' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
President Dwight D. Eisenhower	5 ' 10 ¹ / ₂ "
Sojourner Truth	5 ' 11"
President Grover Cleveland	5 ' 11"
President Herbert Hoover	5 ' 11"
President Woodrow Wilson	5 ' 11"
President Jefferson Davis	5 ' 11"
President Richard M. Nixon	5 ' 11 ¹ / ₂ "
Robert Voorhis the hermit of Rhode Island	< 6 '
Frederick Douglass	6 ' (-)
Anthony Burns	6 ' 0 "
Waldo Emerson	6 ' 0 "
Joseph Smith, Jr.	6 ' 0 "
David Walker	6 ' 0 "
Sarah F. Wakefield	6 ' 0 "
Thomas Wentworth Higginson	6 ' 0 "
President James Buchanan	6 ' 0 "
President Gerald R. Ford	6 ' 0 "
President James Garfield	6 ' 0 "
President Warren Harding	6 ' 0 "
President John F. Kennedy	6 ' 0 "
President James Monroe	6 ' 0 "
President William H. Taft	6 ' 0 "
President John Tyler	6 ' 0 "
John Brown	6 ' 0 (+)"
President Andrew Jackson	6 ' 1"
Alfred Russel Wallace	6 ' 1"
President Ronald Reagan	6 ' 1"



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Venture Smith	6' 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
John Camel Heenan	6' 2 "
Crispus Attucks	6' 2 "
President Chester A. Arthur	6' 2 "
President George Bush, Senior	6' 2 "
President Franklin D. Roosevelt	6' 2 "
President George Washington	6' 2 "
Gabriel Prosser	6' 2 "
Dangerfield Newby	6' 2 "
Charles Augustus Lindbergh	6' 2 "
President Bill Clinton	6' 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
President Thomas Jefferson	6' 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
President Lyndon B. Johnson	6' 3 "
Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.	6' 3 "
Richard "King Dick" Seaver	6' 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
President Abraham Lincoln	6' 4 "
Marion Morrison (AKA John Wayne)	6' 4 "
Elisha Reynolds Potter, Senior	6' 4 "
Thomas Cholmondeley	6' 4 " (?)
Franklin Benjamin Sanborn	6' 5 "
Peter the Great of Russia	6' 7 "
Giovanni Battista Belzoni	6' 7 "
Thomas Jefferson (the statue)	7' 6"
Jefferson Davis (the statue)	7' 7"
Martin Van Buren Bates	7' 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
M. Bihin, a Belgian exhibited in Boston in 1840	8'
Anna Haining Swan	8' 1"





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1744

Gilbert White was made a fellow of Oriel College, Oxford.

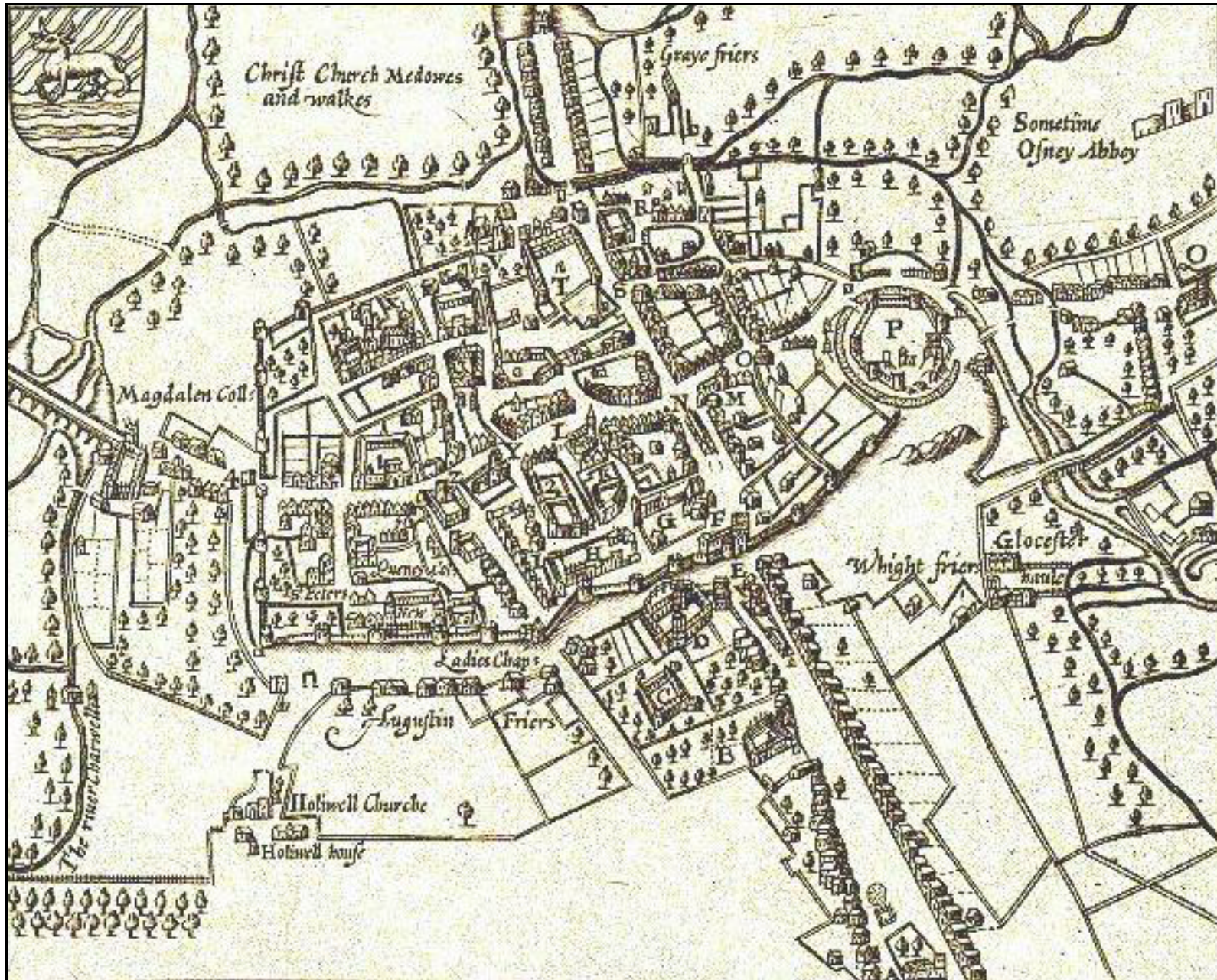
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[Thomas Warton](#) entered Trinity College, Oxford.



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1746

Gilbert White received his MA from Oriel College, Oxford.

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Oriel College

Christ Church



Thomas Percy matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford.

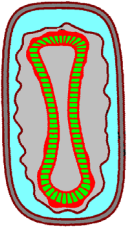


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1747

[Gilbert White](#) was ordained and received his first temporary curacy.
In October he was a victim of the [small pox](#).



