

THE ADVENTURES OF A LITERARY DETECTIVE: IN SEARCH OF THOREAU

It is platitudinous--almost--that the life of the literary or historical researcher is monumentally dull. He spends his time--hours, days, weeks, months, and years of it--crawling around in dank basements and dusty, spider-filled attics of libraries and old houses, going through files of books and periodicals and newspapers and documents that no one else has looked at in years--and probably will not look at again for more years or centuries, if at all. And most often, after all his searching, he finds little of significance ~~at all~~.

But that is not the way I have found it. For more than half a century now I have been absorbed in a search to find all I can know about ^{that} fascinating (to me, at least) man, Henry David Thoreau of Concord, Massachusetts (1817-1862), the author of the classic Walden and the proponent of "Civil Disobedience." True enough I have spent many hours in dank basements and dull attics. I have spent days and even weeks searching through what proved to be dead ends. But I have also had great adventures that more than made up for the dead ends and the dull moments. Willa Cather was right when she said in My Antonia, "That is happiness to be dissolved into something complete and great." That something for me has been Henry Thoreau. And my searches for him have been one adventure after another, a series of literary detective stories that have come true:

One never knows where and when new material will turn up. My friend Charlie Dee, who is in charge of the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, one day a few years ago went out to the Concord town dump to dispose of some trash and saw an old piece of paper blowing along the ground. For some unknown reason--serendipity, perhaps--he stooped down and picked it up and found it to be a receipt by the Town of Concord for surveyer's services, dated in the 1850's and signed by Thoreau. ^{Dee} ~~He~~ then looked back to see where it had come from and saw a whole pile of old papers blazing. They were many of the town's records for the mid-nineteenth century. Stamping the blazes out with his feet, he rescued as many of them as he could. The town archivist, you can well imagine, had a fit when he took them to her. It was then discovered that carpenters had been hired to convert an attic in the Town House over into a lounge for the town police. Finding some old boxes filled with papers in their way, the carpenters had taken them down to the dump and thrown them on the fire.

For another discovery I always feel grateful to a herd of Ayrshire cattle. No, they did not dig it out, but they were responsible nonetheless for the discovery of a number of Thoreau documents and, indirectly, for a whole archive of colonial Americana. Caleb Wheeler, ^{the husband of Concord's late historian} ~~a Concord farmer~~, took great pride in his prize herd of Ayrshire cattle. ~~His wife,~~ Ruth, ~~the late~~ had long since found that if she ever wanted him to go on a trip of any kind, it was easiest to arrange a visit with some other Ayrshire cattle owner. So when she wanted to make a trip to Plymouth, Massachusetts, she checked the directory of Ayrshire cattle owners and found that a Robert Bowler maintained a herd in Plymouth. Caleb was easily persuaded to make a social call on Mr. Bowler and a few hours later they were

Ruth Bowler, Wheeler

knocking on the Bowler's front door. As they were invited in, Mrs. Wheeler noticed hanging on the wall of the front hall an old framed map and sidling over to see it better she was astonished to discover it was a survey signed by Henry D. Thoreau. When she asked her hostess where it came from, Mrs. Bowler explained that her grandfather, Marston Watson, had been a friend of Thoreau at Harvard and when he had purchased this farm in the 1850s, he had hired Thoreau to survey it for him. She had found it in the attic a few years before, had dusted it off and had it framed as an interesting souvenir. "Do you have any other souvenirs of your father's friendship with Thoreau?" "Oh, yes, we have a number of Thoreau letters up in the attic." Explaining that she knew that I was then in the midst of editing a new collection of Thoreau's correspondence, MRS. WHEELER asked if she could see them. Mrs. Bowler disappeared immediately into the attic but after a long while returned empty-handed, muttering that she could not find them and had a vague recollection that she had let someone borrow them. Mrs. Wheeler, stressing their historical and monetary importance, urged Mrs. Bowler to make a determined search for them. A few months later Mrs. Wheeler received a note from Mrs. Bowler saying that she had not found the Thoreau letters, but in searching further for them she had found more than a hundred letters from Ellery Channing, Thoreau's closest friend and biography^{or}, to her grandmother Mary Russell Watson. At one point, as a young man, Thoreau himself "had been sweet" for a time on Mary Russell and had written her a love poem or two. The letters she had found had mostly been written by Channing in the last year of Thoreau's life and reported regularly on the state of his health. "What," Mrs. Bowler asked, "should ^I ~~she~~ do with them?" Mrs. Wheeler easily persuaded her to donate them to the Concord Free Public Library

and there they were of tremendous help when I later was working on Thoreau's biography.

