

SOME SELECT SEA SERPENT SIGHTINGS



"I know histhry isn't throe, Hinnissy, because it ain't like what I see ivry day in Halsted Street. If any wan comes along with a histhry iv Greece or Rome that'll show me th' people fightin', gettin' dhrunk, makin' love, gettin' married, owin' th' grocery man an' bein' without hard coal, I'll believe they was a Greece or Rome, but not befur."

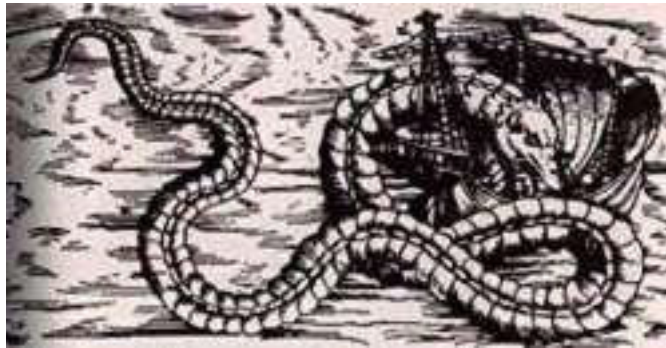
— Dunne, Finley Peter,
OBSERVATIONS BY MR. DOOLEY,
New York, 1902



1555

[Conrad Gesner](#)'s *MITHRIDATES DE DIFFERENTIS LINGUIS*, an account of about 130 known languages providing the Lord's Prayer in 22 of them. This author also provided a narrative *DESCRIPTIO MONTIS FRACTI SIVE MONTIS PILATI* about his excursion to the Gnepfstein, which at an exceedingly impressive elevation of 1,920 meters is the smallest prominence of the Pilatus chain of mountains.

Olaus Magnus, the exiled Catholic archbishop of Uppsala, Sweden, alleged that off the coast of Norway sailors had often reported having seen a "Serpent ... of vast magnitude, namely 200 feet long, and moreover 20 foot thick." He reported that the sailors claimed "he puts up his head on high like a pillar."



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1638

October: [John Josselyn](#), Gent. arrived at his brother Henry's home in Scarborough,¹ where he would abide for some 15 months. While walking in the woods he spied what he presumed to be a kind of fruit:

chanc't to spy a fruit as I thought like a pine Apple, plated with scales. It was as big as the crown of a Woman's hat.... (I) made bold to step unto it with an intent to have gathered it ... but no sooner had (I) touched it but hundreds of Wasps [burst out.]... At last I cleared myself of them, being stung only on the lip; and glad I was that I 'scaped so well.

His lip "swelled so extreemly" that by the time he had stumbled home "They hardly knew me but by my Garments." When he had recovered, he would give further thought to the strange gray nest: "Of what matter it's made no man knows, wax it is not, neither will it melt nor fry, but will take fire suddenly like Tender." What he didn't realize was that the nest was pulp paper made from wood fiber by the paper-making Hornet, and had he succeeded in mastering this technical process, he could have revolutionized the paper-making industry of his age, based as it was at the time on the iffy supply of [cotton](#) and linen rags, and transformed himself from a comfortable into an extremely rich man.²

Josselyn was bemused by the story of the "Mere-man" seen by one "Mr. Mitton" out in Casco-Bay ... "Who laying his hands on the side of the Canow had one of them chopt off with a hatchet, which was in all respects like the hand of a man, the Triton presently sunk, dying the water with his purple blood, and was not more seen." One can almost see him, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, scribbling away before the winking fishermen. "These with many other tales they told me" he admits, "The credit whereof I will neither impeach nor impune, but will satisfy myself with — 'There are many strange things in the world than are to be seen between London and Maidenstone'."

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Jocelyn was the first to mention the famed sea-serpent of Nahant and of Egg Rock, in this year. He wrote that the serpent had been observed "quoiled up on a rock at Cape Ann." (This apparition would be repeatedly seen in Gloucester Bay in August 1817, and occasionally also in Nahant Bay, by hundreds of observers. One skipper would allege soberly that it was "longer than the main-mast of a seventy-four." Another would compare its length to the height of the steeple of the Gloucester meeting-house.)

1. His "Beloved Brother" was agent for the heirs of [Sir Ferdinando Gorges](#) and [Captain John Mason](#), the proprietors of old Maine and New Hampshire and would rise to be the deputy governor of the province. The town is at the mouth of the Nonesuch River in what is now Maine. A suburb of Portland, it originated as "Black Point," Thomas Cammock's settlement, which combined in 1658 with Blue Point and with Stratton's Islands to form a community modeling itself upon the Scarborough that is a resort on the North Sea coast of England.

2. [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#) would make use of this incident in his THE NEW ENGLAND TRAGEDIES. In the verse play "John Endicott" the innkeeper Samuel Cole would be made to exclaim:

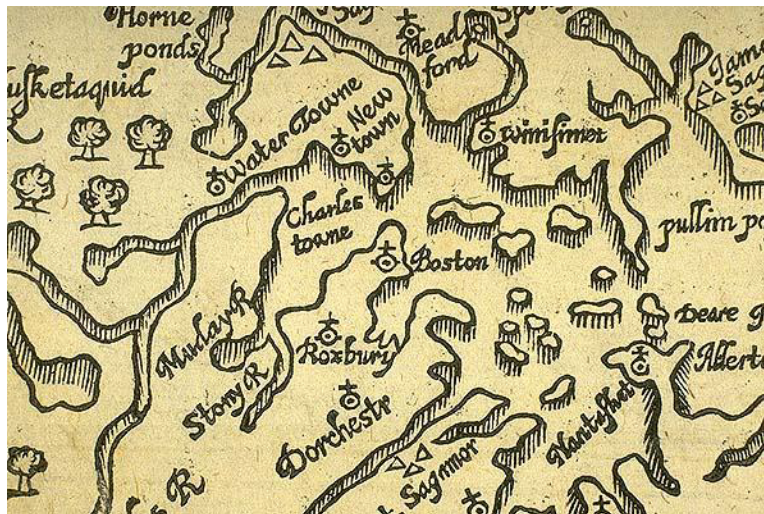
I feel like Master Josselyn when he found
The hornets' nest, and thought it some strange fruit,
Until the seeds came out, and then he dropped it.