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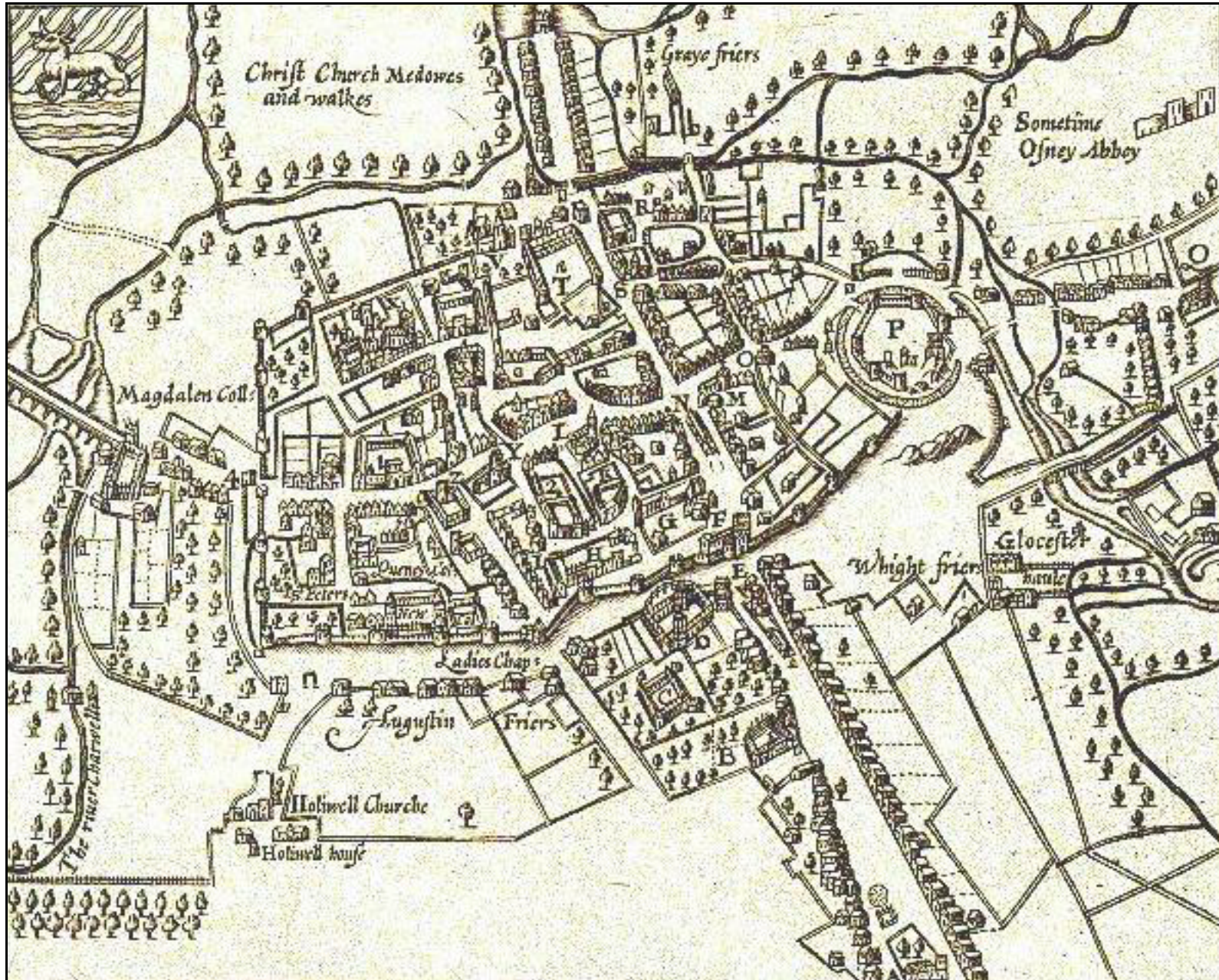
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1751

The Reverend [Gilbert White](#) was serving his *alma mater*, Oriel College at Oxford, as Junior Proctor. In this year, also, he began the GARDEN KALENDAR¹ which he would maintain for two decades.



[Thomas Warton](#) became a fellow at Trinity College, Oxford.

1. See the facsimile published in 1975 with an introduction by John Clegg.



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The [Reverend Professor Thomas Warton, D.D.](#) became headmaster at Winchester.

1753

The Reverend [Gilbert White](#) and his brother John constructed a zig-zag path up the steep slope of beechwoods of Selborne Hanger. (The diagonal path, called “Bostal,” came later.)

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1768

December 6: The 1st volume of the 1st edition of the *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA* went on sale, in Scotland.

This 1st edition would continue to be supplemented in 100 weekly installments or “numbers,” into 1771. [William Smellie](#) had been hired at the age of 28 by Colin Macfarquhar and Andrew Bell to edit this initial effort, and although he would borrow liberally from the likes of Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson, there was a whole lot that this opinionated young man knew nothing whatever about. For instance, he knew so little about the fairer sex that his entire article on “Woman” consists of four words: “the female of man.” There were engravings by Andrew Bell that King George III would characterize as “prurient,” that would need to vanish before any follow-on edition. (This 1st edition is now available in replica but believe me, even in its completed condition as of 1771 there it isn’t a whole lot to be said for it. About the best that can be said is that it made everyone aware that there would need to be a 2d edition.)

Callifornia, a large country of the Weft Indies, lying between 116° and 138° W. long. and between 23° and 46° N. lat. It is uncertain whether it be a peninsula or an ifland.

ENCYCLOPEDIAS

CALIFORNIA

Daines Barrington, who had invented a format called THE NATURALIST’S JOURNAL, presented the Reverend [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne with a copy. The format of this book began to replace the format which the Reverend had been using for the past 17 years for his GARDEN KALENDAR.



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1770

It was in about this timeframe that the idea of writing up, for publication as a book, his stack of copies of letters written to the gentleman naturalist Daines Barrington and to the zoologist Thomas Pennant over the course of two decades, first occurred to the Reverend [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne:

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

All nature is so full, that the district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined.

– [Gilbert White](#)'s THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, as quoted on page 4 of William Least Heat-Moon's PRAIRYERTH (A DEEP MAP) [Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991].

1771

The Reverend [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne discontinued the GARDEN KALENDAR which he had maintained since 1751, in favor of the format of Daines Barrington's THE NATURALIST'S JOURNAL.²

In Nürnberg, Volume II of [Conrad Gesner](#)'s botanical manuscripts.

BOTANIZING

1778

June 14, Sunday: In President of Yale College [Ezra Stiles](#)'s diary, we find a reference to several students doing well in debating. [Noah Webster, Jr.](#) was among them.

The Reverend [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne sighed in his journal, "White butter-flies unnumerable: woe to the cabbages!"

2. See the extracts edited by Walter Johnson, published in 1931 and reprinted in 1970.



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1780

The aunt of the Reverend [Gilbert White](#), in Essex, a Mrs. Rebecca Snookes, died, and her garden tortoise, [Tortoise Timothy](#), was carried off by this naturalist in his carriage to his own garden in Selborne, England: "I was sore shaken by this expedition, which was the worst journey I ever experienced." This testudo would have further testing experiences: "For you must know that my master is what they call a **naturalist**, and much visited by people of that turn, who often put on whimsical experiments, such as feeling my pulse, putting me in a tub of water to try if I can swim, etc.; and twice in the year I was carried to the grocer's to be weighed, that it may be seen how much I am wasted during the months of my abstinence, and how much I gained by feasting in the summer. Upon these occasions I am placed in the scale on my back, where I sprawl about to the great diversion of the shopkeeper's children."

1782

October 27, Sunday: [Nicolò Paganini](#) was born to Teresa Bocciardo at #1359 Via Fosse del Colle in Genoa, [Italy](#) (this was to become #38 Passo di Gatta Mora). The lad would begin to receive music lessons from his father Antonio Paganini, a cargo handler and shipping clerk, before the age of 6.

The Reverend [Gilbert White](#) wrote:

Two of my brother Henry's gold-fish have been sick, & cannot live with the rest in the glass-bowl but in a tin-bucket by themselves they soon become lively, & vigorous. They were perhaps too much crouded in the bowl. When a fish sickens it's head gets lowest; so that by degrees it stands as it were on it's head; 'till getting weaker & losing all poise, the tail turns over; & at last it floats on the water with it's belly uppermost. Gold & silver-fishes seem to want no aliment, but what they can collect from pure water frequently changed. They will eat crumbs, but do better without; because the water is soon corrupted by the pieced of bread, & turns sour. Tho' they seem to take nothing, yet the consequences of eating frequently drop from them: so that they must find many animalcula, & other nourishment. With their pinnae pectorales they gently protrude themselves forward or backward: but it is with their strong muscular tails only that Fishes move with such inconceivable rapidity.

It has been said that the eyes of fishes are immoveable: but these apparently turn them forward or backward in their sockets as their occasions require. They take little notice of a lighted candle, though applied close to their heads, but flounce and seem much frightened by a sudden stroke of the hand against the support whereon the bowl is hung; especially when they have been motionless, and are perhaps asleep. As fishes have no eyelids, it is not easy to discern when they are sleeping or not, because their eyes are always open.

Nothing can be more amusing than a glass bowl containing such



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fishes: the double refractions of the glass and water represent them, when moving, in a shifting and changeable variety of dimensions, shades, and colours; while the two mediums, assisted by the concavo-convex shape of the vessel, magnify and distort them vastly; not to mention that the introduction of another element and its inhabitants into our parlours engages the fancy in a very agreeable manner.

1784

Eventually, in 1986, there would be published A SELBORNE YEAR: THE "NATURALIST'S JOURNAL" FOR 1784 / [GILBERT WHITE](#); edited by Edward Dadswell; illustrated by Nichola Armstrong. Exeter, Devon: Webb & Bower; London: M. Joseph.

1789

[Jeremy Bentham](#) opinioned during this year on the equivalent status of all created beings: “the day **may** come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them by the hand of tyranny.”