Mrs. Wheeler continued to urge Mrs. Bowler to search for the missing Thoreau letters and a few months later she located them in a neighbor's possession. It turned out that most of the letters had already appeared in print, but a few did fill in gaps in the correspondence and I was happy to be able to use them. Mrs. Bowler was entranced by their publication and decided to search her attic for further treasures. She found little more Thoreau material, but she did find a good deal of her grandfather's correspondence with other of the Transcendentalists, enough in fact to take up a two-hundred page book to catalog and describe it. She also found vast piles of documents about her Mayflower ancestors and their descendants shedding much new light on the early history of Plymouth. All of this material she very generously gave to the Pilgrim Society in Plymouth. After a great exhibition was arranged displaying it, the interest of many other Plymouth citizens was aroused and they in turn examined their own attics and donated their findings to the Pilgrim Society. And all of this occurred because of a herd of Ayrshire cattle. One never knows!

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Unfortunately for me I came along just too late to ever interview anyone who actually had known Thoreau in person. I recall once ~~when~~ as a teen-ager visiting Concord and seeing old Howard Melvin who ran a little gift and postcard shop at Old North Bridge for years and who used to regale visitors with his memories of Thoreau, but that was before I became obsessed with Thoreau--and besides I probably would have been too shy to ask him even if I had had the foresight. But then it is probably just as well, for although Melvin used to tell of going hunting and mountain climbing with Thoreau, he was, I have since been told, two or three years old when Thoreau died.

As late as the early 1940s, Dr. Fred S. Piper of Lexington, Massachusetts, who then in his nineties had been an ardent Thoreauvian himself for years, told me he had a patient in Lexington nearly a hundred years old who as a child and young teen-ager had lived next door to Thoreau and could still vividly remember his "piercing eyes, like an owl's" as he walked by her house. But unfortunately I was unable to get up to Lexington to see and interview her before she died.

Mrs. Daniel Chester French, the wife of the sculptor of the Concord Minuteman and of the Lincoln statue in the Lincoln Memorial, moved to and settled down in Concord as a young bride. She was fascinated by historic Concord and devoted much time to gathering anecdotes about the famous of the town from the natives. She tells us in her autobiography, Memories of a Sculptor's Wife, about the recollections of an old farmer by the name of Murray:

"Henry D. Thoreau--Henry D. Thoreau," jerking out the words with withering contempt. "His name ain't no more Henry D. Thoreau than my name is Henry D. Thoreau.

[When Thoreau had returned from Harvard to Concord in

1837 he had changed his name from the David Henry Thoreau he had been christened simply because the family and all his friends had always called him "Henry."] And everybody knows it, and he knows it. His name's Da-a-vid Henry and it ain't never been nothing but Da-a-vid Henry. And he knows that! Why, one morning I went out in my field across there to the river, and there, beside that little old mud pond, was standing Da-a-vid Henry, and he wasn't doin' nothin' but just standin' there--lookin' at that pond, and when I came back at noon, there he was standin' with his hands behind him just lookin' down into that pond, and after dinner when I come back again if there wan't Da-a-vid standin' there just like as if he had been there all day, gazin' down into that pond, and I stopped and looked at him and I says, 'Da-a-vid Henry, what air you a-doin'?' And he didn't turn his head and he didn't look at me. He kept on lookin' down at that pond, and he said, as if he was thinkin' about the stars in the heavens, 'Mr. Murray, I'm a-studyin'--the habits--of the bullfrog!' And there that darned fool had been standin'--the livelong day--a-studyin'--the habits--of the bull-frog!"

Unfortunately Mr. Murray's opinions of Thoreau were all too prevalent in Old Concord. Many of his contemporaries simply could not understand why he, a Harvard graduate, wasted his time and his talents in living in a cabin alone in the woods and in wandering aimlessly, so they thought, in the woods and fields of Concord.

One of the first times I visited Concord to pursue my study of Thoreau, I wandered out Belknap Street to try to find the so-called Texas House, the house which Thoreau and his father had built in 1844, which was then still standing. Seeing a man mowing his lawn, I inquired as to which was Thoreau's house. He stopped

mowing and said to me, "What are you interested in Thoreau for? He never paid his rent?" and then went back to his mowing without ever answering my question.

