

As a Christmas gift for its readers and in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of America's greatest nature writer, Henry David Thoreau, Home Garden is delighted to present a portfolio of rare, hitherto unpublished photographs of the Thoreau country made half a century or more ago by the preeminent illustrator of Thoreau's works, Herbert W. Gleason.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was the only one of the famed Concord writers who was a native of that town in Massachusetts. Educated at Harvard, he returned to Concord to devote himself to a life of writing and quiet contemplation of nature. His masterpiece, Walden (1854), is the vivid account of the two years he spent living in a cabin of his own making on the shores of Walden Pond in his hometown. Among his other well-known works are Cape Cod, The Maine Woods, the controversial "Civil Disobedience," and the massive fourteen-volume Journal--a two-million word recording of his daily thoughts over a quarter of a century.

Why is Thoreau, who in his own lifetime was considered a failure as a writer, now placed in the top rank of our literary greats? There are many reasons. He developed a clear and keen literary style that many have termed the first truly modern prose. He concerned himself with the really central problems of life--What is happiness? What is success? What is the good life?--and found answers

that are even more pertinent in our day than in his own. And as a nature writer, instead of merely reporting the ways of birds and flowers, he concerned himself with the larger issues of the relation of man to nature and nature to man. He used his observations on natural history as foundation stones for the construction of a philosophy of life. He built from the particular to the universal so that his writings have become touchstones for modern man.

Herbert Gleason, a Boston photographer, became interested in Thoreau's writings when he was commissioned to illustrate the twenty-volume Writings of Thoreau in 1906 by Houghton Mifflin. With the help of the <sup>few</sup> remaining people who had known Thoreau personally, Gleason searched out the very spots Thoreau had described so vividly and lovingly and caught them for all time in his camera, before they were destroyed by burgeoning suburbia. If Thoreau had described the anemones in blossom in Walden Woods on May 8, 1852, Gleason returned to that exact spot on the anniversary of that date and photographed the very descendants of the plants Thoreau had described.

Houghton Mifflin used only approximately a hundred of Gleason's photographs in their edition, but the task had captured his imagination, and he devoted a good part of the remaining forty-odd years of his life (He died in 1937.) to adding to his collection of photographs of the

Thoreau country until he had more than twelve hundred choice examples. In 1917, to commemorate the centennial of Thoreau's birth, he published Through the Year with Thoreau, a volume of selections from Thoreau's writings illustrated with some of these photographs, a volume now long since out-of-print. A few more of his photographs found their way into newspaper and magazine articles, but the vast majority never reached print. Gleason's original glass plates and negatives are now appropriately owned by Roland Robbins of Lincoln, Mass., the "pick and shovel historian" who discovered the exact site of Thoreau's Walden cabin in 1946. He has generously consented to the reproduction here ~~of the finest~~ in the pages of Home Garden of some of the choicest of the unpublished ~~photographs~~ photographs from that superb collection.

Walter Harding



October 3, 1967

Mr. Carroll C. Calkins, Editor  
Home Garden  
One Park Avenue  
New York, New York 10016

Dear Mr. Calkins:

When I spoke to you on the telephone yesterday, I had forgotten the fact that the Thoreau Society has a rule that its mailing list cannot be used for anything other than sending out bulletins and booklets. Therefore, I will not be able to send out the post cards for you. I am sorry to have totell you this. It is just a regulation of the Society that I cannot very well ignore. However, I shall be happy to mention in the fall bulletin the forthcoming appearance of the Gleason article and this should serve to alert our members to get copies.

Sincerely yours,

Walter Harding, Secretary  
The Thoreau Society

WH/sc