During this year the Reverend [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne secured publication for his *magnum opus* on that theme:

THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE
IN THE COUNTY OF SOUTHAMPTON:
WITH ENGRAVINGS,
AND AN APPENDIX

The language of birds is very ancient, and, like other ancient modes of speech, very elliptical: little is said, but much is meant and understood.

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Since the Reverend White did not himself sketch, the few illustrations which made their way into this initial publication had been prepared by a [Swiss](#) artist, S.H. Grimm, who had come in 1776 to Selborne. It has been said of the Reverend, as a naturalist, that:



He strongly believed in the value of first-hand observation in the field and it was his opinion that many naturalists spent too much time in the study. White's prime interest was in the behaviour of animals and he had comparatively little regard for the traditional work of zoologists and botanists who did, and intended to do, no more than give names to new species. In considering the characteristics for recognizing a bird, White pointed out the significance of behaviour, mannerisms and song in addition to features of the plumage. Gilbert White was a pioneer in behavioural science, in field work and also in the concentrated study of a small area.

(It occurs to one that such things might with all fairness be said as well of certain other naturalists.)³

3. THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, IN THE COUNTY OF SOUTHAMPTON: WITH ENGRAVINGS, AND AN APPENDIX ... London, Printed by T. Bensley, for B. White and son. Also, 18--: THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE IN THE COUNTY OF SOUTHAMPTON. The standard edition by E. T. Bennett. Thoroughly rev., with additional notes, by J. E. Harting. Stereotyped ed., with ten letters... London, S. Sonnenschein [18--].

1793

→ June 26: [Gilbert White](#) died in Selborne. A church window would be dedicated to the memory of this country pastor:



1794

In Selborne, England, [Tortoise Timothy](#) died. Investigation revealed that although she had been thought for some 60 years to be a male, since she had never laid an egg, actually she had been a solitary female, and that although the naturalist Reverend [Gilbert White](#) had presumed her to be from Virginia in America, actually she had been a *Testudo ibera*, and hence from Algeria in Africa. In any event you will be able to view her carapace in the British Museum of Natural History, where the sign cautiously reads “Died in Selborne in 1794, after an existence of about 54 years in England ... formerly in the possession of the Rev. Gilbert White.”



In America, the Reverend [Timothy Dwight](#) offered a poem “Greenfield Hill.”



The poet was no known relation to Tortoise Timothy — despite the fact that this is very much the sort of effort that this tortoise might (under other circumstances) have composed:

http://narcissus.umd.edu:8080/eada/html/display.jsp?docs=dwight_greenfieldhill.xml&action=show




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1795

A NATURALIST'S CALENDAR, WITH OBSERVATIONS IN VARIOUS BRANCHES OF NATURAL HISTORY; EXTRACTED FROM THE PAPERS OF THE LATE REV. [GILBERT WHITE](#) ... NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED. London, Printed for B. & J. White.

1802

 2d edition of THE WORKS, IN NATURAL HISTORY, OF THE LATE [GILBERT WHITE](#). COMPRISING [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#); THE NATURALIST'S CALENDAR; AND MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS, EXTRACTED FROM HIS PAPERS. TO WHICH ARE ADDED, A CALENDAR... (London: Printed for J. White by T. Bensley).⁴

1813

 Prepared by [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne's nephew John White, the 3rd edition of the Reverend's [THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#).⁵

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Speaking of nature being full, the 5-acre pond north of the city of New-York, that used to be called "The Collect," that had been rimmed by slaughterhouses and had then become a cesspool, was at this point packed solid. There wasn't any water, even foul water, anymore. The area was finally ready to do service as our nation's worst slum.

4. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

5. 1813; 1993: THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, 1813 edition: facsimile with an introduction by P.G.M. Foster. London: The Ray Society. Series title: Ray Society (Series); no. 160.

1820



During this decade, [John Leonard Knapp](#) would be authoring a series of anonymous articles for [Time's Telescope](#) under the byline "The Naturalist's Diary." This series of articles would in 1829 form the germ of his most successful work, also anonymous, *THE JOURNAL OF A NATURALIST*, a work which would see publication in four editions, of which Thoreau would make extensive use. The book is an account of the natural history, country life and agriculture along the escarpment from Alveston to Thornbury in Gloucestershire, inspired by the Rev. [Gilbert White's](#) *THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE*. J.W. White described him as "a charming botanist and traveller through the inexhaustible regions of nature." His last years would be spent at Alveston where he was a churchwarden. His time was now spent almost entirely in the pursuit of Natural History and the cultivation of his garden.



BOTANIZING



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1822



4th edition: [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#) / BY [GILBERT WHITE](#); TO WHICH ARE ADDED THE NATURALIST'S CALENDAR, MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS, AND POEMS. A NEW ED., WITH ENGRAVINGS. London: Printed for J. and A. Arch: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown: Lackington: J. Mawman: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy: J. Hatchard and Son: S. Bagster: Ogle, Duncan, and Co.: W. Mason J. Sheldon: R. Saunders: Hurst and Robinson.⁶

1829



[John Leonard Knapp](#) had been during this decade contributing a series of anonymous articles to [Time's Telescope](#) under the heading "The Naturalist's Diary." At this point this series was the basis for publication at London of an anonymous volume entitled THE JOURNAL OF A NATURALIST. This work would see publication in four editions (it would be reprinted in Philadelphia in 1831), and would be made use of by Thoreau. It is an account of the natural history, country life and agriculture along the escarpment from Alveston to Thornbury in Gloucestershire, inspired by the Reverend [Gilbert White's](#) [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#). J.W. White has described Knapp as "a charming botanist and traveller through the inexhaustible regions of nature." He would spend his last years at Alveston as a churchwarden, occupying himself with the pursuit of natural history and the cultivation of his garden. In honor of Knapp's THE GRAMINA BRITANNICA, the genus of grasses previously named *Milbora* by Adanson would be renamed *Knappia* by Smith.

BOTANIZING

From this year into 1831, [Professor William Jackson Hooker](#) and Dr R.K. Greville would be putting out the two volumes of *ICONES FILICUM* (ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE FERNS).

[Professor Hooker](#) began his *FLORA BOREALI-AMERICANA*, which would not be completed until 1840 (this work would treat primarily Canadian plants and would make itself the 1st flora of North American plants to follow a natural rather than the Linnaean sexual classification system).

CAROLUS LINNAEUS

6. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

1830

➡ By about this point the writings of the naturalist Reverend [Gilbert White](#) had become so popular in England, that what has been termed “the cult of Gilbert White” was beginning to reach even into America. The steady stream of visitors to Selborne, England would eventually include both [Charles Darwin](#) and [John Burroughs](#), and the money that was being made off the sale of such books would eventually draw even the American editor and critic wannabee James Russell Lowell.

📄 The rise of the natural history essay in the latter half of the nineteenth century was an essential legacy of the Selborne cult. It was more than a scientific-literary genre of writing, modeled after White’s pioneering achievement. A constant theme of the nature essayists was the search for a lost pastoral haven, for a home in an inhospitable and threatening world.... [N]atural history was the vehicle that brought readers to the quiet peace of hay barns, orchards, and mountain valleys. These virtuosi of the nature essay were among the best selling writers of their age.



In this regard, here is a quote from Professor Lawrence Buell’s analysis of the manner in which [Henry Thoreau](#) has entered the American canon:

📄 A generation after [Henry Thoreau](#), [John Burroughs](#), America’s leading nature essayist at the turn of the twentieth century, wrote about Thoreau in somewhat the same way eighteenth-century and romantic poets tended to write about [John Milton](#): as the imposing precursor figure whose shadow he must disown or destroy in order to establish his own legitimacy.



MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

REV. GILBERT WHITE

1832



5th edition: [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#) / BY THE LATE [GILBERT WHITE](#); WITH ADDITIONS BY SIR WILLIAM JARDINE. New ed. London: Printed for Whittaker, Treacher & Co. Series title: Constable's miscellany ...; v. 45.⁷

John Veitch and his son James (1792-1863) moved the nursery business to Mount Radford, Exeter, England.

[BOTANIZING](#)



February 2, Thursday: In the year of the publication of the 5th edition,⁸ [Waldo Emerson](#) began [Gilbert White's THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#).

