

# The First Year's Sales of Thoreau's Walden

by

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Amongst the great mass of the official records of Ticknor & Fields, the mid-nineteenth century Boston publishers, and their successors that have been deposited in the Houghton Library of Harvard University at Cambridge, Massachusetts, by the Houghton Mifflin Company, the lineal descendants of Ticknor & Fields, are the apparently hitherto unnoticed records of the early sales of Henry David Thoreau's Walden. These records are interspersed with the records of the sales of other Ticknor & Fields books of the time in a volume labeled "Vol. 1 Journals 1853-55" (Houghton Library call number FMS Am 1185.11). These records give the date of purchase, the name of the purchaser, the number of copies purchased, the title of the book, the discount rate applied (though this is not always given), and the total cost charged. The great majority of purchasers were of course retailers who are purchasing at a discount, but occasionally apparently individuals ordered books directly from the publisher and their names are recorded too. The records thus give an interesting insight into the popularity of the book, its rate of sale, and even its geographical distribution.

With the permission of the Houghton Library and the Houghton Mifflin Company, descendants of the firm of Ticknor & Fields, I reproduce herewith the sales records for Walden for its first year of sale and follow it with an alphabetical identification of the purchasers. As with most such handwritten records of the mid-nineteenth century, the penmanship is often deplorable and the records themselves often inconsistent. I have transcribed them here as accurately as I could, occasionally inserting a bracketed question mark when I could not be certain that I had deciphered the handwriting correctly. Walden, incidentally, was officially published by Ticknor & Fields on August 9, 1854. For the convenience of the reader I have occasionally slightly regularized the format, punctuation, and capitalization.

SALES RECORDS

DATE	PURCHASER	NUMBER	DISCOUNT	COST
1854				
Aug. 1	W. R. Alger	1 Walden		1.00
2	F. W. Kellog	1 "		1.00
3	H. Woodman	1 "		1.00
4	Geo. B. Jones	1 "		1.00
5	Mercantile Library	2 "		1.33
	T. Atkinson	1 "		1.00
7	T. B. Peterson	25 "	1/3	16.67
	J. B. Cooke & Co.	1 "		.67
	O. A. Roorbach	104/100 "		66.67
	S. W. Whitaker	4 "		3.00
	J. S. Homans	5 "		3.33
	A. P. Pfisser [?]	6 "		4.50
	J. W. Randolph	3 "		2.25
	B. M. Norman	6 "		4.50
	J. C. King	1 "		1.00
	W. S. Martien	5 "		3.33
8	Phillips, Sampson & Co.	25 "	1/3	16.67
	J. Munroe & Co.	2 "		1.50
	Gray, Sprague & Co.	5 "		3.75
	T. Kinney [?]	5 "		3.33
	Crosby, Nichols & Co.	6 "	1/4	4.50
	W. C. Little & Co.	3 "	1/4	2.25
	Miller, Orton & Co.	12 "	1/3	8.00
	H. Whipple & Son	3 "	1/4	2.25
	Merriam Chapin & Co.	5 "	1/4	3.75

DATE	PURCHASER	NUMBER	DISCOUNT	COST
1854				
Aug. 8	E. T. Pease & Co.	5 Walden	[?]	3.56
	Merrill & Straw	3 "	[?]	2.25
	I. S. Bailey	10 "	1/3	6.64
	E. Livermore	5 "	1/4	3.75
	Vickery & Griffiths	6 "	1/4	4.50
	W. Channing	1 "		1.00
	W. P. [?] Tewksbury	3 "	1/4	2.25
	Fetridge & Co.	25 "	3	17.50
	J. P. Jewett & Co.	25 "	1/3	16.67
	Fessenden & Co. [?]	3 "		2.25
	Burnham & Bro.	25 "	1/4	18.75
	H. Parker	6 "	1/4	4.50
	B. B. Muzzey & Co.	25 "	1/3	16.67
	Crocker & Brewster	2 "	1/4	1.50
	Reading & Co.	25 "	3	17.50
9	Truman [?] & Spofford	20 "	1/3	13.33
	W. V. Spencer	25 "	3	17.50
	C. A. Hewins	1 "		1.00
	J. Keith & Co.	10 "	1/4	7.50
10	G. W. Briggs	25 "	5%[?]	16.63
	J. Munroe & Co.	1 "		.75
	H. W. Longfellow	1 "		1.00
	Geo. H. Whitney	5 "		3.75
11	G. H. Whitney	8 "	1/4	6.00
	J. Munroe & Co.	2 "		1.50
12	Little Brown & Co.	1 "		.75