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1639

March: Governor John Winthrop recorded in his journal that a number of reputable citizens had reported seeing mysterious lights above Boston Harbor.



JOHN WINTHROP JOURNAL

In later years [John Josselyn](#) would be told by residents of the Massachusetts colony of

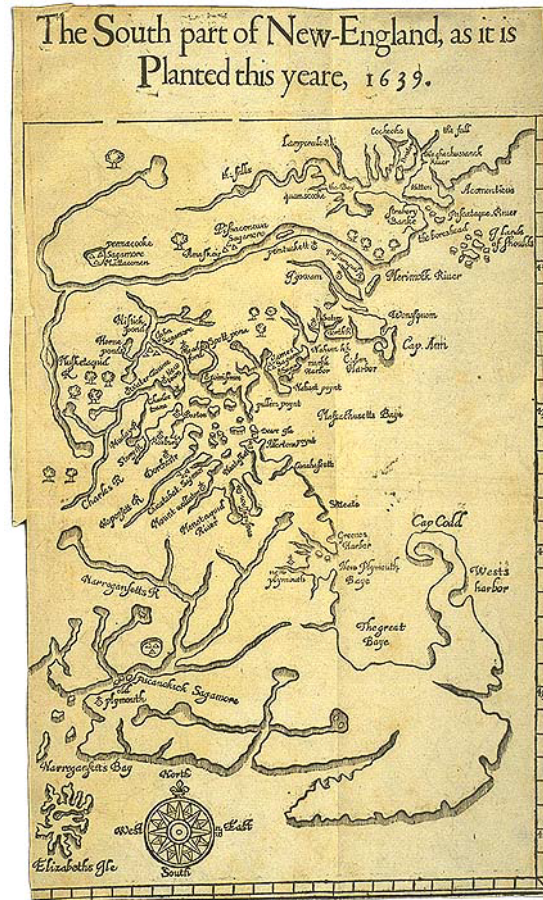
...a *sea-serpent* or snake, that lay quailed up like a Cable upon a Rock at Cape-Ann....

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They would tell him this, admittedly, after they had lifted a few convivial drinks.

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This sort of chitchat would have been, of course, anathema to John Ponce of Cork, the man who was in this Year of Our Lord 1639 creating the formula “Entities should not be multiplied...” to which our philosophers traditionally assign the rubric “Occam’s Razor,” and which we incorrectly attribute to William of Occam. The recommendation for parsimony in explanation would be carried forward in 1812, in Tennemann’s *GRUNDRISS DER GESCHICHTE DER PHILOSOPHIE*, so that later it would make its way into Ueberweg’s *HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY*. The descriptive term “Occam’s Razor” would apparently be a coinage in 1836-1837 by Sir William Hamilton, the scholar who would also be responsible for changing the label “Law of Frugality” into “Law of Parsimony” (spelled thus).

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1641

September 5: A sea serpent was being reported as having beached at Lynn following a hurricane, and coiled itself upon a rock. Obediah Turner recorded in his diary that he had been impressed by the testimony of the witnesses:
Ye witnesses being credible, and it would be of no account to them
to tell an untrue tale.



Turner commented that native Americans also told such stories of monsters, though they were known to be given to declaring wonderful things, and it pleaseth them to make ye white man stare. But making all discount, I do believe that a wonderful monster in form of a serpent doth visit these waters. And my prayer to God is it be not ye serpent spoken of in holy scripture that tempted our great mother Eve.

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1666

Adam Olschlager reported sightings of a large sea serpent “which seen from afar, had the thickness of a wine barrel, and 25 windings.” He added that his informants saw such serpents at the surface “only in calm weather and at certain times.”

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1674

The Royal Society having given favorable notice to his previous effort *NEW-ENGLANDS RARITIES DISCOVERED: IN BIRDS, BEASTS, FISHES, SERPENTS, AND PLANTS OF THAT COUNTRY...*, spicy poem notwithstanding, [John Josselyn](#), Gent. put out an addendum *AN ACCOUNT OF TWO VOYAGES TO NEW-ENGLAND* (“The Porcupine I have treated of, only this I forgot to acquaint you with, that they lay Eggs, and are good meat.”):

THE MAINE WOODS: Tahmunt thought that the whites called it Moosehead Lake, because Mount Kineo, which commands it, is shaped like a moose’s head, and that Moose River was so called “because the mountain points right across the lake to its mouth.” John Josselyn, writing about 1673, says, “Twelve miles from Casco Bay, and passable for men and horses, is a lake, called by the Indians Sebug. On the brink thereof, at one end, is the famous rock, shaped like a moose deer or helk, diaphanous, and called the Moose Rock.” He appears to have confounded Sebamook with Sebago, which is nearer, but has no “diaphanous” rock on its shore.

JOHN JOSSELYN

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This book emphasized the importance to farming of many New England plants.

BOTANIZING

The reception of this 2d book and its 1675 reprinting seems not to have been much impacted by its author's flip –and often marvelous– ridiculing of the Puritans. Twice while in New-England he had been disciplined for attempting to ignore them, and now he was responding with a racist slur:

...of a Linsie-woolsie disposition, of several professions in religion, all alike Aethopians white in the teeth only....