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#), Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

2nd of 2nd M 1832 / Quarterly Meeting - which has been a favoured one. - The public appearances were in rotation first a few Words by Anna D Wing - then Thomas Anthony in a favoured Gospel testimony followed in one & the same tenor by Susan Howland - then after pretty good communications from Danl Clapp & Hannah Dennis The Meeting closed. - & proceeded to buisness. -very considebrable of Moment was before us - Rowland Greenes concern to pay a religious visit to the Yearly Meeting of Virginia & part of that of N Carolina was united with - several return certificates were granted to friends who had visited us in the Ministry some time past - And the appointment of Theophilus Shove by Swansey Moy [Monthly] Meeting to the Station of an Elder was concurred with - there were several acceptable religious communications in the last Meeting & some that probably might as well have been spared. - The Children all went to Meeting from the School. - The Girls were carried in Carraiges. -

[RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS](#)

7. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

8. THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE / BY THE LATE GILBERT WHITE; WITH ADDITIONS BY SIR WILLIAM JARDINE. New ed. London: Printed for Whittaker, Treacher & Co. Series title: Constable's miscellany ...; v. 45.

I do **not** know that this was the edition which [Waldo Emerson](#) was consulting.



REV. GILBERT WHITE

MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

1833



THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE / BY [GILBERT WHITE](#). A NEW ED. / WITH NOTES BY SEVERAL EMINENT AUTHORS, AND AN ENLARGEMENT OF THE NATURALIST'S CALENDAR. London.

[THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#): OBSERVATIONS ON VARIOUS PARTS OF NATURE: AND THE NATURALIST'S CALENDAR / BY THE LATE GILBERT WHITE; WITH NOTES, BY THOMAS BROWN. Edinburgh: Published for the Proprietors by James Chambers.

[THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#): OBSERVATIONS ON VARIOUS PARTS OF NATURE AND THE NATURALIST'S CALENDAR / BY GILBERT WHITE; WITH ADDITIONS BY SIR WILLIAM JARDINE. New ed. / with eighteen engravings by Branston. London: Whittaker, Treacher.⁹

Colley was hired by Bateman to collect orchids in the Demerara region of British Guiana. Sixty species were returned alive from this expedition.

Drummond finally reached Texas after spending his first season collecting mainly in the Ohio Valley. He contracted cholera and barely recovered.

BOTANIZING

1836



[THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#), WITH ITS ANTIQUITIES; NATURALIST'S CALENDAR, & C. A NEW EDITION, WITH NOTES BY EDWARD BLYTH (London: Orr and Smith).¹⁰

GILBERT WHITE

“[[John Claudius](#)] [Loudon](#) and others [wrote in AN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF PLANTS; COMPRISING THE DESCRIPTION, SPECIFIC CHARACTER, CULTURE, HISTORY, APPLICATION IN THE ARTS, AND EVERY OTHER DESIRABLE PARTICULAR RESPECTING ALL THE PLANTS INDIGENOUS, CULTIVATED IN, OR INTRODUCED TO BRITAIN.... London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman] that there are only two species growing in England, which are eaten raw, answering to our eight — to wit, the Bilberry (*V. myrtillus*) and the Blea-berry or Bog Whortleberry (*V. uliginosum*), both of which are found in North America, and the last is the common one on the summit of the White Mountains, but in Great Britain it is found only in the northern part of England and in Scotland. This leaves only one in England to our five which are abundant. Loudon says of the bog whortleberry (*V. uliginosum*), ‘The berries are agreeable but inferior in flavor to those of *Vaccinium myrtillus* [the bilberry]; eaten in large quantities, they occasion giddiness, and a slight headache.’ And of their

9. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

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MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

REV. GILBERT WHITE

common whortleberry (*V. myrtillus*) he says, ‘It is found in every country in Britain, from Cornwall to Caithness, least frequently in the south-eastern countries, and increases in quantity as we advance northward.’ It ‘is an elegant and also a fruit-bearing plant.’ The berries ‘are eaten in tarts or with cream, or made into a jelly, in the northern and western counties of England; and, in other parts of the country they are made into pies and puddings.’ They ‘are very acceptable to children either eaten by themselves, or with milk’ or otherwise. They ‘have an astringent quality.’”

“HUCKLEBERRIES”

The American edition of the Reverend [William Kirby](#)’s ON THE POWER WISDOM AND GOODNESS OF GOD AS MANIFESTED IN THE CREATION OF ANIMALS AND IN THEIR HISTORY HABITS AND INSTINCTS (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard).

ON THE POWER, WISDOM, ...

ON THE POWER, WISDOM, ...

1837



[THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#). BY THE REV. [GILBERT WHITE](#), M.A. WITH THE NATURALIST’S CALENDAR; AND MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS, EXTRACTED FROM HIS PAPERS. A NEW ED.; WITH NOTES, BY EDWARD TURNER BENNETT ... AND OTHERS. London, Printed for J. and A. Arch [etc].¹¹

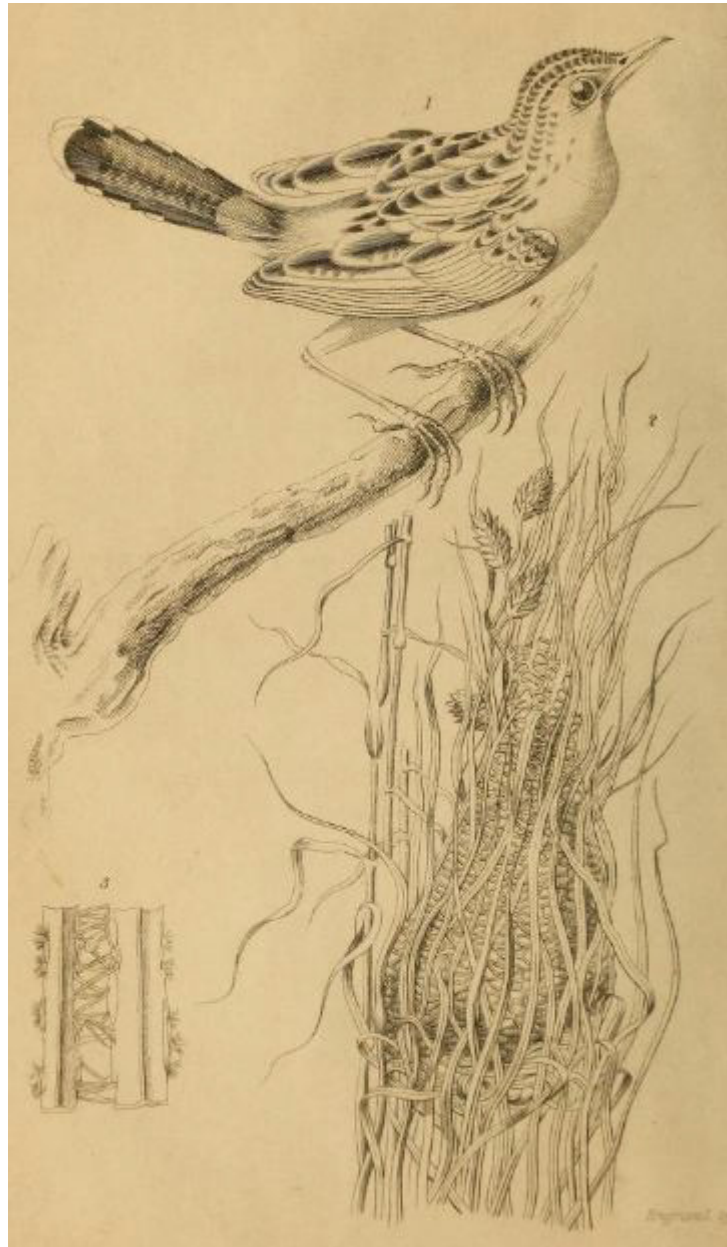
BOTANIZING

John Gould, a taxidermist and leading ornithologist, reported that Charles Darwin had brought back from the Galapagos three species of mockingbird (the very possibility of which, he had already admitted, would undermine the stability of species) and thirteen distinct species of finch. “If ever there was one moment when Darwin was pushed across the border dividing creationism from evolution, this may well have been that moment,” Ronald Clark would mistakenly opine in *THE SURVIVAL OF CHARLES DARWIN: A BIOGRAPHY OF A MAN AND AN IDEA* (NY: Random House, 1984, page 47) — mistakenly because Darwin had in fact already arrived at the concept of development with modification prior to being informed that all those apparently different bird specimens on the islands had developed from mainland finches. Later he would read the famous essay by Thomas Malthus and this would further push him in his understanding of the mechanism of evolution.

11. The Reverend White’s *NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE* is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

REV. GILBERT WHITE

MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE



1841

Professor Sir William Jackson Hooker's BOTANY OF BEECHEY'S VOYAGE TO THE PACIFIC AND BEHRING'S STRAITS (with Dr Arnott).