As recently as 1985 a reporter for the Washington Post came up to Concord to interview the residents of Walden Breezes, the trailer park that still remains on the shores of Walden Pond. Their opinion of Henry Thoreau was not very high and referred to him as "that old drunk who used to live in a shack over on the cove."
[THOREAU WAS A TEETOTALER HIS ENTIRE LIFE]
^ Fortunately not everyone in Concord had such views of Thoreau. *The late*
Raymond Adams of the University of North Carolina was probably the last scholar to interview Concord^{ians} who could still remember Thoreau. He visited there in the 1920s and came back to Chapel Hill with hundreds of notes. One of the best that he passed on to me one time makes a good antidote to Mr. Murray's choleric remarks. Adams had interviewed Abby Hosmer in her old age. She was the daughter of Thoreau's friend Edmund Hosmer and as a child had known Thoreau well. She told Adams:

"One day, we children saw Mr. Thoreau standing right down there across the road near the Assabet. He stood very still, and we knew he was watching something in the water. But we knew we must not disturb him, and so we stayed up here in the dooryard. At noontime he was still there, watching something in the water. And he stayed there all afternoon.

At last, though, along about supper time, he came up here to the house. And then we children knew that we'd learn what it was he'd been watching. He'd found a duck that had just hatched out a nest of eggs. She had brought the little ducks down to the water. And Mr. Thoreau had watched all day to see her teach ~~wh~~ those little ducks about the river.

"And while we ate our suppers there in the kitchen, he told

us the most wonderful stories you ever heard about those ducks."

I think it enlightening that the children of Concord, that is, those who were children when Thoreau was an adult, almost invariably ~~had a good word to say for Thoreau.~~ had a good word to say for Thoreau. He, to them, was the one adult in town who shared their interest in nature and always had time for a word with them. They were able to overlook what the adults thought his eccentricities.

(AS WE HAVE SEEN)

Unfortunately, there are still those around Concord who have little or nothing good to say about Thoreau and who are puzzled that admirers come from around the world to Concord to pay tribute to him. Typical of these Concordians was a distinguished elderly lady who whenever I met her never failed to bring up "the fire." It was not Walden, nor "Civil Disobedience," nor Thoreau's contributions to natural history that she connected with his name. It was "the fire." Thoreau and a companion in 1844 had built a campfire on the shore of Fairhaven Bay. It was not a wise thing to do, for the woods were very dry, and the fire soon got away from them and eventually burned more than three hundred acres. My elderly friend's grandfather had owned some of the land that had burned and she loved to quote her mother as saying, "Don't talk to me about Henry Thoreau. Didn't I all that winter have to go to school with a smootched apron or dress because I had to pitch in and help fill the wood box with partly charred wood?" Being Yankees they couldn't bear to waste even charred wood. And thus Thoreau's reputation failed them.

I should add a word about my elderly friend. Shortly after my biography of Thoreau was published I had dinner with a ~~mutual friend~~, Ruth Robinson Wheeler, ~~the late distinguished~~ ~~historian of Concord~~. In the midst of our conversation she told me that our mutual friend was pleased with my book "because I "had left the scandal out." I immediately asked what the scandal was that I had omitted. Mrs. Wheeler replied, "I don't know, but I assumed you would know." I am not normally a scandal-monger, but I decided that if there was some little-known scandal about Thoreau, it should be gotten into the record and I commissioned Mrs. Wheeler to find out before our mutual friend, who was then in her nineties, passed on, even if she had to promise to keep the secret till after our mutual friend's demise. It did not take Mrs. Wheeler ^{LONG} _A to worm the secret out, so long as it was not put into print during our friend's lifetime. She died a few years back and now I can tell the story--what there was of it. She came from one of the most prominent families in town. One of her great aunts had once experienced an unrequited love for one of the Thoreau brothers. She was not sure whether it was for Henry or, more likely, for his brother John. But that a member of her family had stooped so low as to fall in love with a member of the lowly Thoreau family, that to her was indeed a scandal of major proportions. She can rest in peace now though, for while I have told the story, I have not revealed her family name.

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I have always been interested in knowing where Thoreau derived many of his ideas and have tried to track down any books that Thoreau read and read them myself. To that end I over the years started compiling a list of all the books in his personal library, locating where possible the actual volumes he owned which are now scattered almost literally to the four corners of the earth, and in 1957 I published Thoreau's Library, a catalog of his books and their present locations.

A few years later ^{MRS.} Ruth Wheeler, ~~Concord's historian,~~ [scribble] told me that she had just located one I had missed. When she told me that it was his copy of Homer's Iliad, I was thunderstruck, for in Walden itself Thoreau tells us that for the two years he lived at the pond he never locked his cabin door, and the only thing he ever had stolen was his copy of the Iliad! And when she told me where she had found it, I was even more astonished. It was in the possession of one of the collateral descendants of Alek Therien, the French-Canadian woodchopper of Walden. It was only then on re-
^{I NOTICED} reading Walden that ^A Thoreau, at another spot, tells us of asking Therien if he liked Homer. When Therien replied that he was familiar with the name but had never read him, Thoreau took his Iliad down off the shelf and read to him the passage of Achilles' friendship for Patroclus. It was now quite obvious ~~to me~~ that Therien enjoyed the reading and later at some point helped himself to the book.