DATE	PURCHASER	NUMBER	DISCOUNT	COST
1854				
Aug. 12	Fessenden & Co. [?]	2 Walden		1.50
	J. Munroe & Co.	2 "		1.50
	Geo. A. Parker	1 "		1.00
	T. W. Higginson	2 "		2.00
14	T. H. Pease	5 "	1/4 5%	3.56
	Burnham & Bro.	2 "	1/5	1.60
16	J. P. Jewett & Co.	25 "		16.67
	Phillips, Sampson & Co.	25 "		16.67
	Geo. J. Furness	1 "		1.00
17	J. Fessenden & Co. [?]	20 "	3	14.00
	A. [?] Burley	6 "	30	4.20
19	B. B. Muzzey & Co.	25 "	1/3	16.67
21	O. W. Holmes	1 "		1.00
22	J. Munroe & Co.	2 "		1.50
23	Gould & Lincoln	1 "		.75
	Burnham & Bros.	2 "		1.60
	Geo. Winslow	1 "		1.00
24	J. Munroe & Co.	1 "		.75
	Redding & Co.	6 "		4.50
25	J. M. Cooper & Co.	5 "		3.33
26	J. Burnett	1 "		.75
31	W. J. Reynolds & Co.	2 "		1.40
Sept. 1	Brown Bazin & Co.	1 "		.75
	F. Haven	1 "		1.00
	Jno. Armour	6 "		4.00
2	Boston Library	1 "		.83

DATE	PURCHASER	NUMBER	DISCOUNT	COST
1854				
Sept. 2	Miss Davis	1 Walden		1.00
	J. G. King	1 "		1.00
4	C. Morse	5 "	1/3	3.33
	S. P. Elwood & Co.	3 "	1/4	2.25
5	J. Munroe & Co.	3 "		2.25
	B. B. Muzzey & Co.	13 "	30	9.10
6	E. Dwight	1 "		1.00
7	B. B. Muzzey & Co.	1 Merrimac		.75
	W. J. Reynolds & Co.	1 Walden		.70
	Crosby Nichols & Co.	2 "		1.50
8	W. J. Reynolds & Co.	1 "		.70
9	F. Alger	1 "		1.00
	J. Munroe & Co.	3 "		2.25
12	W. J. Reynolds & Co.	1 "		.70
20	W. J. Reynolds & Co.	1 "		.70
	J. P. Jewett & Co.	1 "		.75
	Crosby, Nichols & Co.	3 "		2.25
23	W. J. Reynolds & Co.	1 "		.70
	Canton Library	1 "		.75
	J. P. Jewett	2 "		1.50
28	C. Simpson	1 "		.75
Oct. 6	I. S. Bailey	4 "		2.67
7	W. J. Reynolds & Co.	1 "		.70
10	J. M. Dewey	3 "	1/4	2.25
16	Crosby Nichols & Co.	2 "	1/4	1.50
	J. Munroe & Co.	2 "		1.50

DATE	PURCHASER	NUMBER	DISCOUNT	COST
1854				
Oct. 18	Brown Bazin & Co.	1 Walden		.75
21	J. Munroe & Co.	2 "		1.50
	Burnham & Bro.	3 "		2.40
Nov. 10	Tappan & Whittemore	2 "		1.50
11	Ide & Dutton	1 "		.75
27	Tappan & Whittemore	1 "		.75
28	B. B. Muzzey & Co.	1 "		.70
Dec. 7	B. B. Muzzey & Co.	1 "		.70
18	Crosby Nichols & Co.	1 "		.75
22	J. Munroe & Co.	3 "		2.25
25	Brown Bazin & Co.	1 "		.75
1855				
Jan. 17	A. Fetridge & Co.	2 "		1.50
Feb. 1	Phillips Sampson & Co.	3 "		2.10
17	Gould & Lincoln	1 "		.75
21	Sanborn, Carter & Bazin	1 "		.70
March 10	Burnham [&] Bros.	2 "		1.60
12	Sanborn, Carter & Bazin	1 "		.70
15	R. W. Hooper	1 "	cf	2.25
24	Brown Bazin & Co.	1 "		.75
[Records for period from April 1, 1855 to June 29, 1855 missing]				
July 10	James W. Crawford, St. Louis	1 Walden		.63
13	Phillips Sampson & Co.	2 "	1.00	2.00
16	Phillips Sampson & Co.	A Week on the Concord River	1.00	1.00

## ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF PURCHASERS WITH IDENTIFICATIONS

(I have identified as "booksellers" here firms that were also stationers, printers, or publishers.)

Alger, F. Possibly the F. Alger who edited Phillips' Mineralogy for Ticknor & Fields in 1843.