The Kew Botanical Gardens were transferred to the government, and on the resignation of William Townsend Aiton Sir William became the initial director. Under his leadership the gardens would increase from 10 to 75 acres, add an arboretum of 270 acres, create many new greenhouses, and institute a museum of economic botany.



Gardener's Chronicle began publication, with J. Lindley as horticultural editor.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE, by the Reverend Gilbert White ... NY: Harper and brothers. Series title: Harper & Brothers family library, No. 147.



REV. GILBERT WHITE

MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

1842

Nathaniel B. Ward's ON THE GROWTH OF PLANTS IN CLOSELY GLAZED CASES.

BOTANIZING

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE / BY THE REV. GILBERT WHITE; ARRANGED FOR YOUNG PERSONS. A new ed. with notes. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; NY: Pott Young and Co.¹²

Matthias J. Schleiden, and, in 1847, Theodor Schwann synthesized their own observations along with known information to reach a reasonable understanding of plant and animal cell structure. Their work established the theory that the cell is the basic unit of all life, helping to create the new general study of biology.

PLANTS

1845

According to Walter Benjamin, by this point the *flâneur* had all but disappeared from the city streets of Europe, as having become an overly transparent social fantasy. It had come to be no longer possible, in the anonymous crudity of the city throng, to value one's isolation and anonymity as if were some sort of "prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito," consuming and comprehending the throngs who passed before his eyes as a "botanist on asphalt." Dana Brand, who has found exemplars of the *flâneur* in Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville but, strangely, not in Henry Thoreau, has commented on this as follows:¹³



[T]he flaneur, understood by Benjamin and others as an exclusively and quintessentially Continental phenomenon, was in fact a significant presence in the culture of the United States in the three decades before the Civil War.

12. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

13. My own take on this, obviously, would be that Thoreau should be considered as having been in the *flâneur* tradition, except that just as the *flâneur* of the boulevards considered himself to be an on-asphalt transplant of the botanist of the rural walks, by a doubled reversal Thoreau would have considered himself to be an on-soil transplant of the urban "botanist on asphalt" (this situation was so obvious, however, that he didn't ever feel the need to come right out and say so).

MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

REV. GILBERT WHITE

When Evert Augustus Duyckinck asked [Hawthorne](#) whom he might include in a new series of American books



being published by Wiley & Putnam, Hawthorne suggested [Henry Thoreau](#) but with the same breath damned him to neglect by commenting that “The only way, however, in which he could ever approach the popular mind, would be by writing a book of simple observations of nature, somewhat in the vein of [the Reverend [Gilbert White](#)’s [THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#)].”¹⁴

As for Thoreau, there is one chance in a thousand that he might write a most excellent and readable book; but I should be sorry to take the responsibility, either towards you or him, of stirring him up to write anything.... He is the most unmalleable fellow alive – the most tedious, tiresome, and intolerable – the narrowest and most notional – and yet, true as all this is, he has great qualities of intellect and character. The only way, however, in which he could ever approach the popular mind, would be by writing a book of simple observation of nature, somewhat in the vein of White’s History of Selborne.

1851

[THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#); WITH OBSERVATIONS ON VARIOUS PARTS OF NATURE; AND THE NATURALIST’S CALENDAR. BY THE LATE REV. [GILBERT WHITE](#) ... WITH ADDITIONS AND SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES BY SIR WILLIAM JARDIN ... ED.,... London, H.G. Bohn.¹⁵

The initial volume of what would become a 5-volume set published at London by Van Voorst, ILLUSTRATIONS OF NEW SPECIES OF EXOTIC BUTTERFLIES, SELECTED CHIEFLY FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF W. WILSON SAUNDERS AND [WILLIAM C. HEWITSON](#) (three more volumes would appear between 1862 and 1871, and a final volume in 1878).

14. The Reverend White’s NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

15. The Reverend White’s NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.



REV. GILBERT WHITE

MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

1853

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE: WITH OBSERVATIONS ON VARIOUS PARTS OF NATURE AND THE NATURALIST'S CALENDAR / BY THE LATE REV. GILBERT WHITE; WITH EXTENSIVE ADDITIONS BY THOMAS BROWN. 9th ed. London: J. J. Griffin; Glasgow: R. Griffin.¹⁶

THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE: WITH OBSERVATIONS ON VARIOUS PARTS OF NATURE AND THE NATURALISTS CALENDAR / BY THE LATE REV. GILBERT WHITE ... EDITED, WITH NOTES BY SIR WILLIAM JARDINE. London: Nathaniel Cooke.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE / BY THE LATE REV. GILBERT WHITE; WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES BY THE REV. J. G. WOOD; ILLUSTRATED WITH ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD. London: George Routledge & Co.

Henry Thoreau belatedly consulted this oft-published work.¹⁷

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

17. I do not know which of the many editions Henry perused, or even for sure that it was one of the completer editions. Also, although it has been alleged many times that this had great influence on Thoreau, quite frankly I have been unable myself to verify that Thoreau took this species of nature writing as Waldo Emerson had, with any seriousness.



MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

REV. GILBERT WHITE

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

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

THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE

and [Alexander von Humboldt](#)'s

ASPECTS OF NATURE

— as he understood very well that this was bound suitably to render him unattractive to them.¹⁸

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

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

GOD IN CONCORD by Jane Langton © 1992

38

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

Thoreau, Letter to Harrison Blake,
December 19, 1853

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

ISBN 0-670-84260-5 — PS3562.A515G58

Viking Penguin

Penguin Books USA Inc.

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



REV. GILBERT WHITE

MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

Concord Dec 19th 53

Mr Blake,

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

True, a man cannot lift himself by his own waist-bands, because he cannot get out of himself, but he can expand himself, (which is better, there being no up nor down in nature) and so split his waist-bands, being already within himself.

You speak of doing & being — & the vanity real or apparent of much doing — The suckers, I think it is they, make nests in our river in the spring of more than a cart-load of small stones, amid which to deposit their ova. The other day I opened a muskrats' house. It was made of weeds, five feet broad at base & 3 feet high, and far and low within it was a little cavity, only a foot in diameter where the rat dwelt. It may seem trivial — this piling up of weeds, but so the race of muskrats is preserved. We must heap up a great pile of doing for a small diameter of being. — Is it not imperative on us that we do something — if we only work in a tread-mill? and, indeed, some sort of revolving is necessary to produce a centre & nucleus of being. What exercise is to the body — employment is to the mind & morals. Consider what an amount of drudgery must be performed — how much hum-drum & prosaic labor goes to any work of the least value. There are so many layers of mere white lime in every shell to that thin inner one so beautifully tinted. Let not the shell fish think to build his house of that alone; and pray what are its tints to him? Is it not his smooth close-fitting shirt merely? whose tints are not to him, being in the dark, but only when he is gone or dead, and his shell is heaved up to light a wreck upon the beach, do they appear. With him too it is a song of the shirt — “work — work — work” — & this work is not merely a police in the gross sense, but in the higher sense, a discipline. If it is surely the means to the highest end we know, can any work be humble or disgusting? Will it not rather elevating as a ladder — the means by which we are translated?

How admirably the artist is made to accomplish his self culture by devotion to his art! The woodsawyer through his effort to do his work well, becomes not merely a better woodsawyer, but measurably a better man. Few are the men that can work on their navels — only some Brahmins that I have heard of. To the painter is given some paint & canvass instead. — to the Irishman a bog, — typical of himself. — In a thousand apparently humble ways men busy themselves to make some right take the place of some wrong, — if it is only to make a better paste-blackening — and they are themselves so much the better morally for it.



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

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

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

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

Work – work – work!