When I asked Mrs. Wheeler how she had tracked down the volume, she said that as a member of the local public library board she had heard rumors of the book's location and she had gone to the man to try to persuade him to donate the book to ~~the library.~~

the library to add to their already sizable collection of Thoreau's books. He had brought out the book and showed her Thoreau's signature and notes in it, but he was not ready to give it away.

I was especially delighted with the news because it meant that in my biography of Thoreau, which was then well under way, I could announce the solution of the more-than-a-century-ago puzzle of the disappearance of the book. But since I thought it might be well to get the present owner's permission to tell the story, I asked a mutual friend, the late Gladys Hosmer of Concord, to interview him. Mrs. Hosmer, as all who knew her can testify, could be a pretty formidable person, but when she asked him about the book, he absolutely refused to admit he knew anything about it, telling her she must have mixed himself up with someone else. The only thing I can imagine to explain his denial was that when two such doughty women had come to call upon him in rapid succession, he began to fear that he was becoming involved with a stolen book, though the statute of limitations had of course expired more than a century ago. He did however agree that I could tell the story in my biography, so long as I put it in the best possible light. And so there I said:

Although Therien had had little formal education, he was keen and alert. The two often talked of books. Quite naturally their discussion turned to one of Thoreau's favorite authors, Homer. And when Therien told Thoreau that he thought Homer a great writer, "though what his writing was about, he did not know," Thoreau ^{took} ~~told~~ his

Iliad down and translated portions for him. Therien was so delighted that he later quietly borrowed Pope's translation from the cabin and forgot to return it.

Thoreau was to wonder in Walden where it had gone to. The owner was apparently satisfied that I had not implicated the woodchopper and made no attempt to sue me.

The story, however, unfortunately does not end there. When several years later he died, both Mrs. Hosmer and Mrs. Wheeler went to his family to alert them of the existance of the volume. The family had not known of it and made a particular search of all their father's possessions. But it was nowhere to be found ^{AND} has not come to light again to this day. [^] Whether he gave it away or sold it or destroyed it, no one knows. And so this book that disappeared mysteriously in the eighteen-forties and reappeared in the nineteen-sixties, has once more disappeared ~~once more~~ just as mysteriously and I do not know if it will ever turn up again.

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In 1958, Professor Carl Bode of the University of Maryland and I published the first new edition of Thoreau's correspondence in more than sixty years. Because earlier editions had included only selected letters and had been badly edited by modern standards, we determined to print every letter written by or to Thoreau that we could find and tracked down the original manuscript as our text whenever we could. We were luckily able to turn up many hitherto unpublished letters, among them one Thoreau had written to his cousin George Thatcher in Bangor Maine on January 1, 1858, the manuscript of which ~~was~~^{is} now in the great Berg Collection in the New York Public Library. Shortly after our book reached print, Paul Oehser, then director of publications at the Smithsonian Institution, published a letter in Science, the official publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, pointing out a particularly interesting sentence in the letter. Thoreau, in speaking of their mutual friend Edward Hoar, had said:

Mr Hoar is still in Concord, attending to Biology, Ecology, &c with a view to make his future residence in foreign parts more truly profitable to him.

Up to the time of our publication of this letter it had generally been supposed that the word "ecology" had been coined in 1866 by the German Darwinian Ernst Haeckel. But here was Thoreau using the word eight years earlier and using it in a way that implied his cousin would be familiar with it. For a time I was very proud of the fact that I had, though quite accidentally, corrected what was apparently a false claim and pushed the history of a very important word back at least eight years.

Fortunately for the record (though unfortunately for my pride) in the spring of 1965, the late Richard Eaton, a botanist associated with Harvard University, pointed out to me that Haeckel had spelled the word as "oecology" and that the simpler spelling of "ecology" had not been adopted until the International Botanical Congress had been held in Madison, Wisconsin, in August of 1893. Thus Thoreau was not only using the word eight years before it was supposedly coined, but he was using a spelling that did not come into usage until forty-five years later. What is more, even after an intensive search, Eaton could find no other use of the word than Thoreau's before Haeckel's of 1866. "Was there any chance," Eaton asked, "that Thoreau's letter was a forgery and the use of the word an anachronism?"

Since Thoreau's manuscripts nowadays bring such high prices on the autograph market, it seemed perfectly possible that some unscrupulous soul had forged the letter. But when I checked with Dr. John Gordan, the curator of the Berg Collection, he had an absolutely water-tight provenance for the manuscript. George Thatcher, the recipient of the letter, had sold it to George Hellman, the well-known book dealer. Hellman, in turn, sold it to the book collector Stephen Wakeman. When Wakeman died, it was purchased at auction by W.T.H. Howe, the president of the American Book Company. And at his death, his entire collection was purchased by the Berg brothers. What is more, Gordan had sales receipts for each transaction.