Alger, W. R. A Unitarian clergyman in Boston. Ironically this first purchaser of Walden later in Solitudes of Nature and of Man (Boston, 1866) wrote a strong denunciation of Thoreau.

Armour, Jno. I have been unable to identify this name, but the discount received indicates that he is a bookseller.

Atkinson, T. A Theodore Atkinson lived at 7 Doane St. in Boston at this time and a Thomas Atkinson at 30 Charles St.

Bailey, I. S. A Portland, Maine, bookseller.

Boston Library. Probably the Boston Public Library.

Briggs, G. W. A Boston bookseller.

Brown Bazin & Co. A Boston bookseller.

Burley, A [?]. I have been unable to identify this name, but the discount received indicates that he is a bookseller.

Burnett, J. I have been unable to identify this name, but the discount received indicates that he is a bookseller.

Burnham & Bros. A Boston bookseller.

Canton Library. Probably the public library in Canton, Mass., where Thoreau did a short stint of teaching while he was a student at Harvard.

Channing, W. Could be W. Ellery Channing the poet, friend and biographer of Thoreau; or Walter Channing, Ellery's father; or William Henry Channing, Ellery's cousin, the Unitarian clergyman.

Cooke, J. B. & Co. Is this by any chance W. B. Cooke & Co., a San Francisco bookseller?

Cooper, J. M. & Co. A Savannah, Georgia, bookseller.

Crawford, James W. A St. Louis, Missouri, bookseller. Thoreau's friend Bronson Alcott had a number of admirers in St. Louis and probably one of these ordered the book.

Crocker & Brewster. A Boston bookseller.

Crosby, Nichols & Co. A Boston bookseller.

Davis, Miss. Too vague for identification.

Dewey, J. M. Possibly D. M. Dewey, a Rochester, New York, bookseller.

Dwight, E. Probably Elizabeth Dwight who later married Thoreau's friend James Elliot Cabot.

Elwood, S. P. & Co. I have been unable to identify this bookseller.

Fessenden, J. & Co. [?] Probably the Brattleboro, Vermont, bookseller, though the handwriting of the name is not clear in any case.

Fetridge, A. & Co. A Boston bookseller.

Furness, Geo. J. He resided at 5 Liberty Square in Boston. Whether he was related to Emerson's friend William Henry Furness is not known.

Gould & Lincoln. A Boston bookseller.

Gray, Sprague & Co. An Albany, New York, bookseller.

Haven, F. Is this possibly the Samuel Foster Haven, librarian of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester?

Hewins, C. A. Charles A. Hewins resided at 129 Washington Street, West Roxbury, Mass.

Higginson, T. W. The Transcendentalist author and Unitarian clergyman who was one of Thoreau's earliest admirers.

Holmes, O. W. The poet and physician who never was able to arouse much enthusiasm for Thoreau and later described him as that "nullifier of civilization, who insisted on nibbling his asparagus at the wrong end."



Homans, S. S. A New York City bookseller.

Hooper, R. W. Robert W. Hooper was a physician who lived at 44 Summer Street, Boston. Note that the \$2.25 he paid includes charges c[arried] f[orward]" from a previous bill.

Ide & Dutton. A Boston bookseller.

Jewett, J. P. & Co. A Boston bookseller.

Jones, Geo. B. I have been unable to identify this person.

Keith, J. & Co. A Worcester, Mass., bookseller. Thoreau had a circle of admirers in Worcester, among them H. G. O. Blake and Theo. Brown.

Kellog, F. W. I have been unable to identify this person.

King, J. G. A Boston lawyer who sometimes sponsored Emerson's lectures in that city.

Kinney [?], T. I have been unable to identify this bookseller.

Little Brown & Co. The Boston bookseller and publisher.

Little, W. C. & Co. An Albany, New York, bookseller.

Livermore, E. A New York City bookseller.

Longfellow, H. W. The Cambridge poet had been one of Thoreau's teachers at Harvard.

Martien, W. S. A Philadelphia bookseller.

Mercantile Library. The New York City subscription library. In 1843 when Thoreau was living on Staten Island, he obtained a "perpetual stranger's ticket to the library through his former Harvard tutor H. S. McKean, then the librarian.

Merriam Chapin & Co. A Springfield, Mass., bookseller.

Merrill & Straw. Lowell, Mass., booksellers.

Miller, Orton & Co. A New York City bookseller.

Morse, C. Probably either Charles M. Morse, a Boston bookseller, or Charles E. Morse, a Cambridge, Mass., bookseller.

Munroe, J. & Co. The Boston bookseller that had published Thoreau's first book, A Week, that had been such a financial failure. It is interesting to note apparently not wanting to get stuck a second time with a Thoreau book that they never ordered more than three copies of Walden at a time, though they were forced to re-order ten times before the year was up.

Muzzey, B. B. & Co. A Boston bookseller.

Norman, B. M. A New Orleans bookseller.

Parker, Geo. A. A student by this name was attending the law school at Harvard at this time.

Parker, H. Probably S. H. Parker, a Boston bookseller.

Pease, E. T. Possibly E. T. Pease & Co., a Hartford, Conn., bookseller.

Pease, T. H. Possibly a member of the above firm.

Peterson, T. B. A Philadelphia bookseller.

Pfisser [?], A. P. I have been unable to identify this dealer, though because the handwriting is difficult, I may not have read the name correctly.

Phillips, Sampson & Co. A Boston bookseller.

Randolph, J. W. A Richmond, Virginia, bookseller.

Reading & Co. A Boston bookseller.

Redding & Co. Probably a misspelling of the above.

Reynolds, W. J. & Co. A Boston bookseller.

Roorbach, O. A. The well-known New York City bookseller and bibliographer.

Their order for 104 copies is the largest Walden received.

Sanborn, Carter & Bazin. A Boston bookseller.

Simpson, C. Possibly C. Stimpson, a Boston bookseller.

Spencer, W. V. A Boston bookseller.

Tappan & Whittemore. A Boston bookseller.

Tewksbury, W. T. Probably W. P. Tewksbury, a Boston bookseller.

[Truman?] & Spofford. Probably a Cincinnati bookseller, though the first name is almost illegible.

Vickery & Griffiths. I have been unable to identify this bookseller.

Whipple, H. & Son. A Salem, Mass., bookseller.

Whitaker, S. W. I have been unable to identify this bookseller.

Whitney, Geo. H. A Providence, R. I., bookseller.

Winslow, Geo. A George Winslow resided at 114 State St., Boston, Mass.

Woodman, H. Probably Horatio Woodman, a Boston lawyer and friend of Emerson.

Totalling up these sales, we find that in the first year (excepting the months of April, May, and June, 1855, for which the records have disappeared), Ticknor & Fields sold 738 copies of Walden out of a printing of two thousand copies. It should be noted that I have also included their occasional sales of Thoreau's first book, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, which had been published by J. Munroe & Co. of Boston in 1849, but who had returned their unsold copies to Thoreau in 1853. After the publication of Walden, Thoreau made arrangements with his new publisher to carry a few copies of the first book in stock to sell as the occasion demanded. In the first year they thus sold two copies!

#### SALES BY CITIES

If we tabulate the sales of Walden to booksellers, we make some interesting discoveries:

Boston, Mass.	399 copies
New York City	126
Philadelphia	30
Cincinnati	20
Portland, Maine	14

Providence, R. I.	13 copies	
Hartford, Conn.	10	
Worcester, Mass.	10	
Brattleboro, Vermont	6	
Albany, New York	6	
New Orleans, La.	6	
Savannah, Ga.	5	
Springfield, Mass.	5	
Rochester, New York	3	
Lowell, Mass.	3	
Richmond, Va.	3	
Salem, Mass.	3	
San Francisco, Calif.	1	
St. Louis, Mo.	<u>1</u>	
	664	Total sold to booksellers

Thus we can easily see that overwhelmingly the sales were local, with more than half the copies being sold in Boston, almost two-thirds (420 copies) in New England. There is a surprise though in the fact that it was a New York City bookseller (O. A. Roorbach) that individually sold the largest number of copies (104), although this fact is in part at least explained in that Roorbach was competing with only three other bookstores, whereas in Boston there were twenty-two booksellers handling the book. Far more surprising are the number of orders from below the Mason-Dixon Line--New Orleans, Savannah, and Richmond, Virginia. The Transcendentalists in general and Thoreau in particular have been thought to have few admirers in the South, chiefly because of their outspoken position against slavery. Yet three Southern bookstores ordered multiple copies.

# SALES BY MONTHS

One other tabulation is perhaps worthwhile and that is chronological.

August, 1854	629 copies
Sept.	55
Oct.	18
Nov.	5
Dec.	6
Jan., 1855	2
Feb.	5
March	5
April-June	[No sales record]
July	3

Thus we see that more than 80% of the first year's sales occurred in the month of publication and that after three months the sales had tapered off to an average of less than five copies a month. It was incidentally not until 1859 that the first edition of two thousand copies of Walden was exhausted. And it was not until after Thoreau's death in 1862 that Ticknor & Fields bothered with a second printing--and then of only 280 copies. But the sales of Walden since that date are quite a different story, of course--though not one to be told here.

State University College, Geneseo