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

Dec 22nd

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

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

Might you not find some positive work to do with your back to Church & State – letting your back do all the rejection of them? Can

*you not go upon your pilgrimage, Peter, along the winding mountain path whither you face? A step more will make those funereal church bells over your shoulder sound far and sweet as a natural sound
Work – work – work!*

Why not make a very large mud pie & bake it in the sun! Only put no church nor state into it, nor upset any other pepper -box that way. – Dig out a wood-chuck for that has nothing to do with rotting institutions – Go ahead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Henry D. Thoreau

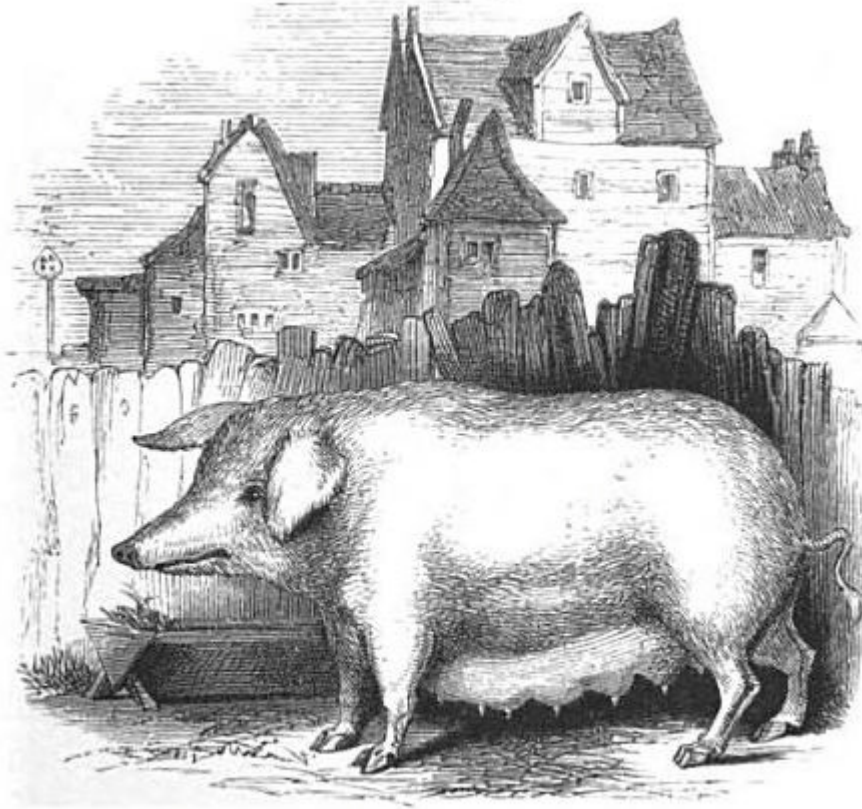
BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON

MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

REV. GILBERT WHITE

1854

[Edward Jesse](#)'s edition of [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#); WITH OBSERVATIONS ON VARIOUS PARTS OF NATURE AND THE NATURALISTS CALENDAR / BY THE LATE REV. [GILBERT WHITE](#); WITH ADDITIONS AND SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES BY SIR WILLIAM JARDINE ... WITH FORTY ENGRAVINGS (London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden), contained a new biography of the Reverend White.¹⁹



THE COMMON OR DOMESTIC HOG. (*Sus scrofa*.)

REVEREND GILBERT WHITE

1856

Thomas Cholmondeley urged [Henry Thoreau](#) to “try a history. How if you could write the sweet, beautiful history of Massachusetts? ... Or take Concord ... Take the spirit of Walton and a spice of White.” Cholmondeley was of course referring to [Izaak Walton](#)'s famously inoffensive fishing book and to the Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s [THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#).

19. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

REV. GILBERT WHITE

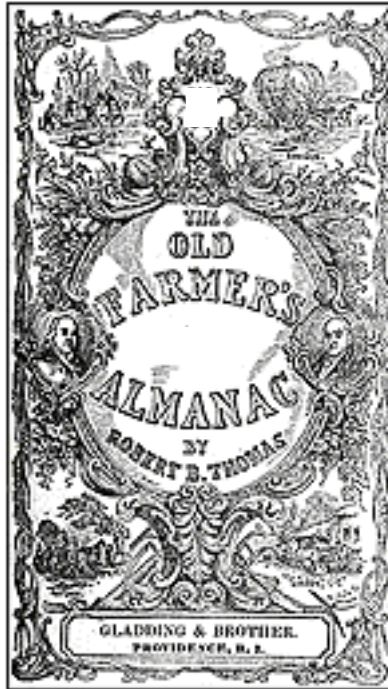
MISS TIMOTHY TORTOISE

1859

April 23, Saturday: The 1st patient was admitted to the Michigan Asylum for the Insane. This facility at Kalamazoo was Michigan's 1st state mental hospital. It had originally been proposed by the governor on February 28, 1848, but would not officially open until August 29, 1859. The facility would later be known as Kalamazoo State Hospital.²⁰

PSYCHOLOGY

Dr. Alfred I. Tauber has explored the significance of [Henry Thoreau](#)'s writing, "A wise man will know what game to play to-day, and play it. We must not be governed by rigid rules, as by an almanac, but let the season rule us. The moods and thoughts of man are revolving just as steadily and incessantly as nature's. Nothing must be postponed. Take time by the forelock. Now or never! You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment" (which he attributes to this day rather than the following one), for an appreciation of his attitude toward time and eternity.



April 23, 1859: Rain, rain.

Hear seringo, by chance the first, and while it rains. The tree sparrows abundant and singing in the yard, but I have not noticed a hyemalis of late. The field sparrow sings in our yard in the rain.

The sidewalk is all strewn with fishworms this forenoon, up and down the street, and many will evidently die in the cold rain. Apparently the rain tempted them to remain on the surface, and then the cold and wet benumbs and drowns them. Some of them are slowly crawling across the paths. What an abundant supply of food for the birds lately arrived! From Gilbert White, and the notes by others to his last edition, I should infer that these were worms which, having been tempted out in unusual numbers by the rain, lost their way back to their holes. They say that they never take their tails out of their holes.

GILBERT WHITE

20. Street, W.R. A CHRONOLOGY OF NOTEWORTHY EVENTS IN AMERICAN [PSYCHOLOGY](#). Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 1994



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In about five quarts of scarlet oak acorns gathered the other day there [WERE] only some three gills that had life in them, or say one in seven. I do not know how many the squirrels had got, but as it was quite near a house, a tree by itself, I think not a great many. The rest were apparently destroyed by worms; so that I should say the worms destroyed before spring three fourths of them. As the grub is already in the acorn, it may be just as well (except for the squirrels) to sow them now as in the fall, whatever you can get.

Clears up at 3 P.M., and a very strong south wind blows.

I go on the water. I frequently observe that the waves do not always run high in proportion to the strength of the wind. The wind seems sometimes to flat them down, perhaps when it blows very hard in gusts, which interrupt a long roll.

What is that small willow on the north side of S. Brown's stump, which apparently began to open two days ago? A large hickory by the wall on the north side (or northeast side) of the hill apparently just blown down, the one I saw the screech owl go into two or three years ago. I think it may have fallen in this very high wind which arose within an hour; at any rate it has fallen since the grass began to spring, for the owl-hole contains a squirrel's nest made of half-green grass somewhat withered, which could only have been found quite recently, and also the limbs have been driven so deep into the ground that I cannot pull them out, which shows that the ground was thawed when it fell; also the squirrel's nest, which is perfectly sheltered, now the tree is fallen, was quite wet through with rain, that of the morning, as I think. This nest, which I suppose was that of a red squirrel, was at the bottom of a large hole some eighteen inches deep and twenty-five feet from the ground, where a large limb had been broken off formerly. An opening on the side had been stopped with twigs as big as a pipe-stem and larger, some of them the hickory twigs quite green and freshly gnawed off with their buds, forming a rude basketwork which kept up and in the grass and rotten wood, four or five handfuls of which, mixed with the rotten wood of the inside, composed the nest. This was the half old and withered and half green grass gathered a few days since about the base of the tree.

1861

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE: WITH OBSERVATIONS ON VARIOUS PARTS OF NATURE, AND THE NATURALIST'S CALENDAR / BY THE LATE REV. GILBERT WHITE; WITH ADDITIONS AND SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES BY SIR WILLIAM JARDINE; edited,... London: Henry G. Bohn.²¹

During this year and the following one, Professor Sir William Jackson Hooker's THE BRITISH FERNS.

21. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

1862

In his 70th year, [Thomas Bell](#) retired to Selborne, where he took a keen interest in the records of the amateur naturalist, the late Reverend [Gilbert White](#).



In this year of [Henry David Thoreau](#)'s demise there was published **yet another** edition of the Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s [THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#), this time entitled [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#). WITH MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES, this time issued in London by a publishing enterprise "Bell and Daldy" (there's always some greedy but unimaginative publisher eager to republish some uncontroversial and non-innovative thingie that has made money for at least 13 previous editions).²²

1877

[Thomas Bell](#) prepared a new edition of the late Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE.

22. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

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1881

[Houghton, Mifflin](#) was touting its editions of

- Charles Dudley Warner's IN THE WILDERNESS which would be found to be "as fresh and fragrant of the woods as anything that Thoreau ever wrote," and
- Frank Bolles's THE LAND OF LINGERING SNOW which revealed "a power of minute observation as remarkable as Thoreau's."