This racist slur to the contrary notwithstanding, Josselyn faults the European intrusives for their behavior toward the indigenous Americans, adopting for himself a paternalistic attitude of concern:

Thus instead of bringing of them to the knowledge of Christianitie, we have taught them to commit the beastly and crying sins of our Nation, for a little profit.

A staunch Royalist out of step with theocracy in both New World and Old, Josselyn could seldom resist an opportunity for raillery. Addressing the Fathers, he says of his tales:

I have taken some pains in recollecting of them to memory, and fetting of them down for their benefit from whence I may expect thanks; but I believe my reward will be according to Ben Johnson's proverbs,

"Whittle to a Jade and he will pay you with a fart,
Claw a Churl by the britch and he will fhite
in your fift!"

Small wonder that this bachelor of nature would in a later era find a strong admirer in another robust sailer against the current, [Henry Thoreau](#):

What a strong and healthy but reckless, hit or miss style had some of these early writers of New England like Josselyn....

Thoreau would marvel, when he had borrowed Josselyn's books from [Harvard Library](#) in 1851 and 1854, that

they spoke with a relish, smacking their lips like a coach-whip, caring more to speak heartily than scientifically true.... They were not to be caught napping....

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Thoreau recognized a kindred spirit in “Old Jossely,” who hewed his words

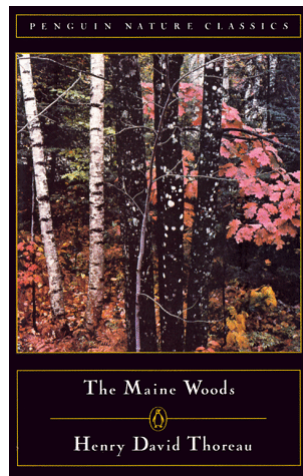
tough, like hardened things, the sinews of a deer,
or the roots of the pine.

Nature, Thoreau would declare in [A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS](#), was served only by such lines written

as if its author, had he held a plow instead of a pen,
could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end.

Thoreau would return again to praise the “strong new soil” that spoke through Josselyn’s rich old prose in [The Atlantic](#)’s “Chesuncook” (1858) and in the posthumous [THE MAINE WOODS](#) (1864). Both writers shared a style thick with feral metaphors, shaping

sentences that are verduous and blooming as evergreen
and flowers, because they are rooted in fact and
experience.



It was in this 2d book that [John Josselyn](#) reported that residents of the Massachusetts colony had in 1639 made claims to him of

...a *sea-serpent* or snake, that lay quoiled up like a
Cable upon a Rock at *Cape-Ann*....

— a report which constitutes the 1st know mention of American sea serpents in print.

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Appended to this book was a chronology of sorts, of the “observations of America” prior to this one.

JOHN JOSSELYN’S TAKE ON HISTORY



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1734

The Reverend Hans Egede saw a “monster” rise from the water off the coast of Greenland. He estimated it at 100 feet in length.

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1779

The American gunship *Protector* engaged a large serpent in Penobscot Bay, lying at the surface of the water quite motionless. After Captain John Foster Williams had observed the creature with glasses for some time, he dispatched Ensign Edward Preble with a large boat to attempt to destroy it, or at least get as near it as he could. As this craft approached, the serpent raised its head about ten feet out of the water and looked about, and began to move slowly away. The seamen went in pursuit, 12 oars being pulled with all possible force, and discharged their swivel gun loaded with bullets. James Fenimore Cooper would report, in his biography of Preble, that “The discharge produced no other effect than to quicken the speed of the monster, which soon ran the boat out of sight.”

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1780

May: Captain George Little of the frigate *Boston* reported that at sunrise, while the ship was anchored in Round Pond in Broad Bay, off the coast of Maine, he observed “a huge Serpent, or monster, coming down the Bay, on the surface of the water” and ordered the ship’s cutter to be manned and armed. He went himself with this boat, and approached within a hundred feet of the serpent, which then suddenly dove. Although the creature bore in every other characteristic than size the appearance of a common black snake, it “was not less than from 45 to 50 feet in length; the largest diameter of his body, I should judge, 15 inches; his head nearly the size of that of a man, which he carried four or five feet above the water.”



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1817



August 12, Tuesday, 13, Wednesday, and 14, Thursday: Solomon Allen III observed, about 150 yards away, “a strange marine animal, that I believe to be a serpent, in the harbor in ... Gloucester. I should judge him to be between eighty and ninety feet in length, and about the size of a half barrel.... His head formed something like the head of a rattlesnake, but nearly as large as the head of a horse. When he moved on the surface of the water, his motion was slow, at times playing about in circles, and sometimes moving nearly straight forward. When he disappeared, he sunk apparently down.”

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Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

5th day 14th of 8 M / Silent Meeting, to me a hard time & if all faired as I did there was indeed neither dew rain or fields of offering. – I labor’d but was unable to get to the Source from

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whence much help is to be derived -But After I came out, life revived, & I was not without hope that tho' barrenness was my portion, Yet the labor that I experienced was not without its use. -

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



August 19, Tuesday: At the meeting of the Linnean Society of New England, in Boston, a panel of three experts was assembled, a judge, a physician, and a naturalist, to obtain affidavits from all those claiming to have sighted the Cape Ann sea serpent. Reports of such sightings would continue, almost daily, through the month. (No record exists of their having lifted blankets in any of the cradles of [Concord](#).) The report of the Linnaean Society included the information that the form of life had been seen

to resemble a serpent in its general form and motions, to be of immense size, and to move with wonderful rapidity; to appear on the surface of the water only in calm and bright weather; and to seem to be jointed or like a number of buoys or casks following each other in line.

It was noted that when approached, it sank rather than dived, that it was of a dark brown color, that it had a smooth exterior, and that it was somewhere between 70 and 120 feet in length. The composite picture to emerge from this series of affidavits, which would include witnesses in 1818 and 1819, would be that of a huge snakelike creature that was dark on top but lighter on its underside. Since this creature was reported to be moving by vertical undulations whereas the motion of reptiles is a lateral undulation, it was a strange creature in more than its size. When a farmer would find, in a field just off Cape Ann, a three-foot creature with a series of bumps along its back, the Linnean Society would presume that this specimen was a just-hatched sea serpent, and it would be necessary for Alexandre Lesueur to demonstrate it to be merely a deformed mature black snake. The Linnean Society of New England would award this apparition the designation *Scoliophis Atlanticus*. Eventually some [Harvard College](#) undergrads would award the sea serpent an honorary degree, in which it would find itself cited as *Magnus Serpens Maris suppositus, aut porpoises aut horse-mackerel grex*.³

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The marvelous serpent would not resurface in Boston Harbor until 1871.

Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

3rd day 8 M 19 1817 / This Afternoon rec'd a letter from Ann Yarnell of Philadelphia- respecting Benjn Doyen by which I entertain some suspicions of his being a true man, it appears that he has given her a different account from that which he gave us - but a little time must elapse before a correct

3. Later in his life, in 1858, [Henry Thoreau](#) would record some eye-witness testimony of this phenomenal apparition, although he carefully qualified the source of the testimony as being a person who was also a believer in spiritualism:



January 14, 1858: Mr. Buffum says that in 1817 or 1819 he saw the sea-serpent at Swampscott, and so did several hundred others. He was to be seen off and on for some time. There were many people on the beach the first time, in carriages partly in the water, and the serpent came so near that they, thinking that he might come ashore, involuntarily turned their horses to the shores with a general consent, and this movement caused him to shear off also. The road from Boston was lined with people directly, coming to see the monster. Prince came with his spy-glass, saw, and printed his account of him. Buffum says he has seen him twenty times, once alone, from the rocks at Little Nahant, when he passed along close to the shore just beneath the surface, and within fifty or sixty feet of him, so that he could have touched him with a very long pole, if he had dared to. Buffum is about sixty, and it should be said, as affecting the value of his evidence, that he is a firm believer in spiritualism.



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judgement can be formed-

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1819



June 6, Sunday: The North American Review mentioned that “a whole race of people has become nearly extinct,” an “unfortunate people, whose fate it has been, like the morning dew, insensibly and mysteriously to disappear, before the lights of civilization and christianity.” “That they should become extinct is inevitable,” the journal explained but “this cannot excuse us for pressing upon them with indecent haste. If they must perish, let them die a natural, and not a violent death.”⁴

Hawkins Wheeler saw a sea serpent, and reported that it “was entirely black; the head, which perfectly resembled a snake’s, was elevated from four to seven feet above the surface of the water, and his back appeared to be composed of bunches or humps, apparently about as large as, or a little larger than, a half barrel; I think I saw as many as ten or twelve.... I considered them to be caused by the undulatory motion of the animal — the tail was not visible, but from the head to the last hump that could be seen, was, I should judge, 50 feet.”

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Friend Stephen Wanton Gould wrote in his journal:

*1st day 6th of 6th M / Our Meeting this morning was large & tho’ to me a season of some barraness, yet others no doubt were favord with life. - Jonathon Dennis - D Buffum & Hannah Dennis were in succession engaged to bear testimony. - In the Afternoon we were silent
With Br D Rodman took tea at Jona Dennis.*

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



August 14, Saturday: Apparently, according to a report which appeared in the American Journal of Science, between 8PM and 9PM on the previous evening two women of Amherst MA had observed “a brilliant white light resembling burnished silver” which they supposed to descend slowly from the sky as a ball onto their front yard. At one point this light was bright enough for them to see it reflect upon or cast a shadow against a nearby wall. The next morning, according to a report from a Professor Rufus Graves, the man of the house, an Erastus Dewey, noted that there was in his yard, some 20 feet from the doorstep, a “circular form, resembling a sauce or salad dish bottom upwards, about eight inches in diameter and one in thickness, of a bright buff color, with a fine nap upon it similar to that on milled cloth.... On removing the villous coat, a buff colored pulpy substance of the consistency of good soft soap, of an offensive, suffocating smell appeared; and on a near approach to it, or when immediately over it, the smell became almost insupportable, producing nausea and dizziness. A few minutes exposure to the atmosphere changed the buff into a livid color resembling venous blood. It was observed to attract moisture very rapidly from the air. A half-pint tumbler was nearly half filled with the substance. It soon began to liquefy and form a mucilaginous substance of the consistence, color, and feeling of starch when prepared for domestic use.” Whatever this material was, within two or three days it would evaporate, leaving only some sort of dark-colored residue upon the sides and bottom of that tumbler. It would be noted that when they then rubbed some of this dried residue between their fingers, it became a fine,

4. Unsigned review of the Reverend Heckewelder’s AN ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY, MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE INDIANS NATIONS WHO ONCE INHABITED PENNSYLVANIA..., in North American Review, 6 (June 1819) 156, 170.



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odorless ash.

SKY EVENT

Samuel Cabot reported his attention to have suddenly been arrested by an object emerging from the sea about 100 to 150 yards from him, "which gave to my mind at the first glance the idea of a horse's head.... I perceived at a short distance eight or ten regular bunches or protuberances, and at a short interval three or four more.... The Head ... was serpent shaped it was elevated about two feet from the water ... he could not be less than eighty feet long."

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After some passage of time, Friend [Moses Brown](#) wrote again to Sophronia N.J. Forster of Weare, New Hampshire, expressing continued interest in her teaching at Yearly Meeting School.

In [Newport, Rhode Island](#), Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) had a conversation with a local [Jew](#) and was reassured about the superiority of [Quakerism](#):

7th day 14th of 8 M / Rec'd two letters from Wm Rickman in N York one of them mentioned that Wm Foster of England had obtained a Certificate from Friends there to pay a religious visit to friends in this Country & expected to embark next spring – This Afternoon my mind was struck in conversation with Moses Lopez a Jew, by a remark of his he was speaking of religion & giving some of his views on the subject & observed that was he to change his religion he should turn [Quaker](#) & remarked that there were some of our manners & customs that he approved beyond others & even some of his own – he Said he was once in [New Bedford](#) & was invited to dine at the house of Our friend Sam Rodman, who provided a good Salt Fish dinner for him & when they set down to the table he observed a profound silence which seemed very strange to him & was at an entire loss what to think or how to account for it but after a few moments, Socobility was resumed & things went on in their usual order, at tea he remarked the same pause, when, (to use his own expressions) he considered it must be some of our ceremonies, & he could but approve of it, being much more solemn in its effects than a prayer rabbled over with apparant feeling or sensibility, he remarked that it was their practice to say a short prayer after dinner, but he says I like Your mode best being more Solemn. now I have no doubt but this poor son of Israel was Struck with real religious feelings on the occasion, which from the dark state of his mind he would not fully comprehend. – This circumstance may tend to confirm Friends of the necessity of such pratices. – we know not the effects of them, if attended too with reverance they may reach the hearts of some, when we are not aware of it ourselves,

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& perhaps most effectively when nothing may be uttered



RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

1826



June 16, Friday: On orders of Sultan Mahmud II, the [Janissaries](#), the elite of the Ottoman army, were killed in their barracks by Spahis (cavalry).

EGYPTIANS

Great Britain recognized the independence of Mexico.

ENGLISH EVENTS OF 1826

The captain of the American ship *Silas Richards* off Nova Scotia, at St. George's Bank, and one of the passengers, an Englishman named William Warburton, witnessed an enormous, many-humped snakelike creature, slowly approaching the ship.

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1837

Hermann Schlegel, a German zoologist, proposed that what people were seeing, when they thought they were seeing a sea serpent, would be merely a row of porpoises.

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Now let's bring two categories together, the category of (1) things that people think they are seeing, and the category of (2) glacial erratic boulders: in this year the Danish scholar Carl Rafn read Roman numerals and the name "Thorfinn Karlsefni" in the limestone surface of the glacial erratic known as the [Dighton Rock](#) on the tidewaters of the Taunton River at Berkley, Massachusetts, ten miles north of the city of Fall River.

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT

Thorfinn supposedly sailed to America from Greenland in the year 1010. This idea that the rock was a message from the Viking Americans would prompt the 19th-century violinist Ole Bull to purchase it for donation to the Royal Society of Copenhagen. Olaf Strandhold would pretend to translate the inscription as a Norse rune meaning "THYGSTHI WAS BURIED ON THE SHORE YEAR 1049AD." When scholars would begin to mock the idea of Norse origin, the Royal Society would have the rock shipped back to its home, to be cared for by the Old Colony Historical Society of Taunton, which has since presented it to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Along the way the rock has been moved from its original position, where it had been subject to daily inundation by tides, to a small park on higher ground, where it has been provided with an adjoining display insisting that the round-headed anthropomorphs appearing on its face are part of the Portuguese coat of arms, and that the whole inscription is a message from Miguel Cortereal, a Portuguese explorer. This finding is per Edmund Burke Delabarre of Brown University, a psychology professor who had a home nearby, who in his book *DIGHTON ROCK* has interpreted a portion of the inscription as: "Miguel Cortereal by will of God, here Chief of the Indians," and professes that on December 2, 1918 he was first able to convince himself that he could make out on the rock the date 1511 plus a Portuguese coat-of-arms. Here is what he made out to be very plainly the Portuguese coat-of-arms, represented we understand about as accurately as one can represent a coat of arms by pounding with one rock upon another rock:



Indeed, this psych prof discovered when he hit the history books, the claim was made that in the Year of Our Lord 1501 there was a Miguel Cortereal, Portuguese navigator, who disappeared along with his crew while sailing the Atlantic in search of his explorer brother Gaspar Cortereal, who had himself, in the previous year, disappeared, along with his three ships and their crews. (Joao Vas Cortereal, the father of Miguel and Gaspar, he found by further such reading, was believed by some to have made his way to "the land of the cod," presumably the seamounts off the coast of Newfoundland, in the Year of Our Lord 1472.) Not all historians, it must be emphasized, agree with Professor Delabarre's interpretations of this rock near his home.

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"Dighton Rock is like the rocks you see along the highways, filled with graffiti," says Jim Whitall. "It's where everyone wanted to leave a message, and it's the first stone in America that anyone paid any attention to. It was a bulletin-board for ancients, Native Americans, and colonials alike." The rock with the mysterious hieroglyphs was moved to dry land a few years ago by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and a building was built around it to preserve the inscriptions. Winter ice and constant submergence at high tide under the Taunton River began obliterating some of the older markings. Also, in case one of the great scholars who deciphered the stone over the past 300 plus years is right, it's best to preserve what may be a most important piece of history. Even if the hodgepodge of scratches and scribbles can't ever be deciphered, Dighton Rock is a unique rock of ages. Sam Morison said, "if the history of the Dighton Rock is nothing else, it is a remarkable demonstration of human credulity." Right on, Sam!

-Campbell Grant, ROCK ART OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, 1967



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1848

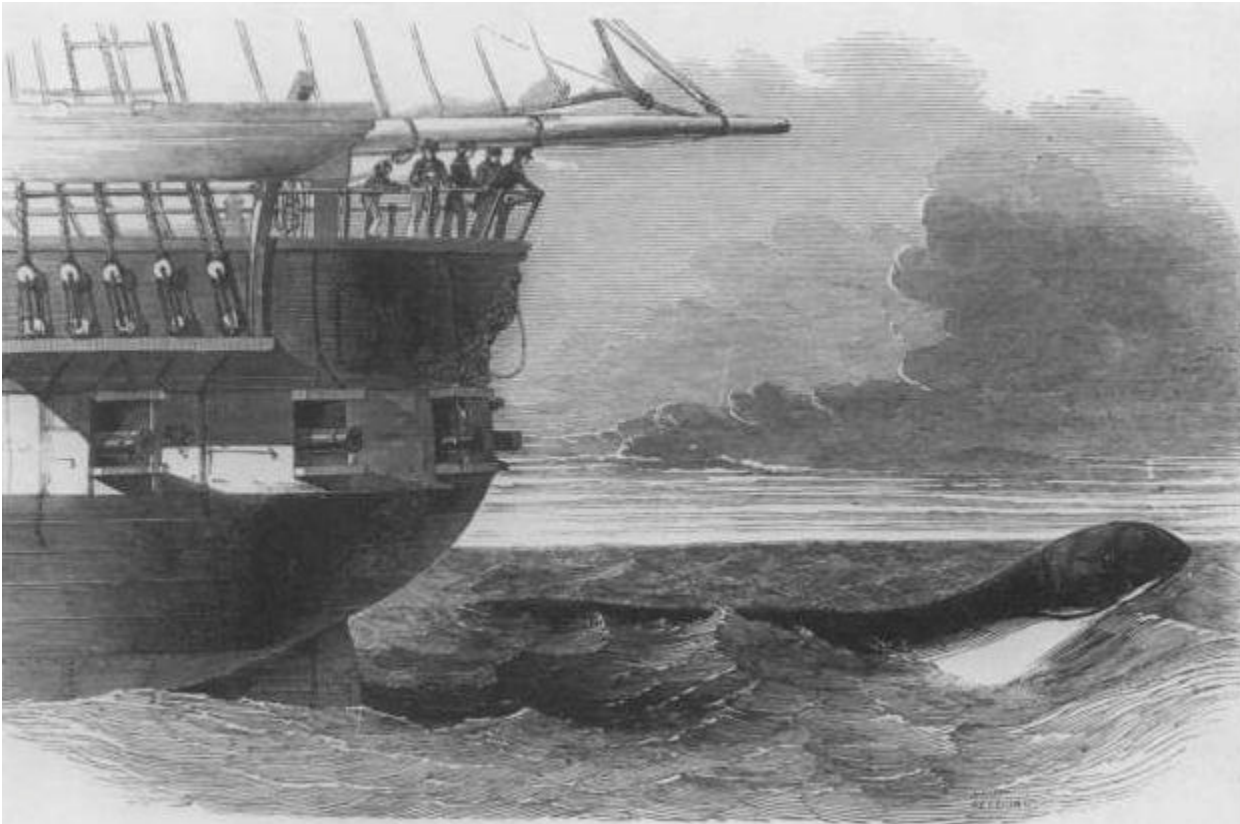
August 6: Captain Peter M'Quhae and the crew of the frigate *Daedalus*, sailing up from the Cape of Good Hope toward England, saw what they would report to Admiral Sir W.H. Gage of the Admiralty as “an enormous [serpent](#), with head and shoulders kept about four feet constantly above the surface of the sea, and as nearly as we could approximate by comparing it with the length of what our main-topsail yard would show in the water, there was at the very least 60 feet of the animal [above water], no portion of which was, to our perception, used in propelling it through the water, either by vertical or horizontal undulation. It passed rapidly, but so close under our lee quarter, that had it been a man of my acquaintance, I should easily have recognized his features with the naked eye; and it did not, either in approaching the ship or after it passed our wake, deviate in the slightest degree from its course to the S.W., which it held on at the pace of from 12 to 15 miles per hour, apparently on some determined purpose. The diameter of the serpent was about 15 or 16 inches behind the head, which was, without any doubt, that of a snake, and it was never, during the 20 minutes that it continued in sight of our glasses, once below the surface of the water; its color a dark brown, with yellowish white about the throat. It had no fins, but something like the mane of a horse, or rather a bunch of seaweed, washed about its back. It was seen by the quartermaster, the boatswain's mate, and the man at the wheel, in addition to myself and officers above mentioned.” Soon afterward another witness, Lieutenant Edward Drummond, confirmed all these particulars but added that in his opinion the structure which Captain M'Quhae termed a mane must have been a dorsal fin. Some ten years later, another officer would retrospect that since the movement of this creature had been “steady and uniform,” it must have been being propelled by fins rather than by “any

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undulatory power.”



1857



June 14. Sunday. 7 A.M. to Clarks Island— B.M. Watson tells me that he learns from pretty good authority that Webster once saw the [sea serpent](#). It seems it was first seen in the bay between Manomet & Plymouth beach — by a perfectly reliable witness (many years ago—) who was accustomed to look out on the



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sea with his glass every morning the first thing as regularly as he ate his breakfast— One morning he saw this monster — with a head somewhat like a horse's raised some six feet above the water—& his body the size of a cask trailing behind— He was careering over the bay chasing the mackerel which ran ashore in their fright & were washed up & died in great numbers. The story is that Webster had appointed to meet some Plymouth gentlemen at Manomet & spend the day fishing with them. After the fishing was he set out to return to Duxbury in his sail boat with Peterson, as he had come, & on the way they saw the sea serpent, which answered to the common account of this creature— It passed directly across their bows only six or 7 rods off & then disappeared. On the sail however Webster having had time to reflect on what had occurred — at length said to Peterson "For God's sake, never say a word about this to any one — for if it should be known that I should have seen the sea-serpent, I should never hear the last of it— but wherever I went should have to tell the story to every one I met." So it has not leaked out till now.

Watson also tells me (& Ed Watson confirms it — his father having probably been of the party) that many years ago a party of Plymouth gentlemen rode round by the shore to the Gurnet & there had a high time. When they set out to return they left one of their number a General Winslow, asleep— and as they rode along homeward amused themselves with conjecturing what he would think when he waked up & found himself alone. When at length he awoke, he comprehended his situation at once, and it being low tide & he being somewhat excited by the wine he had drunk — he mounted his horse and rode along the shore to Saquish Head in the opposite direction— From here to the end of Plymouth Beach is about a mile & a quarter and it being low tide he then waded his horse as far as the Beacon north of the channel at the entrance to Plymouth Harbor — about 3/4 of a mile — & then boldly swam his horse across to the end of Plymouth further beach about 1/2 mile ^— notwithstanding a strong current — & having landed safely — he whipped up & soon reached having come only about 8 miles the town ^— & had ample time to warm & dry himself at the tavern before his companions who had at least 20 miles to ride about through Marshfield & Duxbury— And when they found him sitting by the tavern fire they at first thought it was his ghost —

Mr. Ed. Watson's brother (half?), the one who used to live in his schooner, told me that he saw (I suppose not long before) a stream of what they call "kelp flies," supposed to be generated by the rotting kelp, flying along just under the bank, on the shore in Duxbury, some ten feet wide by six deep and of indefinite length, - for he did not know how long they would be passing, -and flying as close as they could conveniently. Ed. Watson had no doubt of it. They also have what they call menhaden flies. This was an offset to my account of the ephemera. Mr. Albert Watson's sons are engaged in lobster catching. One will get two hundred in a day. I was surprised to hear that their lobster-traps



were made in Vermont, costing something over a dollar apiece, — much timber, — but it seems they can be made cheaper there and sent down by railroad. They use sculpins, perch, etc., etc., for bait, catching it in a circular net, with an iron ring. There were a couple of quarts of pine plugs or wedges in a boat, with which to plug the claws of the lobsters to prevent their fighting and tearing each other's claws off in the cars. There are larger crates of latticework, six or eight feet square, sunk to a level with the water, in which they keep them fresh. They get three cents apiece for them, not boiled.

Saw them swim three horses across from Saquish Head to the island, a quarter of a mile or more. One rows a small boat while a man holds the bridle. At first the horses swam faster than the man could row, but soon they were somewhat drawn after the boat. They have sometimes driven a whole drove of cattle over at once.

Saw an abundance of horseshoe crabs on the Saquish shore, generally coupled, the rearmost or male (if that is he with two club feet) always the smaller. Often there were three or even four in a string, all moving about close to the shore, which apparently they affect. The pigs get a little nutriment out of them. Looking front the island, the water is a light green over a shoal.

In a little reel cedar grove, of young trees surrounding an old tram, the only indigenous wood on the island, some three rods by two, and fifteen feet high, I counted thirty-five crow blackbirds' nests, sometimes two or three near together in a tree, the young fluttering about and some dead beneath. The old in numbers were meanwhile coarsely chattering over our heads. The nests appeared to be made partly of the grassy seaweed.

E. Watson says that he saw a hen catch and devour a mouse, rather young, that was running across his barn floor. In the shade of the orchard there, amid seaweed, a variety of whiteweed with more entire leaves, etc., and apparently without rays. Is it the Connecticut variety, with short rays?

Mr. Watson describes a sea turtle, as big as a mud turtle, found on the shore once. It had a large dent in its back, in which you [could] lay your hand, — a wound.

Evening. —At B.M. Watson's again. Hear a new song, very sweet and clear from what at first sounded like a golden robin, then a purple finch. It was not the first.

B.M. Watson speaks of an old lady named Cotton, now alive and over ninety, who is the Plymouth oracle.

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He says that his father-in-law Russell (whom I saw and who told me this once) knew a Cobb, who had seen Peregrine White.

Watson had a colt born about ten or eleven the last evening. I went out to see it early this morning, as it lay in the cold pasture. It got up alarmed and trotted about on its long large legs, and even nibbled a little grass, and behaved altogether as if it had been an inhabitant of this planet for some years at least. They are as precocious as young partridges [Ruffed Grouse *Bonasa umbellus* (Partridge)]. It ran about most of the day in the pasture with its mother. Watson was surprised to see it so much larger than the night before. Probably they expand at once on coming to the light and air, like a butterfly that has just come out of its chrysalis.



1858



JONATHAN BUFFUM

January 14, Thursday [1858]: Mr. Buffum says that in 1817 or 1819 he saw the [sea-serpent](#) at Swampscott, and so did several hundred others. He was to be seen off and on for some time. There were many people on the beach the first time, in carriages partly in the water, and the serpent came so near that they, thinking that he might come ashore, involuntarily turned their horses to the shore as with a general consent, and this movement caused him to shear off also. The road from Boston was lined with people directly, coming to see the monster. Prince came with his spy-glass, saw, and printed his account of him. Buffum says he has seen him twenty times, once alone, from the rocks at Little Nahant, when he passed along close to the shore just beneath the surface, and within fifty or sixty feet of him, so that he could have touched him with a very long pole, if he had dared to. Buffum is about sixty, and it should be said, as affecting the value of his evidence, that he is a firm believer in Spiritualism.

This forenoon I rode to Nahant with Mr. Buffum. All the country bare. A fine warm day; neither snow nor ice, unless you search narrowly for them. On the way we pass Mr. Alonzo Lewis's cottage. On the top of each of his stone posts is fastened a very perfectly egg-shaped pebble of sienite from Kettle Cove, fifteen to eighteen inches long and of proportionate diameter. I never saw any of that size so perfect. There are some fifteen of them about his house, and on one flatter, circular one he has made a dial, by which I learned the hour (9:30 A. M.). Says he was surveying once at Kettle Cove, where they form a beach a third of a mile long and two to ten feet deep, and he brought home as many as his horse could draw. His house is clapboarded with hemlock bark; now some twenty years old. He says that he built it himself.

Called at the shop where lately Samuel Jillson, now of Feltonville, set up birds,—for he is a taxidermist and very skillful; kills his own birds and with blow-guns, which he makes and sells, some seven feet long, of glass, using a clay ball. Is said to be a dead shot at six rods!

Warm and fall-like as it is, saw many snow buntings at the entrance to the beach. Saw many black ducks (so Lewis said; may they not have been velvet ducks, i. e. coot?) on the sea. Heard of a flock of geese (!) (may they not have been brant, or some other species?), etc.; ice[?] divers. On the south side of Little Nahant a large mass of fine pudding-stone. Nahant is said to have been well-wooded, and furnished timber for the wharves of Boston, i. e. to build them. Now a few willows and balm-of-Gileads are the only trees, if you except two or three small cedars. They say others will not grow on account of wind. The rocks are porphyry, with dykes of dark greenstone in it, and, at the extremity of Nahant, argillaceous slate, very distinctly stratified, with fossil corallines in it (?), looking like shells. Egg Rock, it seems, has a fertile garden on the top.

P.M.—Rode with J. Buffum, Parker Pillsbury, and Mr. Mudge, a lawyer and geologist of Lynn, into the northwest part of Lynn, to the Danvers line. After a mile or two, we passed beyond the line of the porphyry into the sienite. The sienite is more rounded. Saw some furrows in sienite. On a ledge of sienite in the woods, the rocky woods near Danvers line, saw many boulders of sienite, part of the same flock of which Ship Rock (so called) in Danvers is one. One fifteen feet long, ten wide, and five or six deep rested on four somewhat rounded (at least water-worn) stones, eighteen inches in diameter or more, so that you could crawl under it, on the top of a cliff, and projected about eight feet over it,—just as it was dropped by an iceberg. A fine broad-backed ledge of sienite just beyond, north or northwest, from which we saw Wachusett, Watatic, Monadnock, and the Peterboro Hills. Also saw where one Boyse (if that is the spelling), a miller in old times, got out millstones in a primitive way, so said an old man who was chopping there. He pried or cracked off a piece of the crust of the ledge, lying horizontal, some sixteen or eighteen inches thick, then made a fire on it about its edges, and, pouring on water, cracked or softened it, so that he could break off the edges and make it round with his sledge. Then he picked a hole through the middle and hammered it as smooth as he could, and it was done. But this old man said that



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he had heard old folks say that the stones were so rough in old times that they made a noise like thunder as they revolved, and much grit was mixed with the meal.

Returning down a gully, I thought I would look for a new plant and found at once what I suppose to be *Genista tinctoria*, dyers'-green-weed,—the stem is quite green, with a few pods and leaves left. It is said to have become naturalized on the hills of Essex County. Close by was a mass of sienite some seven or eight feet high, with a cedar some two inches thick springing from a mere crack in its top.

Visited Jordan's or the Lynn Quarry (of sienite) on our return, more southerly. The stone cracks very squarely and into very large masses. In one place was a dyke of dark greenstone, of which, joined to the sienite, I brought off two specimens, q. v. The more yellowish and rotten surface stone, lying above the hard and grayer, is called the sap by the quarrymen.

From these rocks and wooded hills three or four miles inland in the northwest edge of Lynn, we had an extensive view of the ocean from Cape Ann to Scituate, and realized how the aborigines, when hunting, berrying, might perchance have looked out thus on the early navigators sailing along the coast,—thousands of them,—when they little suspected it,—how patent to the inhabitants their visit must have been. A vessel could hardly have passed within half a dozen miles of the shore, even,—at one place only, in pleasant weather,—without being seen by hundreds of savages.

Mudge gave me Saugus jasper, graywacke, amygdaloid (greenstone with nodules of feldspar), asbestos, hornstone (?); Buffum some porphyry, epidote, argillaceous slate from end of Nahant.

Mr. Buffum tells me that they never eat the seaclams without first taking out "the worm," as it is called, about as large as the small end of a pipe-stem. He supposes it is the penis.

JONATHAN BUFFUM

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1864

Elihu Vedder's painting of the Nahant sea serpent, now in the Boston Museum. (A preliminary oil sketch for this painting, extensively modified by the painter in 1899 and titled "The Lair of the Sea Serpent," is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.)

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1871

The "sea serpent" of August 18, 1871 was again reported off Cape Ann. So the question becomes — what magnificent child was being born in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in this year AD1871?⁵

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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 18, 2013

5. Later in his life, in 1858, [Henry Thoreau](#) had recorded some eye-witness testimony of this phenomenal apparition, although he carefully qualified the source of the testimony as being a person who was also a believer in spiritualism:



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JONATHAN BUFFUM

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.