It was obvious then that the manuscript was genuine, but how to explain the seeming anachronism? Thoreau's hand-

[* See next sheet for reproduction.]

X writing was notoriously bad, but a look at the word in the manuscript * seemed clearly "Ecology."

However when I checked it against other manuscripts that Thoreau had written about that time of his life, it was just as clear that his capital "Es" looked very different. They were rounded while that in the letter was sharply angled. It was only after intense study that I finally realized that Thoreau's word was not "Ecology" but "Geology." And this was confirmed when I discovered that in his journal entries for that winter Thoreau speaks of visiting quarries with Edward Hoar.

Upon making this discovery, I immediately wrote a letter of apology and explanation which was published in Science and I thought the matter was done with. But a few years later I picked up a copy of the New York Times Book Review one Sunday morning and started reading a review of the new supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary only to find the reviewer commenting how interesting it was that Thoreau was the first known user of the word "ecology"! A quick check of the supplement revealed ~~indeed~~ that it ~~did~~ indeed cite Thoreau's sentence as the earliest known use of the word. I immediately wrote another letter of apology and explanation, this time to the editor of the OED. He wrote a most gracious letter back agreeing that the word in Thoreau's handwriting did look like "Ecology" and adding that the Merriam-Webster Company of Springfield, Massachusetts in checking the proofs of the OED supplement came up with my letter to Science and notified the OED of the error. Unfortunately their letter arrived too late to make the correction. And so it seems likely that if I am going down in history, it will most likely be as the man who corrupted the Oxford English Dictionary.

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to be mobilized to
major social problem
it is essential that
attitudes have a broad
encompasses diverse
views. Evaluation re-
sults, factual, supported
and not the medium
of sectarian opinion.
BURNES E. MOORE
Public Information,
Analytic Association,
New York

Mr. Hoar is still in Con-
cord, attending to Botany,
Ecology, &c with a view
to make his future resi-

Fig. 1. Part of a letter dated 1 January 1858 by Thoreau to his cousin George Thatcher. The word in question occurs at the beginning of the next-to-the-last line.

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(137), I should like
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in full elsewhere.

RICHARD A. DURST
Chemistry,
Trenton,

"Ecology": Correction

adventently respon-
g the record on the
rd ecology, I would
set it straight once

more. In 1958, with Carl Bode, I edited
*The Correspondence of Henry David
Thoreau* (New York Univ. Press),
and in it I transcribed a sentence from
a newly found letter of 1 January
1858 as reading, "Mr. Hoar is still
in Concord, attending to Botany, Ecol-
ogy, &c with a view to making his fu-
ture residence in foreign parts more
truly profitable to him" (see Fig. 1).
In the issue of *Science* of 17 April
1959 (129, 992); Paul H. Oehser,
quoting from the volume, pointed out
that this use of the word *ecology* pre-
ceded the generally accepted coinage
of the word by Ernst Haeckel by eight
years.

Recently, Richard Eaton of Harvard
University called my attention to the
fact that Haeckel's word was *oecology*,
and that American botanists did not
adopt the simpler spelling until the
Madison Botanical Congress of 23 Au-
gust 1893. In the light of this new in-
formation, I reexamined photostats of
the letter (the manuscript is in the
Berg Collection of the New York Pub-
lic Library) and realized for the first
time that, while at first glance the
word seems obviously to be *Ecology*,
it can without too much imagination
be read as *Geology*. I also noted that
several times in his *Journal* that winter
Thoreau mentioned Hoar's interest in
rocks and quarries. Under these cir-
cumstances I think I must assume that,
since *geology* makes as much sense in
the context as *ecology* does, *geology*
must have been the word that Thoreau
intended. I think we may once more
assume that it was Haeckel who origi-
nated the word, in 1866—although, as

students of Thoreau will realize, even
if Thoreau did not coin the word, he
was unquestionably a pioneer in the
science of ecology.

WALTER HARDING
State University College,
Geneseo, New York

Women—in Science or Out

I should like to add one item to
the list of "tasks ahead" in Alice S.
Rossi's article ("Women in science:
Why so few?" 28 May, p. 1197):
High school guidance teachers should
be persuaded that a career in science or
engineering will not ruin a girl's future.
Several years ago, when I expressed
a desire to enter M.I.T., I received
from my high school adviser—a warm
and friendly woman—a stunned and
slightly horrified look. She wished to
save me from my "immature desires"
by getting me admitted to Bryn Mawr
or Smith, where I could write poetry
and avoid those brutal, masculine cal-
culus courses if I wished. Well, I
have an "unusually supportive" father
such as Rossi mentions. I entered
M.I.T., and in 1963 left it with a
Bachelor of Science degree. But at
last report my high school adviser
was still doing her best to dissuade
girls—even if they were excellent in
high school mathematics, physics, and
chemistry—from applying to schools
oriented toward science.

FRANCES M. A. DYRO
School of Medicine,
University of Baltimore, Maryland

My longest search has been for the long lost journals of Harrison Gray Otis Blake, Thoreau's Worcester friend and correspondent. In searching through some old newspaper files about thirty-five years ago, I ran by chance across a copy of Blake's obituary of 1898 which indicated Blake's journals were still then in existence. Since Blake had been Thoreau's most ardent disciple (so much so that Thoreau's sister Sophia had willed to him most of Thoreau's manuscripts), what insights might Blake's journals not give into Thoreau's life and personality?

I started my search by tracking down Blake's will and found that while the journals were not mentioned, he had bequeathed the Thoreau manuscripts to his friend E. Harlow Russell, then principal of the old Worcester State Normal School. It took only a few letters to Worcester friends to find that ^{Russell's} ~~Harlow's~~ granddaughter, whom I shall call Mrs. Ross, though that is not her name, was still living. A letter to her brought a rather vague letter saying that she had inherited most of her grandfather's possessions, but they were all in storage and she had no idea what was among them. Someday she intended to go through them, and when she did, she would let me know if the missing journals were among them.

Some years went by without my hearing again from Mrs. Ross and I got diverted to other projects. Then in the early 1960's a Thoreau scholar who was a native of Worcester began to make a study of Thoreau's Worcester connections. He too ran across a reference to the missing journals, ^{AND} realized how important they might be. He too tracked them to Mrs. Ross and drove to her summer cottage in the mountains to interview her. Although her letter to me had been friendly despite its vagueness, she was crisp and crusty to her caller. "Yes, she was Harlow Russell's

granddaughter." "Yes, she had inherited his papers." "Yes, they were up in the attic of this very house." But she was "not going up into that hot attic for anyone, not even Henry Thoreau." "Could I come back in cooler weather and look at the papers?" "No, in cooler weather I live in my winter house a hundred miles from here and I see no point in driving back. Those papers do not interest me one bit." And so the Worcester scholar left even more frustrated than I.

Another ten years later a third Thoreau scholar got involved. He too tracked down Mrs. Ross and drove to her summer cottage. He rang the front door bell and as she answered the door, a large and ferocious dog came snapping and snarling around the corner of the house. "Does that dog bite?" "I certainly hope so," she replied, but she did invite him in. Spotting a Thoreau book on her shelves, he took it down and out fell the manuscript of a hitherto unknown Thoreau letter. She let him make a copy of the letter but on everything else she was more adamant than ever. There was no way he was going to get up in her attic and look through those papers. She wished he would go away and stop bothering her.

It was at this time that the three of us got together, compared notes, and decided to launch a joint campaign to get into that attic. We discovered that she had a brother still living, but he was in the foreign service and lived abroad. We wrote to him explaining the importance of the papers and asking his help. He replied very sympathetically but said he thought he ought to delay action until his next visit home, several years off, when he could use his persuasive powers on his sister face-to-face. That was the last we ever heard

from him, though we understand he has since retired and is still living abroad.

Next we learned that Mrs. Ross's late husband had taught for years at a very distinguished university. Perhaps the university could help us. I went to the rare book librarian of the university and explained the importance of the papers. He was immediately excited and said he would approach Mrs. Ross to see if she would donate the papers to the university library in honor of her husband, stressing the tax advantages of such a donation. But, alas, a few days later he called to say that in doing some research on Professor Ross, he discovered that there had been a quarrel between Ross and the university over a retirement pension and Mrs. Ross was not on speaking terms with anyone associated with the university.

Still conniving, we aroused the interest of a public library in the papers. Excitedly they invited ^{Mrs. Ross} ~~her~~ out for luncheon to broach the subject. To impress her they took her to the area's best restaurant. The waiters were all too attentive and brought her martini after martini. By the time the lunch was over and they were ready to discuss the papers, she had imbibed too much and was in no shape to discuss such a delicate subject. She responded to no further invitations.

Next by one of those purely lucky bits of ~~serendipity~~ we discovered that a mutual friend of all three of us, a man whom I shall call George Whitehead had as a youth many years ago once been in love with Mrs. Ross before she had married. But they had quarreled and each gone his separate way. George had married someone else too, had had a long and happy marriage, but his wife had died a few years back and now he was lonely.

When he learned that Mr. Ross had died, he decided to get in touch ^{WITH} Mrs. Ross again. When we told him about the papers, he promised to see if he could get a look at them. Mrs. Ross responded immediately to his letter and invited him to visit her in her summer cottage. Within a few days the two were together exploring the attic. Almost the first thing he came across was the manuscript of an unpublished essay by Harlow Russell on his acquaintance with Thoreau. They took it downstairs to read, but when they had finished, she said, "Oh, George, it's too hot to go back up into that attic again. Let's postpone it until another day." And he never got up into the attic again.

By now, of course, we despaired of ever getting up into the attic. Several years went by and then, much to our joy and surprise a young couple turned up at one of our Thoreau Society's annual meetings and the wife introduced herself as the niece of Mrs. Ross. "Did we know about the papers in the summer cottage attic?" "Would we like to see them?" "No," she had not been in the attic herself, but she suspected there were some real treasures there, and she was working on her aunt to explore ^{FOR} them. After months of careful negotiations, the Worcester scholar and the niece not only got into the attic but examined everything in it. ^{THERE} ~~They~~ were a number of interesting manuscripts and other bits, but not a sign of what we wanted most--the Blake journals

Our interest then focussed on the barn across the street from the cottage. There was a locked room there that apparently had books and papers in it. After much persuasion the two searchers examined that room and its contents. Again there were a few small treasures, but not the journals. By now we realized ~~back~~

that Mrs. Ross was playing a cat and mouse game with us, for when we indicated we were giving up hope, she hinted that maybe the journals were someplace in her winter place. Again she showed a few small treasures, but she died before our search team really got to work on the house, and, when after her death, they explored the whole house, they found no trace of the journals. Mrs. Ross had apparently been leading us on all those years. We have no proof actually that she had ever had them. Perhaps Blake never willed them to Russell, or perhaps Russell did inherit them but destroyed them or gave them to someone else--we hope the latter. We still hope too that someday yet they will turn up, but where, we have no idea.

They say that misery loves company and I will have to admit that it has been a consolation at times that others have been frustrated in their search for information about Thoreau. Brooks Atkinson, the late New York Times drama critic who himself wrote a biography of Thoreau more than half a century ago, once told me of his most frustrating experience. He said that he learned that Edward Simmons, then a well-known painter, had spent his childhood summer vacations living in the Old Manse in Concord and had thus gotten to know Thoreau. With some difficulty Atkinson, through a mutual friend, arranged to meet Simmons. Atkinson's first question was "Mr. Simmons, tell me, what did you think of Henry Thoreau?" "I thought he was a son of a bitch," was the disconcerting reply and he refused to say any more.

Later I came across the explanation for Simmons' gruffness. In his little-known autobiography Simmons tells us:

Like all boys, I was intensely interested in birds and animals. One day I was playing in the grass in front of the

Old Manse, when I suddenly looked up to see a short man with a blond beard leaning over me.

"What have you there, Eddie?"

"A great crested flycatcher's egg," I replied.

This was a very rare find.

He wanted me to give it to him, but I would not. Then he proposed a swap.

"If you will give it to me, I will show you a live fox," he said. This was too much to resist. We made a rendezvous for the next Sunday.

Although descended from a line of parsons, I had already learned that Sunday was, for me, merely a holiday, and it was evidently the same for him. This man was Henry D. Thoreau.

Accordingly, the following Sabbath I trudged down to his place at Walden Pond, and he, who had "no walks to throw away on company," proceeded to devote his entire afternoon to a boy of ten. After going a long way through the woods, we both got down on our bellies and crawled for miles, it seemed to me, through sand shrubbery. But Mr. Fox refused to show himself--and worse luck than all, I never got my egg back!

I have always had a grudge against Thoreau for this.

Incidentally it is interesting to note that since Edward Simmons was not born until 1852, five years after Thoreau gave up his cabin, Simmons could never have "trudged down to his place at Walden Pond.

Confused recollections are often true of the elderly. But I do not doubt the gist of Simmons' tale.

Simmons' recollections remind me of the recollections of one of his contemporaries, Annie Sawyer Downs. But, first, let me tell the story of finding Annie's recollections.

Some few years ago Marcia Moss, the indefatigable curator of special collections at the Concord Free Public Library, called my attention to a manuscript of recollections of mid-nineteenth century Concord that had recently been given to them. It had been found in an attic in Cambridge. It was unsigned and no one in the family knew its origin other than as indicated in a postscript which read "Andover, Massachusetts, November 10, '91." It was obvious from its contents that it had been written by a woman who had been a child in Concord during the 1840s. The only other ~~seeming~~ clue was Nathaniel Hawthorne's identification of the writer therein as the "Doctor's little girl." But the Hawthorne family doctor at the time was Josiah Bartlett who had no daughter of an age appropriate to have written the recollections. (However, the author did happen to mention that she was long interested in botany. When I showed the manuscript to Thomas Blanding, the Thoreau authority in Concord, he picked up on this and said he vaguely recollected that Ellery Channing mentioned a Concord woman botanist in his biography of Thoreau. (Checking, I found the name of Annie S. Downs, identified as "that admirably endowed flower-writer. . . [who] died in 1901." Her only book in the Concord Library was an atrocious verse history of the town of Andover that had not circulated in eighty years and had to be searched out of storage. An inscription in the book revealed she had once attended Bradford Academy, now Bradford College, but calls to Bradford College revealed only that the secretary of the alumni association and the curator of the Bradfordiana collection were both abroad for the summer, so no records were available.

If she wrote a history of Andover, Massachusetts, probably she had had some connection with the town, but the reference desk in the town library had no record of her. "Try the historical

No other appropriate doctor in Concord turned up in the medical directory.

society. It is just down the street and today is the only day it is open this month. In fact, it closes in half an hour." There was no Annie Sawyer Downs in the society's name files, but in the 1901 folder of the chronological file there was a tiny sliver of an unidentified newsclipping which said, "Died, Annie Sawyer Downs, the well-known verse writer, December 7 1901"! "Are there any newspaper files for Andover at the turn of the century?" "Yes, there are microfilms at the library." So back to the library I went and out with the microfilms for 1901 and the first issue of the weekly newspaper after Annie's death. But, alas, not a mention of Annie in the first issue or the second. Fortunately in re-winding the film, the name "Annie Sawyer Downs" caught my eye. Here to my astonishment in an issue dated several days before her supposed death was a lengthy account of her funeral! Obviously the clipping in the historical society had been misdated.

The funeral account stated she had been born, Annie Sawyer, in Concord and lived there through her childhood, was long especially interested in flowers, and published poetry regularly in various religious journals. But what about Hawthorne's comment about her being the "Doctor's little girl"? Back to Concord to check the vital statistics. There was no record of her birth--apparently her parents had never filed one. But a little more than a year before her birth there was record of the marriage of a Dr. Sawyer of Manchester, N.H. to a Concord girl. Why was he not in the medical directory? He was a homeopathic physician and they were boycotted by the prevailing more conventional physicians. A check with Arlin Turner, the biographer of Hawthorne, confirmed that Mrs. Hawthorne occasionally

consulted Dr. Sawyer, much to her husband's dismay. So Annie Sawyer Downs was unquestionably the author of the manuscript. Thomas Blanding later turned up evidence for me that she had delivered the paper at the dedication of the Lawrence, Massachusetts, Public Library in 1892.

Mrs. Downs' paper was filled with anecdotes, ~~most of them familiar,~~ of the many famous Concordians, but there was one about Thoreau that I had never heard and I think it worth retelling. Let me give it in Annie's own words:

No entreaties ever induced [Thoreau] to show us where his rare floral friends made their homes. He had no secrets, however, from Mr. Minot Pratt [a Concord resident and amateur botanist], and only a couple years before his death I had an amusing interview with him. Mr. Pratt had promised to take me to the only place in Concord where the climbing fern could be found. I had given my word of honor that I would not tell, and in due season we were on the ground. In the midst of our enjoyment we heard a snapping of twigs, a brisk step, in the bordering thicket, and in a second Mr. Thoreau's spare figure and amazed face confronted us. Mr. Pratt answered for my trustworthiness, and so won over Mr. Thoreau by representing what a deed of charity it was to enlighten my ignorance that he climbed with us into our clumsy vehicle and by circuitous ways took us to the haunt of a much rarer plant which he said nobody else in Concord had ever found. I was sincerely grateful and not backward in telling him so. But noticing an odd twinkle in Mr. Pratt's eye, I asked him later what it meant. He told me he had known of the plant years before Mr. Thoreau found it, and that the spot was not half a mile from where

Mr. Thoreau had discovered us. He had doubled and redoubled upon his track simply to puzzle and prevent my ever finding the place again.

* * * * *

With Mrs. Down's words we come not to the end of my Thoreauvian adventures, but to this narration of them. The adventures continue regularly and I have told only a small part of them here. It adds to the excitement of each dawn that I may that day discover something new. While Thoreau did not "double and redouble upon his tracks" deliberately to puzzle his biographers as he had for Annie Downs--at least not most of the time--those of us who are so interested in his life and works have had to do some doubling and redoubling to discover his often nearly vanished tracks. But the labors have been worth it. The excitement of the chase has added much to the joy of life and the discoveries, I hope, to the understanding of that ever-intriguing man Henry D. Thoreau. The chase continues. There are still more attics to search.