(Meanwhile this corporation was promoting [John Burroughs](#) as "the same breed as [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne, as [John James Audubon](#), as Thoreau" and John Muir as "the Thoreau of the Far West.")



[Houghton, Mifflin](#)'s Horace Scudder began to anthologize their properties in [Henry Thoreau](#)'s literary corpus, in AMERICAN PROSE. They included "Sounds" and "Brute Neighbors" from [WALDEN](#) and "The Highland Light" from [CAPE COD](#), pieces of descriptive portraiture characterized by a noncombative authorial persona. (The comparable materials included from their [Waldo Emerson](#) properties were "Behavior" and "Books.") Also, Thoreau's "A Winter Walk" was positioned as one of their "Emerson Little Classics" volumes. Lawrence

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Buell comments, on page 347 of *THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION*, that

In short, Houghton, Mifflin used its name-droppable authors to market the works of newer authors, who if all went well became name-droppable themselves. The publishers thereby built the image of an emerging canon of literary nature writing with Thoreau at its head.



[Burroughs](#) would attempt to distance himself from this advertising, by pointing out that “There is really little or no resemblance between us,” by pointing out for instance that “Thoreau’s aim is mainly ethical, as much so as Emerson’s is,” by pointing out that “The aim of White of Selbourne [*sic*] was mainly scientific” whereas his own aim “so far as I have any, is entirely artistic. I care little for the merely scientific aspects of things, and nothing for the ethical. I will not preach one word. I will have a pure result, or nothing. I paint the bird, or the trout, or the scene, for its own sake.” “I do not take readers to nature to give them a lesson, but to have a good time.” Characterizing [Henry Thoreau](#), whom he had never met, as having been “grim, uncompromising, almost heartless,” he proclaimed “I don’t owe him any great debt.” Why should he owe him any great debt? – “Thoreau was not a great philosopher, he was not a great naturalist, he was not a great poet . . . His philosophy begins and ends with himself, or is entirely subjective, and is frequently fantastic, and nearly always illogical . . . There are crudities in his writings that make the conscientious literary craftsman shudder; there are mistakes of observation that make the serious naturalist wonder; and there is often an expression of contempt for his fellow countrymen, and the rest of mankind, and their aims in life, that make the judicious grieve.” “To the last, his ornithology was not quite sure, not quite trustworthy.” The problem as he saw it was that Thoreau had for some inane or self-absorbed reason been “more intent on the natural history of his own thought than on that of the bird.” Under guidance by Walt Whitman, he proclaimed, his agenda was merely to “liberate the birds from the scientists.” A man after a publisher’s heart!

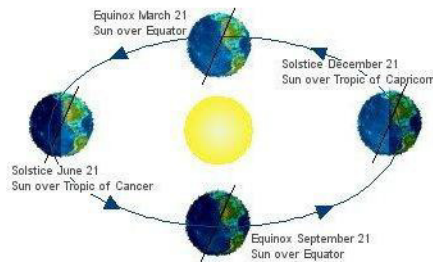


1884

Publication of more of H.G.O. Blake's excerpts from [Henry Thoreau's](#) journal, as SUMMER (Cambridge:

H.G.O. BLAKE'S "SUMMER"

Houghton, Mifflin & Co.). Lawrence Buell has pointed out, on pages 221-32 of THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION, that it is "[n]ot by chance" that Thoreau's journal was first excerpted and published, "a generation after his death, as four season books."



He traces the history of this sort of season book back through Susan Cooper's RURAL HOURS of 1850 and James Thompson's THE SEASONS of 1726-1740 through Virgil's GEORGICS and [China's](#) BOOK OF SONGS and [Hesiod's](#) WORKS AND DAYS even unto "the art of paleolithic cave drawings." — An extended tradition, that. Buell even has the wit to characterize WALDEN here as "the most famous of all American season books," and we observe again the oft-observed phenomenon I characterize as "flattening," as the most excellent standard-bearers are portrayed as merely instances of one or another debased category in a categorization scheme. (A necessary part of the business/busyness of academia is that each effort is to be subsumed to its genre. They've got us surrounded — they're not gonna get away this time!)

Introductory

Those who are interested in Thoreau's life and thoughts — a company already somewhat large, and which, I trust, is becoming larger — a second volume of selections from his Journal is now offered. The same arrangement of dates has been followed, for the most part, as in "Early Spring in Massachusetts," in order to give here a picture of summer as there of spring. Thoreau seems himself to have contemplated some work of this kind, as appears on page 99 of this volume, where he speaks of "a book of the seasons, each page of which should be written in its own



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season and out-of-doors, or in its own locality, wherever it may be." Had his life continued, very likely he would have produced some such work from the materials and suggestions contained in his Journal, and this would have been doubtless far more complete and, beautiful than anything we can now construct from fragmentary passages.

Thoreau has been variously criticized as a naturalist, one writer speaking of him as not by nature an observer, as making no discoveries, as being surprised by phenomena familiar to other people, though he adds that this "is one of his chief charms as a writer," since "everything grows fresh under his hand." Another, whose criticism is generally very favorable, says he was too much occupied with himself, not simple enough to be a good observer, that "he did not love nature for her own sake, "with an unmixed, disinterested love, as [Gilbert White](#) did, for instance," even "cannot say that there was any felicitous "seeing." This last statement seems surprising. Still another is puzzled to explain how a man who was so bent upon self-improvement, who could so little forget himself and the conventions of society, could yet study nature so intelligently. But the very fact that Thoreau "did not love nature for her own sake" "with an unmixed, disinterested love, rather looked beyond and above, whither she points, to 'a far Azore, to

The cape never rounded, nor wandered o'er,'

and was not specially bent upon being an intelligent student of nature, an accurate scientific observer or natural historian, but sometimes lamented that his observation was taking too exclusively that turn; the very fact that he aimed rather at self-improvement, if one pleases to call it so (though this seems a somewhat prosaic account of the matter), that he was bent upon ever exploring his own genius and obeying its most delicate intimations, and in his love of nature found the purest encouragement in that direction, this constitutes to me the great charm of his Journal, as it does of all his writings, as it did also of his life and conversation.

I desire to express here my obligations to Mr. W.E. Channing, and Mr. F.B. Sanborn, of Concord, both of them friends and biographers of Thoreau, for indicating to me the position of places on the accompanying map, most of which are referred to in the Journal.



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1891

S.A. Jones wrote to A.W. Hosmer that the Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s [THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE](#) "shows how fitly Channing called Thoreau the Poet-naturalist. White is a naturalist; Thoreau is the naturalist **plus** the poet, and crowning these is the moralist."²³ What Jones did not add was that this nasty trick of being more than a mere nature writer quite disqualifies an author to sell into the market which emerged in postbellum America subsequent to [Henry Thoreau](#)'s death, for what is known generically as "nature writing," since this is and always has been and always will be in its essence a pandering to fantasies of escapism.



Thoreau's thorniness in print, his paradoxes, and his caustic rejection of the platitudes of his day concerning economics, politics, and nature helped to prevent his work from being widely read. The rise of the popular natural history essay and the eventual rejection of genteel sensibility in the late nineteenth century -a belief in social Darwinism and in a benign, divinely fated progress, led by professional scientists in their laboratories- came about not because of Thoreau but because the more Americans saw the devastation of forests and wildlife hitherto considered inexhaustible, the more nostalgic they began to feel for what historian Donald Worster has called "a lost pastoral haven." Unlike Thoreau's work, popular nature writing through the turn of the century by and large avoided attacking the excesses of the Gilded Age and concentrated instead on escapism. After the Civil War, American readers began to want "the literature of rest and delight," stories set in peaceful, idyllic scenes from which flowed "streams of healing for the discomforts of civilizations." And because readers found little that was restful in Thoreau, his reputation -meager as it was at the time of his death- declined even as nature writing of a more popular sort began to proliferate. Reviewed in the press, his work was called "eccentric," "idiosyncratic," and "morbid."

23. The reference is to Channing's 1873 THOREAU, THE POET-NATURALIST.



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1899

[Houghton, Mifflin](#) was promoting [John Burroughs](#) as “the same breed as [Gilbert White](#) of Selborne, as [John James Audubon](#), as [Henry Thoreau](#)” and John Muir as “the [Henry Thoreau](#) of the Far West.” Lawrence Buell comments, on page 347 of *THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION*, that:

In short, Houghton, Mifflin used its name-droppable authors to market the works of newer authors, who if all went well became name-droppable themselves. The publishers thereby built the image of an emerging canon of literary nature writing with Thoreau at its head.





1900

Many of the holograph letters which the Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s had written to the gentleman naturalist Daines Barrington and to the zoologist Thomas Pennant over a period of two decades in the late 18th Century, which the Reverend had then edited into his [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#), and which had over the course of time made their way into the British Library, were transcribed and published in an arrangement by R. Bowdler Sharpe titled GILBERT WHITE'S SELBORNE.²⁴

The British owned Pacific Islands Company purchased rights to all minerals on 3-mile- long Ocean Island for £50 a year. Within 80 years 20,000,000 tons of phosphate for agricultural fertilizer (shipped to Australia and New Zealand for crops exported mainly to Britain) were extracted from the island, obliterating the original tropical vegetation and destroying the homeland of the 2,000 native islanders. The same fate befell neighboring Nauru (8.5 square miles) and its original 1,400 inhabitants.

The language of birds is very ancient, and, like other ancient modes of speech, very elliptical: little is said, but much is meant and understood.

— Gilbert White's THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, as quoted on page 417 of William Least Heat-Moon's PrairieEarth (a deep map) [Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991].

Ethanol Consumption in Annual Gallons per US Adult

1790	5.8
1830	7.1
1840	3.1
1860	2.1
1890	2.1
1900	2.1
1920	0.9
1940	1.56
1980	2.76



24. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.



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1911

A NATURE CALENDAR. Edited and with an introduction by Wilfred Mark Webb.
London, Selborne Society.

GILBERT WHITE

1938

THE WRITINGS OF [Gilbert White](#) OF SELBORNE, selected and edited by H.J. Massingham; with wood-
engravings by Eric Ravilious. London, The Nonesuch Press.²⁵

[Blomquist, H.L.](#) "Peat mosses of the southeastern States." [Jour. Elisha Mitchell Sci. Soc.](#) 54: 1-21.
Also, "The [North Carolina](#) Academy of Science." [Science, New Series](#) 88 (2272): 59-60.

Szent-Gyögyi withdrew his recent suggestion that "citrin" (which had come to be understood to consist of various flavonoids), which was present along with vitamin C in citrus peels, could help maintain small blood vessels. These bioflavonoids were termed Vitamin P, and would become the subject of much discussion (the US Food and Drug Administration has since concluded that bioflavonoids are neither vitamins nor of nutritional value).

PLANTS

1980

At an auction, the Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s original holograph of his book manuscript [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#), which he had created from his copies of letters he had written to the gentleman naturalist Daines Barrington and to the zoologist Thomas Pennant over a period of two decades, were purchased by The Oates Memorial Library and Museum.²⁶

The language of birds is very ancient, and, like other ancient modes of speech, very elliptical: little is said, but much is meant and understood.

— Gilbert White's THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, as quoted on page 417 of William Least Heat-Moon's [PrairyErth \(a deep map\)](#) [Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991].

25. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.

26. The Reverend White's NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE is only the 4th most reprinted book in the English language.



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1982

[Gilbert White](#)'s YEAR: PASSAGES FROM THE GARDEN KALENDAR & THE NATURALIST'S JOURNAL / SELECTED BY JOHN COMMANDER; INTRODUCTION BY RICHARD MABEY. Oxford, NY: Oxford UP.

The 1st genetically engineered crop was developed at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. (By 1994 the Flavr-Savr tomato would become the 1st such plant approved for commercial marketing. The Flavr-Savr tomato was designed for slow fruit ripening and increased shop life.)

PLANTS

1985

Walter Samuel Scott's [WHITE](#) OF SELBORNE (Liss, Hampshire, England: Nimrod Book Services).

1986

Richard Mabey's [GILBERT WHITE](#): A BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR OF THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE (London: Century).



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1991

The Reverend [Gilbert White](#)'s [THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE](#) was referenced by William Least Heat-Moon:²⁷

All nature is so full, that the district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined.

– [Gilbert White](#)'s THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, as quoted on page 4 of William Least Heat-Moon's PRAIRYERTH (A DEEP MAP) [Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991].

The language of birds is very ancient, and, like other ancient modes of speech, very elliptical: little is said, but much is meant and understood.

– [Gilbert White](#)'s THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE, as quoted on page 417 of William Least Heat-Moon's PrairyErth (a deep map) [Boston MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1991].

An Iroquois spokesperson, in Geneva for a UN conference on the environment, quoted Headman Seattle (Seeth of the Susquamish)'s (Chief Seattle's) alleged speech as “ancient wisdom”

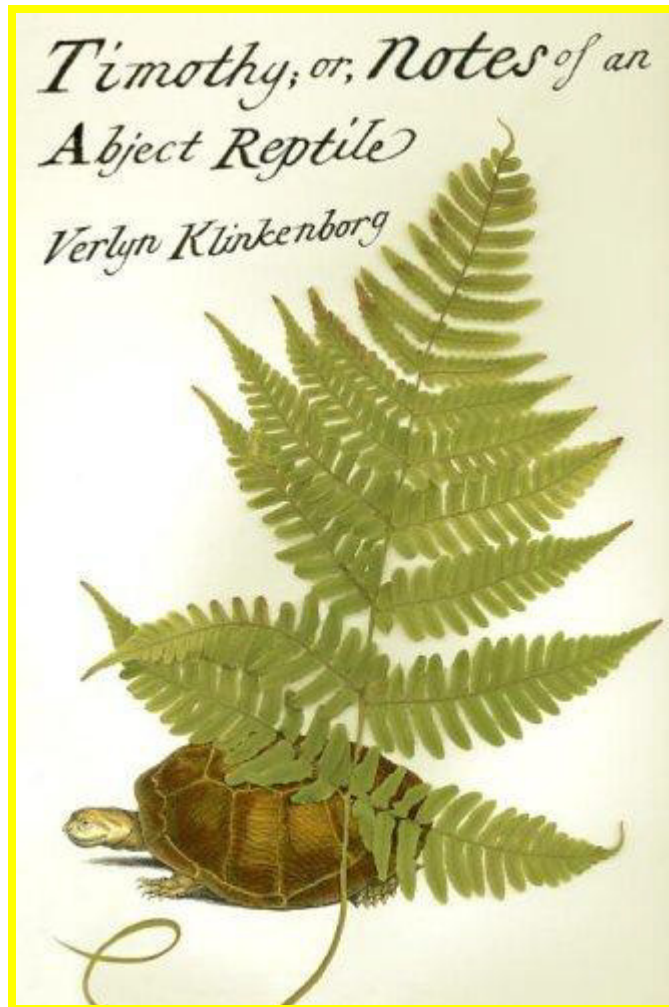
27. One wonders why this popular author chose to quote this generality, rendering it even more general by deletion of a clause, rather than the much more pertinent remark that the Reverend [Gilbert White](#) made to Daines Barrington in his Letter VII of October 8, 1770, “Men that undertake only one district are much more likely to advance natural knowledge than those that grasp at more than they can possibly be acquainted with: every kingdom, every province, should have its own monographer.” The full and correct quotation from letter XX of October 8, 1768 should have been “It is, I find, in zoology as it is in botany: all nature is so full, that that district produces the greatest variety which is the most examined.” I will refrain from commenting upon quotations which omit clauses and alter words, and instead ask you to bear in mind that “examination” in this quote may not have meant to the Reverend then precisely what it would indicate now to us. “Examination” in zoology and “examination” in botany differed slightly in the Reverend White's neck of the woods. Botany was being examined by white men wandering around with trowels and baskets; zoology by white men wandering around with guns and sacks. You need to examine the letters, to get the taste of this: to discover an “extraordinary provision of nature” was in this period to kill it and take it home as “a new instance of the wisdom of God in the creation” (quoting further from the same letter). The usual euphemism for “white men wandering around with guns and sacks” was “gentlemen.”

and as “spiritual perspective.”



2006

February 7: Verlyn Klinkenborg of the New York Times, who in 1993 provided the introduction for the Everyman's Library edition of Thoreau's WALDEN, released a new book titled TIMOTHY; OR, NOTES OF AN ABJECT REPTILE. The book is about the Reverend [Gilbert White](#) of Selbourne but is told from the point of view of his



garden tortoise, whom he had named "Timothy" (the shell of this famous female tortoise is now at the British

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Museum of Natural History).



Timothy

Gilbert



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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: May 30, 2013

ARRGH AUTOMATED RESearch REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



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



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

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

THE NATURAL HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE

THE ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE