

THE
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VALLEY
REVIEW

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MARIST

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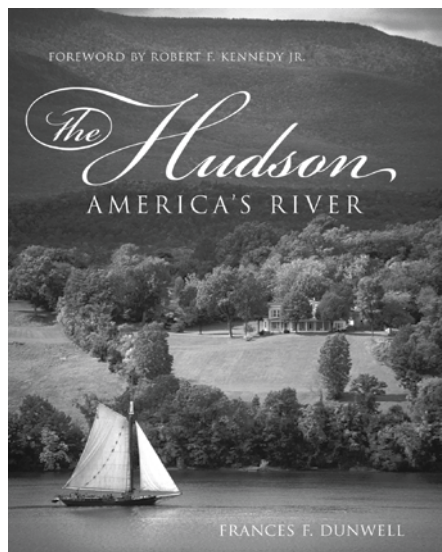
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*This issue is dedicated to the memory
of Thomas W. Casey.*



Thomas W. Casey and Elizabeth Burroughs Kelly
in the summerhouse at Riverby

From John Burroughs' "Waiting"

Serene, I fold my hands and wait
Nor care for wind, nor tide, nor sea;
Rave no more 'gainst Time nor Fate,
For lo! My own shall come to me.

I stay my haste, I make delays,
For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face.

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

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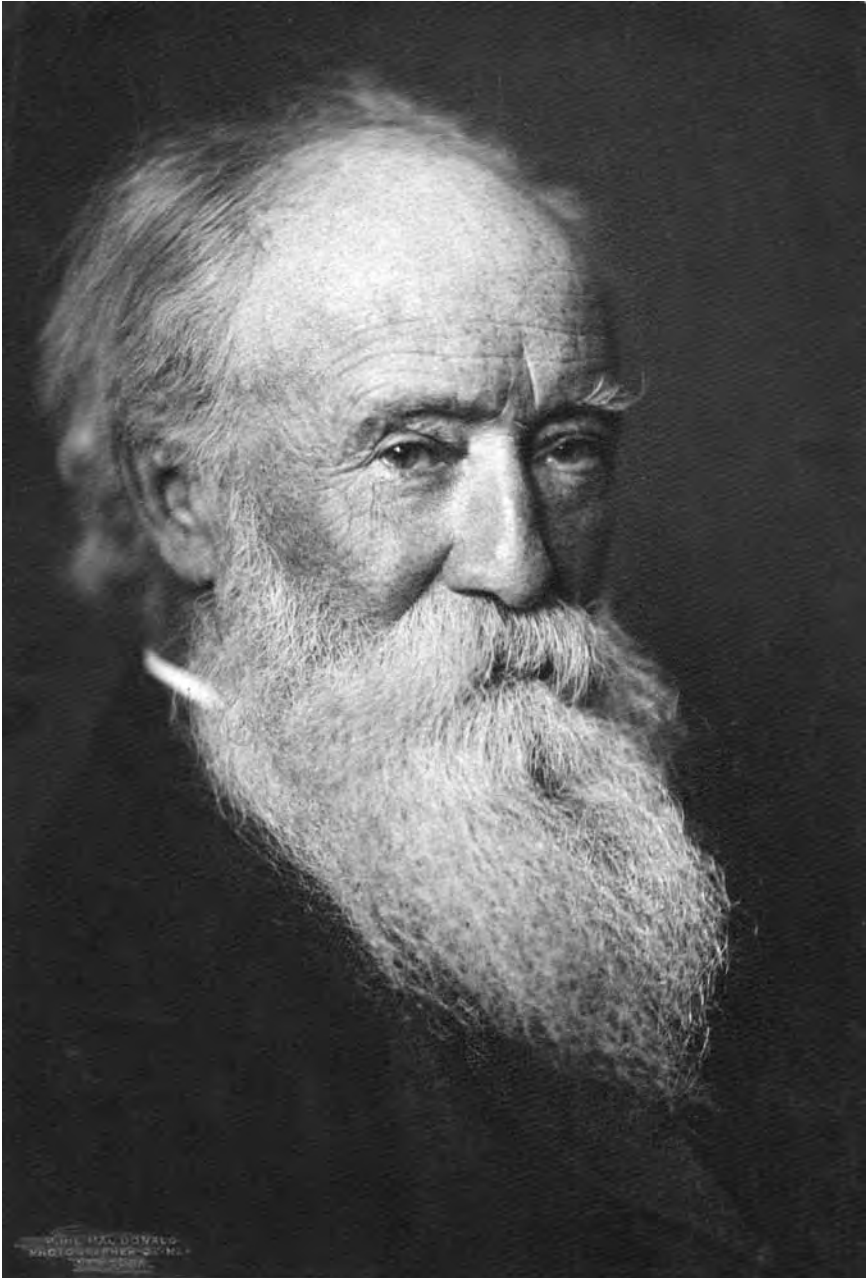
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On the Cover: Portrait of John Burroughs by Orlando Rouland,
Courtesy of Craig Chesek © American Museum of Natural History (AMNH)



John Burroughs in the Hudson River Valley: An Introduction

Stephen M. Mercier

I sit here amid the junipers of the Hudson, with purpose every year to go to Florida, or to the West Indies or to the Pacific Coast, yet the seasons pass and I am still loitering, with a half-denied suspicion, perhaps, that, if I remain quiet and keep a sharp lookout, these countries will come to me. I may stick it out yet, and not miss much after all. The great trouble is for Mohammed to know when the mountain really comes to him. Sometimes a rabbit or a jay or a little warbler brings the woods to my door. A loon on the river, and the Canada lakes are here; the sea gulls and the fish hawk bring the sea; the call of the wild gander at night, what does it suggest? And the eagle flapping by, or floating along on a raft of ice, does not he bring the mountain? (*Signs and Seasons*, 4)

In his essay “A Sharp Lookout” in *Signs and Seasons* (1886), John Burroughs contemplates the wonders of nature, concluding that one “has only to stay at home and see the procession pass” (3). Burroughs encouraged all readers to appreciate that which they could discover within their midst. One need not go gadding about the world in far-off places in search of natural wonders; Burroughs found all the nature he desired right in New York’s Hudson River Valley. As sensitive to his surroundings as a barometer, he fine-tuned his powers of perception in Roxbury and West Park. With a poetic spirit, he deciphered ecological relations between plants, animals, soil, and weather patterns. His love for the local has been noted by several critics. As Jeff Walker explains, Burroughs “is observing nature from his home in the Hudson River Valley, a major bird migration route that also boasts spectacularly distinct climatological and seasonal changes” (294). His long-standing considerations of the Hudson Valley mark him as the premier writer of the region.

As Alfred H. Marks noted in his “John Burroughs and the Hudson Valley,” which appeared in *The Hudson Valley Regional Review* in September 1995,

Let us make no bones about it—John Burroughs is, without doubt, the Hudson Valley’s greatest author. . . . And even when his thoughts wander off into transcendental realms, there is no doubt where his feet are rooted. He also carried the spirit and the place markers of the Hudson Valley into the world outside and elicited response which brought that wide world here to the shores of the river—to Riverby, to Slabsides, and indeed to Roxbury. (3)

While many authors are associated with the region, such as Myron Benton, William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, Henry James, James Kirke Paulding, Anya Seton, Walt Whitman, and Nathaniel Parker Willis, Burroughs is the one who spent so many years intensely observing the valley. Indeed, many critics consider Burroughs to be one of the finest “regionalist” writers. Harry Stoneback explains that “Regionalism means, finally, that a writer writes out of, not about, a profound sense of place, that he sees in and through and because of intense localism, that his strength comes from being ‘rooted as a tree’” (271). Of Burroughs, Stoneback pronounces: “His is a vision that comes, as he says, from living ‘on the land, amid the wrinkles of the hills, [where] you have place, fixedness, locality, a nook in the chimney-corner.’ There has perhaps seldom been a writer so immersed in the local, in the regional, who kept such a sure eye on the eternal and the universal” (276-77). Rebecca Kneale Gould recognizes that Burroughs developed “an ethic and aesthetic of ‘staying in place’” (151). According to Gould, like Wendell Berry Burroughs heeds “the call to return to local agriculture and local culture” (151), and captures for readers “the practical, spiritual, and aesthetic value of the new life he has taken up” (152). Indeed, Burroughs found that farming connected him to the landscape and to the larger currents of the universe. In *Signs and Seasons*, he preaches: “Cling to the farm, make much of it, put yourself into it, bestow your heart and your brain upon it, so that it shall savor of you and radiate your virtue after your day’s work is done!” (261). The farm furnished Burroughs with the ideal and the practical. At his Riverby farm in West Park, Burroughs supported himself by growing strawberries, raspberries, apples, currants, and table grapes, which he shipped down the river—first by boat and later by train—to New York City; at nearby Slabsides, he grew 30,000 celery plants. His grounding on the family farm helped inform his subjects and style as a writer.

What John Burroughs said of naturalist Gilbert White in *Literary Values* (1902) could likewise be said of Burroughs himself. In Burroughs’ opinion, White

had in the very texture of his mind the flavor of rural things. Then it is the growth of a particular locality. Let a man stick his staff into the ground anywhere and say, ‘This is home,’ and describe things from that point of

view, or as they stand in relation to that spot,—the weather, the fauna, the flora,—and his account shall have an interest to us it could not have if not thus located and defined. This is one secret of White's charm. His work has a home air, a certain privacy and particularity. . . . we get an authentic glimpse into the real life of one man there; we see him going about intent, lovingly intent, upon every phase of nature about him. (186)

Burroughs gives away the secret of his own great talent when he notes the skill required to “give the atmosphere” of “birds, trees, flowers, clouds, [and] streams,” and “to seize the significant and interesting features and to put the reader into sympathetic communication” (187-88). He crafted essays that would maintain what he called “human interest,” encouraging readers to conjure their own associations with the wildlife he so lovingly described.

When considering the passionate affiliation with nature in his comrade Walt Whitman in *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person* (1867), Burroughs seems to be reflecting upon qualities of his own writing: “To him that is pregnable, the rocks, the hills, the evening, the grassy bank, the young trees and old trees, the various subtle dynamic forces, the sky, the seasons, the birds, the domestic animals, etc., furnish intimate and precious relations at first hand which nothing at second hand can supply” (38). Central to Burroughs is this firsthand connection; he urged readers to make direct contact with the outdoors and to bask all of their senses in their surroundings. In “The Gospel of Nature” in *Time and Change* (1912), Burroughs praises the natural world for the existence of human and other life forms. Then he asks simply, “But I am not preaching much of a gospel, am I? Only the gospel of contentment, of appreciation, of heeding simple near-by things—a gospel the burden of which still is love, but love that goes hand in hand with understanding” (262). Embedded within his many rambles around the Hudson River Valley, this message of affectionately appreciating one's immediate surroundings struck a chord with many readers.

Hailed as the most beloved author of the natural history essay, Burroughs' books sold more than one and a half million copies. A prolific author, Burroughs penned twenty-seven books that were published over a fifty-five year period, from 1867 to 1922. His essays, totaling an incredible 450, include literary criticism on Ralph Waldo Emerson (whom he considered to be his “spiritual father”), Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. Burroughs and Whitman were very close friends while Burroughs lived in Washington, D.C. (1863 to 1872), and remained close until Whitman's death in 1892; in fact, in a section titled “Happiness and Strawberries: June 21” in his *Specimen Days* Whitman fondly recounts his visit to see John and Ursula Burroughs at Riverby. In his description, Whitman offers a

compelling description of the Hudson River:

Here I am, on the west bank of the Hudson, 80 miles north of New York, near Esopus, at the handsome, roomy, honeysuckle-and-rose-embowered cottage of John Burroughs. The place, the perfect June days and nights (leaning toward crisp and cool), the hospitality of J. and Mrs B., the air, the fruit (especially my favorite dish, currants and raspberries, mixed, sugared, fresh and ripe from the bushes—I pick ‘em myself)—the room I occupy at night, the perfect bed, the window giving an ample view of the Hudson and the opposite shores, so wonderful toward sunset, and the rolling music of the R.R. trains, far over there—the peaceful rest—the early Venus-heralded dawn—the noiseless splash of sunrise, the light and warmth indescribably glorious [...] Then, after some whiffs of morning air, the delicious coffee of Mrs. B., with the cream, strawberries, and many substantials, for breakfast. (77)

While living near the Hudson, Burroughs crafted social criticism leery of unchecked industrialism. He developed geological hypotheses, confronted Darwin’s theories on evolution, and deeply considered the relationship between spirituality and science. And he forged philosophical reflections upon humanity’s place in the cosmos. Although John Burroughs only had a modest amount of formal college education, studying a few months at the Hedding Literary Institute in Ashland, New York, and at Cooperstown Seminary, he taught at several schools in the Hudson River Valley and surrounding area from 1854 to 1864. Despite his humble beginnings as a farmboy in Roxbury (1837 to 1854) and early career as a schoolteacher, by the end of the nineteenth century John Burroughs had become a household name.

Throughout most of his lifetime, Burroughs kept a journal in which he contemplated this wide range of subject matter, and upon which he drew when constructing his essays. Before their publication in book form, most of Burroughs’ essays appeared in leading periodicals such as *The Atlantic*, *The Century*, *The Dial*, *Galaxy*, *Harper’s*, *Lippincott’s*, *Popular Science Review*, *Putnam’s*, and *Scribner’s*. Perhaps his most famous essays recount his rambles exploring native natural history in the Hudson River Valley and Catskills, and life on the family farm. These works contributed to the development of the natural history essay in meaningful ways. Philip Marshall Hicks sums up Burroughs’ standards for “literary naturalism,” Burroughs’ more precise term for the genre of nature writing: “first, the writer must tell the truth as to fact; second, he must make that fact interesting and significant by relating it to man’s experience; third, he must write with simplicity,

sincerity, and clearness of his own love for nature” (143). Indeed, Burroughs had the ability to construct captivating descriptions of the Hudson River Valley’s flora and fauna. For example, he associates the springtime arrival of the wake-robin (trillium) “with the universal awakening and rehabilitation of nature” (*Wake-Robin*, 4). He meditates upon both the sublimity of the pond-lily as a symbol of nature’s ability to generate beautiful forms out of the soil, thus poetically bridging the gap between the organic and inorganic. He celebrates rainwater, wildflowers and weeds, the apple, strawberry, cows, chipmunks, squirrels, speckled trout, and tree toads, so often taken for granted in favor of more exotic species. Appreciating roots and stalks, as well as wildflowers, he urged readers to engage their sensory modalities in order to fully appreciate their surroundings, even those aspects that society has not typically deemed “beautiful.” Of the bluebird, Burroughs writes: “When Nature made the bluebird she wished to propitiate both the sky and the earth, so she gave him the color of the one on his back and the hue of the other on his breast” (*Wake-Robin*, 205). Famously known as “John O’Birds,” Burroughs considers not only bird migration and nest building, but also how parents raised their young, what they eat, as well as their general behavior and habitats; in his study of ecological relations, he greatly preferred the “live bird” to the stuffed specimen and urged his readers to do the same.

Burroughs’ deep emotive connections may help to reorient environmental ethics toward the central need for an emotional concern for species and their surroundings. Burroughs’ sincere sympathy for and identification with local landscapes implicitly warrants their protection:

Then the typical spring and summer and autumn days, of all shades and complexions,—one cannot afford to miss any of them; and when looked out upon from one’s own spot of earth, how much more beautiful and significant they are! Nature comes home to one most when he is at home [...]. One’s own landscape comes in time to be a sort of outlying part of himself; he has sowed himself broadcast upon it, and it reflects his own moods and feelings; his is sensitive to the verge of the horizon; cut those trees, and he bleeds; mar those hills, and he suffers. (*Signs and Seasons*, 5)

Burroughs’ oeuvre reveals the viability of sentimental affection and familial affiliation; important intersections occur between the sentimental and environmental ethics and protection. His texts offer profound respect for the intrinsic value of the “other,” whether this other is a bird, flower, stream, the divine soil, or any other aspect of natural habitat. His prose has the capacity to transcend his own era and exercise powerful influences today. Burroughs offers to the present a

most valuable trajectory to follow. Future environmental historians will look back to find that the resurgence of Burroughs' texts—which, in my opinion, is inevitable—has helped people to more productively imagine themselves “at home” on the planet with other species.

One might see Burroughs' writings as a response to an ever-increasing spirit of industrialization that was gripping the nation in the mid-nineteenth century. As the Gilded Age ushered in robber barons with wealth beyond imagination, Burroughs feared greed would diminish citizens' appreciation of their natural surroundings and deprave their souls. American entrepreneurs like Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Jay Gould, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller acquired massive wealth as they initiated the production of harmful technologies that could sever the human-nature relationship. Burroughs' deep appreciation for life forms undermined the cultural emphasis upon moneymaking as the most important endeavor for citizens. Natural resources, such as oil, coal, and timber, were seen as a means to wealth. Cities and suburbs, railroads and factories, began to replace farm and forest. The result of a cultural climate obsessed with the attainment of affluence and corporate prestige is that nature, if viewed at all, is seen as a resource for consumption. Economic growth supersedes environmental awareness and protection. In “An Outlook Upon Life” (*Leaf and Tendril*, 1908), Burroughs writes: “I look upon this craze for wealth that possesses nearly all classes in our time as one of the most lamentable spectacles the world has ever seen” (257). As he continues his reflections, Burroughs builds a contrast between what he calls “the simple life” and people whose motivation is material gain, those who Burroughs calls the “wealth-maniacs” (260). As James Perrin Warren states in his *John Burroughs and the Place of Nature*, Burroughs “gave voice to the art of simple living and to the beauty and power of nature found near at hand. In both respects, his work may speak to modern readers who seek an inclusive, diverse sense of nature, and nature that finds a place in close proximity to culture and exercises healthy influences upon it” (1). He dreaded the potential misuse of technology and felt that an obsession with materialism was deteriorating the nation. Therefore, he accentuated direct contact with the elements, the taste of wild berries, the enjoyment of taking morning and evening walks, the pleasure of viewing the stars, a bird's nest, or a wildflower. For these reasons, those who seek the respite offered by more simple living as an escape from the ennui of civilization seem particularly drawn to Burroughs. Furthermore, as an American middle-class was emerging, citizens with time for leisure sought nature as a refuge from urban sprawl. Still further, “the preservation of the natural environment became a matter of increasing preoccupation.” (Pierce, 16).

Since this issue is appearing in autumn, it is fitting to include some of Burroughs' own considerations of the natural beauty of the Hudson River Valley during this wondrous season. A chapter titled "Autumn Tides" can be found in *Winter Sunshine* (1875). Of the fall of 1874, Burroughs writes:

There were six weeks of Indian summer, all gold by day, and, when the moon came, all silver by night. The river was so smooth at times as to be almost invisible, and in its place was the indefinite continuation of the opposite shore down toward the nether world. One seemed to be in an enchanted land, and to breathe all day the atmosphere of fable and romance. Not a smoke, but a kind of shining nimbus filled all spaces. The vessels would drift by as if in mid-air with all their sails set. The gypsy blood in one, as Lowell calls it, could hardly stay between four walls and see such days go by. Living in tents, in groves and on the hills, seemed the only natural life. (112)

Here Burroughs vividly portrays his perception of the river in an "enchancing" manner. He notes the effect the experience has on him, as the sights of the river rouse his "gypsy blood" out of doors. Indeed, Burroughs always seems to be encouraging his readers to immerse themselves in their surroundings, rather than to be confined by "four walls." He shares his joy over the autumn colors of the Hudson River Valley, even before peak foliage:

How rich in color, before the big show of the tree foliage has commenced, our roadsides are in places in early autumn [...] with the profusion of goldenrod and blue and purple asters dashed in upon here and there with the crimson leaves of the dwarf sumac; and at intervals, rising out of the fence corner or crowning a ledge of rocks, the dark green of the cedar with the still fire of the woodbine at its heart. I wonder if the waysides of other lands present any analogous spectacles at this season. (119)

Enticing readers to see such an array of natural beauty with a childlike curiosity, Burroughs emphasizes what they might recognize in the familiar. The world becomes rather magical. "Then, when the maples have burst out into color, showing like great bonfires along the hills, there is indeed a feast for the eye. A maple before your windows in October, when the sun shines upon it, will make up for a good deal of light it has excluded; it fills the room with a soft golden glow" (119-120). One touchstone of Burroughs' poetic prose is that he brings nature "close to home" for his readers. Look out "your windows" he tells us, reminding us that natural beauty is nearby rather than far off. For Burroughs, the "common" was never taken for granted. In his rambles in the Hudson River Valley, the "typical"

remained novel and Burroughs maintained a breathtaking sense of expectancy. The behaviors of few creatures escaped his discerning eye:

By mid-October, most of the Rip Van Winkles among our brute creatures have lain down for their winter nap. The toads and turtles have buried themselves in the earth. The woodchuck is in his hibernaculum, the skunk in his, the mole in his; and the black bear has his selected, and will go in when the snow comes. [...] The coon retires about the same time. The provident wood-mice and the chipmunk are laying by a winter supply of nuts or grain, the former usually in decayed trees, the latter in the ground. (120-21)

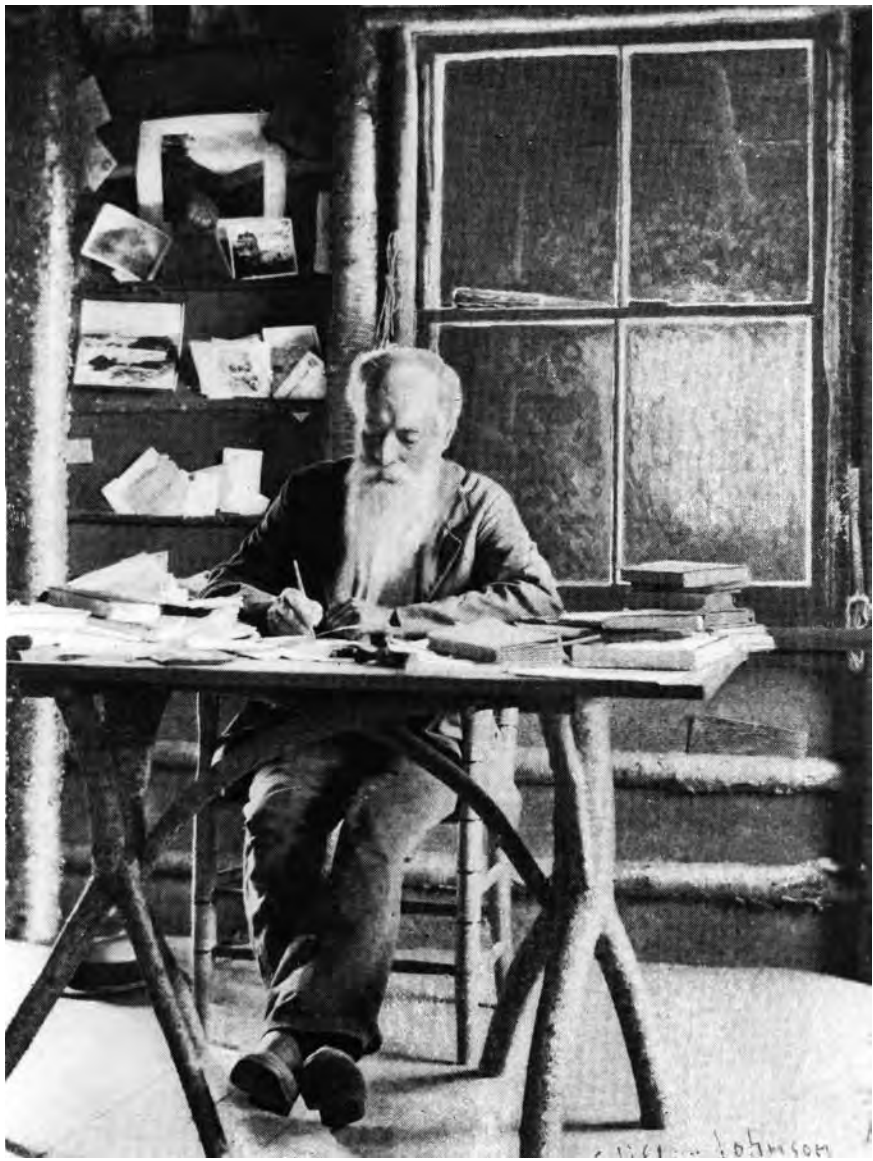
In addition to considering the winter preparations of toads and turtles, skunks and moles, black bear, wood-mice and chipmunks, Burroughs also included observations about red and gray squirrels, bumblebees, hornets, wasps, and trout. He celebrated the “underdog” species that many people find bothersome, “ugly,” and regularly dismiss in favor of the “cute” and beautiful. We are to develop sympathy for flora and fauna, and even develop sensitivity toward ambient aspects of the weather. Of “a close observer,” Burroughs writes:

“He is keenly alive to all outward impressions. When he descends from the hill in the autumn twilight, he notes the cooler air of the valley like a lake about him; he notes how, at other seasons, the cooler air at times settles down between the mountains like a vast body of water, as shown by the level line of the fog or the frost upon the trees” (*Leaf and Tendril*, 9).

Indeed, fans and scholars of Burroughs have been drawn to his keen perceptions and the intuitions to which they gave rise. Philosopher Thomas W. Casey argued that Burroughs could be properly labeled an “external mystic,” due to his gleaning of the divine through the medium of nature.

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John Burroughs at his writing desk in Slabsides

John Burroughs—Regionalist (and Modernist?): A Meditation on Influences and Confluences

H.R. Stoneback

As some readers of this essay will know, in my two articles in Charlotte Walker's superb collection of essays, *Sharp Eyes: John Burroughs and American Nature Writing*, I made a detailed case for the importance of seeing Burroughs as a *regionalist*, a writer who has crucially important things to say to this new century about visions of home, place, rootedness. Indeed, Burroughs as much as *any* American writer, any charismatic personage and public figure in our history, lived and wrote in and through a complex vision of concreteness, rootedness, intense locality, and the bright particularity of place. Through local knowledge, Burroughs—like the best regionalists—leads us to the universal and eternal verities. I will use that argument as a springboard to these meditations on Burroughs as a Modernist—and I mean that term in the sense it is used in literary history, to denote that period of High Modernism centered in the 1920s and in the work of such writers as Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, and others. If Burroughs is not exactly a Modernist, he is, I will suggest here, a very important pre-Modernist, or crypto-Modernist, and his pervasive influence on Modernist writers is a subject that has been almost entirely overlooked. To get where I want to go, the reader will have to travel with me through some literary history, some personal history, and some anecdotes, since I may be approaching that age that could be called my *anecdote*. Along the way, I will throw in some science, since the recent Burroughs Conference at Vassar College—"Sharp Eyes—John Burroughs: Nature Writing and Nineteenth Century Science"—underlined the importance of such connections.*

The science, I can assure you, will be light, tentative—since I am well aware that I am a poet and a literary critic addressing an audience that includes distin-

An early version of this essay was delivered as the Keynote Address at the Vassar Burroughs Conference (June 15–19, 2008). Thus it may retain certain signs of orality—intentionally so, since all writing is a performance that involves a sense of occasion and audience, as well as tone, rhythm, voice.

guished scientists and naturalists. But then, of course, Burroughs was also a poet (especially in his best essays) and a literary critic. Here I am reminded of the story of the writer and lecturer who perished in the famous Johnstown Flood. When he arrived at the Pearly Gates, St. Peter invited him to give a lecture on the Great Flood to a heavenly throng the next night. Then St. Peter added: "Uh...there is *one* thing you may wish to bear in mind during your talk." "What's that," the Johnstown Flood victim asked. St. Peter smiled: "*Noah* will be in the audience." I am also reminded of Sir John Pope-Hennessy, that wonderful lecturer on art history I heard many times. He had a certain way of handling questions after his lectures. When somebody asked a silly question he moved his head back and forth in a slow, hypnotic motion—he was very tall and had a very long neck—then fixed his eyes on the questioner and said: "I fear, sir or madam, I fear your question condemns any possible answer to insignificance." I find more congenial my mentor Robert Penn Warren's way of handling dumb questions—Red Warren would say, "Ah cain't git a purchase on your question." In brief, I am determined here to avoid raising questions about Burroughs and science that condemn the answers to insignificance because I "cain't git a purchase" on nineteenth-century science.

Still, 2008 is a remarkable season of science and nature-writing for me, for a road-weary poet-troubadour. Right before the Burroughs Conference, I returned from a grueling roadtrip to Kansas City where at the International Hemingway Conference I delivered a keynote address centrally concerned with Hemingway and science, with the *scientific* circus surrounding the Scopes trial, and the response of Hemingway characters to writers such as Mencken who wanted to cram quasi-Darwinian theory down the throats of what Mencken was pleased to regard as the redneck "booboisie" of the South. Hemingway's characters view Mencken as just another "Monkey Missionary," another intolerant preacher of tolerance in the name of pseudo-science. Immediately after the Burroughs Conference I went to Paris to speak at the International Lawrence Durrell Conference at the University of Paris. That conference rubric—"Lawrence Durrell at the Crossroads of Arts and Science"—and some of the presentations bore a striking resemblance to the Burroughs Conference deliberations, perhaps proving that the Hudson Valley is on the international cutting edge of knowledge and history. My subject in Paris was the quality of exact observation in Durrell's work and its probable indebtedness to the nineteenth-century natural sciences dedicated to a new order of descriptive exactitude. Lawrence Durrell, of course, was the famous modern or post-modern novelist and poet, author of *The Alexandria Quartet* and many other works. His brother Gerald was a famous naturalist. I knew Lawrence Durrell, and Larry and I discussed, among other things, Thoreau and American Nature Writing. Larry

thought Thoreau could have been more exact, accurate—less transcendental. I don't recall that we ever discussed Burroughs. In any case, my central concern at the University of Paris conference was what Larry called the importance of “tuning in to nature idly,” with a kind of rapt attention to the mysterious quiddity of things, a quality of attention that looks outward *and* inward in order to grasp the *Deus Loci*, the Spirit of Place. Whether this is a case of influence or confluence, I am quite certain that Larry, if he knew Burroughs' work, would salute John Burroughs as brother-poet of nature and place.

After I left Paris—John Burroughs traveling with me all the way— I spoke at another conference in Provence, in the Camargue, that capital of nature-study in southern France. At the International Aldington Society Conference I discussed the influence of nature writing and nineteenth-century science on yet another key Modernist writer, Richard Aldington, prolific author of ninety-some volumes of poetry, fiction, criticism, biography, and translation. Aldington, a once celebrated though now neglected novelist and poet, famous as a founding member of the Imagist movement, was profoundly influenced by nineteenth-century nature writing. He was a keen amateur lepidopterist—collecting and studying butterflies was his lifelong avocation. As a boy in the late 1890s and early 1900s he served his apprenticeship in nature study with Francis Austin, the field-naturalist and specimen collector and author of various works. In spite of his later primary associations with avant-garde artistic circles in Paris and London, exact study of nature remained at the center of his life to the end; as his daughter, my dear friend Catha Aldington, always reminds me when we talk, her father loved butterflies, seashells, flowers, and had an insatiable hunger to know the flora and fauna of the many places where he lived. Late in his life, Aldington's primary interests were still listed as “botany, astrology, entomology, anthropology, butterflies, bushmen, beetles; music, sculpture, painting, architecture, history” (Doyle, xvii). Catha tells me she cannot remember her father ever mentioning Burroughs—but again, whether influence or confluence, if Aldington did know Burroughs' work, I am certain he would salute John Burroughs as brother-poet of nature and place.

Since I have cited Aldington and Durrell it is necessary to stress here that they were both disciples of that quintessential Modernist Ezra Pound. All the main currents of Modernism flow through and from Ezra Pound, and he is usually viewed as a high priest of the Gospel of Art and the burden of European Civilization—but it is important to remember that he was born in Idaho, that he lived the first fifteen years of his life in the nineteenth century, that he had deep affinities with Thoreau, that he translated Louis Agassiz, that he loved long walks with close observation of details of place and nature, etc. ad infinitum. To

take just one brief moment from Pound's multifaceted career, we might recall that his creation, the seminal Imagist Movement in poetry, is grounded in the best nineteenth-century nature writing, in attention to detail, in what Pound calls "natural magic [that] requires great trees, & a readiness for rain" (Pound, 39). His daughter, the distinguished poet and scholar Countess Mary de Rachewiltz, tells me she knows of no evidence that her father read Burroughs. Yet I note that when I directed an Imagism Conference (2007) at Mary's home, Brunnenburg Castle in Italy, some of the talk had to do with American nature writing. I am willing to bet, though the evidence has not yet surfaced, that Pound knew the work of Burroughs. For now, I will settle for the fact that the letters and poems that Mary sends to me—and she is very much her father's daughter—are rich with the imagery of place, with exact observations of birds and plants and flowers.

In his magisterial study entitled *The Pound Era* (a widely accepted designation for much of the literary twentieth century), Hugh Kenner suggests that the increasing exactitude of nature writing in the decades preceding Modernism—that is to say, precisely the span of Burroughs' writing career—is one of the most important unexamined influences on certain Modernist writers. Kenner writes: "In the Pound Era [writers] learned that the energy concentrated in exactness was a poetic resource." Pre-modern generality would no longer do, since the natural sciences "formed on minute attention produced in the 19th century a new order of descriptive exactness" (Kenner, 168).

And that brings us to Ernest Hemingway, truly a nature writer and Pound's most famous apprentice, who crafted a prose style rooted in exactitude and *attention* to the natural world. Hemingway learned from Pound that style "derives from attention: such attention as Louis Agassiz paid to nature's minute realities." Agassiz, as Pound remarked, "could teach a litteratus to write" (Kenner, 167). Hemingway, of course, was well-versed in the natural sciences long before he met Pound; indeed, Dr. Clarence Hemingway, Ernest's father, was a passionate amateur naturalist, founder of a local branch of the Agassiz Club, the nature-study group that Ernest joined at age *four* when he became immersed in specimen collection—birds, insects, rocks—thus developing his discipline of *attention* from his earliest years. Pound's later lessons in nature and writing served to confirm Hemingway's boyhood intimations when he arrived at ground zero of Modernism: Paris, 1922.

Some of you may recall Hemingway's famous survey of American literature in *Green Hills of Africa*, where he says he has never been able to read Thoreau because he "cannot read other naturalists unless they are being extremely accurate and not literary" (21). (We note that Hemingway says *other* naturalists—that is, he counts himself a naturalist, a nature writer). Also in *Green Hills* we find

Hemingway's celebrated lament for the ravaged American continent: "A continent ages quickly once we come. The natives live in harmony with it. But the foreigner destroys... the earth gets tired of being exploited. A country wears out quickly unless man puts back in it all his residue and that of all his beasts. When he quits using beasts and uses machines, the earth defeats him quickly" (284). In such passages, we might hear echoes of Burroughs on Thoreau, on the "sucked orange" we make of the earth.

In fact, as I have argued in a number of conference papers, lectures, and essays for the past thirty-some years, Burroughs directly influenced Hemingway, especially through the essays on camping, hiking, fishing. Hemingway's early masterpiece, "Big Two-Hearted River," is deeply indebted to Burroughs. Although no mention of Burroughs has yet surfaced in the Hemingway archive, we can be certain that it will—perhaps in the twelve-volume collection of Hemingway's letters now in progress. Consider a few facts: Hemingway, from age three or four, was a passionate reader of *St. Nicholas*, that important children's magazine of nature and culture in which Burroughs' essays were excerpted and reprinted; moreover, Hemingway's boyhood hero was Teddy Roosevelt. Need I say more for any audience familiar with the Burroughs-Roosevelt connections and friendship? Yes, just this: In Hemingway's writing credo, the deleted conclusion of "Big Two-Hearted River" later published as "On Writing," but written in his early twenties, everything depends on exact knowledge and attention to nature. Hemingway tells us that his persona, Nick Adams, "wanted to write like Cezanne painted... wanted to write about country so it would be there... Nobody had ever written about country like that. He felt almost holy about it. It was deadly serious. You could do it... if you lived right with your eyes" (Hemingway, *Nick Adams Stories*, 239-40). Such passages chart precisely the intersection of nature writing and Modernism, and provide the key cartography for the Burroughs influence on and confluence with Hemingway's vision and style. Live right with your eyes, indeed—*Sharp Eyes, Sharp Lookout*.

Now let us consider briefly another lesser-known Modernist or two who were direct and acknowledged inheritors of the Burroughs legacy. One is the Kentucky novelist and poet Elizabeth Madox Roberts, who lived from 1881 to 1941. It must suffice to say here that Roberts is the greatest neglected southern woman writer—or however you'd like to phrase that: I prefer "the greatest neglected American writer." Period. For many decades I have led a national crusade—now joined by younger scholars—to restore her to her rightful place in the canon of American literature. Roberts received international attention and fame with her first novel, *The Time of Man*, published in 1926. It is, hands down, one of the greatest

American pastoral novels, and it is absolutely steeped in the style and modes of nature writing and Modernism. We know that when Roberts was an unknown schoolteacher in rural Kentucky she was reading the essays of Burroughs, especially his volume *Birds and Poets*. We know, too, that she organized and led a bird-study club in Springfield, her Kentucky hometown. All this precedes the composition of her masterpiece, *The Time of Man*, in which having combined the nature-writing lessons of Burroughs with the stylistic lessons of her Modernist master Ezra Pound, she grounds her writing in the grammar of nature, reckons the rhetoric of rocks and fields, parses the sentences of stone and sky, and renders as powerfully as any writer ever what she calls the “earth-hungers,” the “exalted experience of rapture in being” (Stoneback, 93). So you may mark Roberts down as an acknowledged disciple of Burroughs. She was also the student of an even more fervent disciple of Burroughs, Edith Rickert.

Rickert should be known at Vassar—isn't it pretty to think so? (as Hemingway said in another context)—for she was both one of Vassar's most distinguished graduates (in 1891) and a faculty member for three years in the 1890s. Yet in that fine slim volume on Burroughs published in 2008 by the Vassar Library that briefly surveys Burroughs; connections with Vassar and includes excellent essays on Whitman and Burroughs by Ed Renehan and Jeff Walker, I find no mention of Rickert, nor is she mentioned in other discussions of Burroughs and Vassar. Once very well known, I fear Rickert is a name that only resonates these days with a few of my generation who were graduate students in English in those days of yore when the name Rickert inspired fear and trembling, admiration and awe in generations of graduate students, especially for those who had to study her massive eight-volume study of the text and manuscripts of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Her co-editor was John Manly—Manly and Rickert, a once-famous combo like Ruth and Gehrig maybe, or Sacco and Vanzetti.

Edith Rickert was a fascinating character. Born in 1871 in Ohio, raised mostly in Chicago, she entered Vassar in 1887. While she was a student, Rickert was one of many “Vassar Girls” who made frequent pilgrimages to see the “Sage of Slabsides.” As all readers of Burroughs know, he welcomed college girls (from SUNY New Paltz, too) to his cabin in the woods, across the river and into the trees of Ulster County. Since all who knew Rickert stress her extraordinary beauty, vitality, and intelligence, her remarkable grace and distinction, and her tornadic passion and energy (and we know that Burroughs was not insensible to such attributes), we should not be surprised that Rickert and Burroughs stayed in touch long after she left Vassar. The full story of their relationship may be lost in the mists of history and genteel or censored biography, and much of their thirty-

year correspondence appears to be irretrievable. We do have bits and pieces of their correspondence. In 1905, when Rickert was living in England, Burroughs answered one of her letters, saying, “You make me want to come to England again” (Barrus II, 86). A year later—Burroughs is now sixty-nine, Rickert is thirty-five—he writes: “Do you want me to come and help make that garden?” He’ll do the digging, he says, but he’s no good at making flower gardens, just vegetables. He advises her: “Dig and plant, and transplant, Edith; it will do you good. That soil on your fingers will make you hold your pen more firmly—more of the earth-spirit will get into your books...” (Barrus, II:106; ellipsis in cited text). About the photograph Rickert had sent him, Burroughs, always the precise observer, says: “You look well in this picture, and strong. It is a face of power—that finely-cut and ample mouth, and those eyes! I almost quail before them. I do not remember that you had those day-of-judgment eyes when you used to come to Slabsides” (Barrus II 106). Five years later, when Rickert is back in the States, Burroughs writes to her: “I am thinking longingly of a trip to Egypt this winter... Do you have any dreams of the Orient? If so, I wish that you might realize them with me and my friends” (Barrus, 171). That’s Burroughs at seventy-four. And, in 1919, the eighty-two-year old Burroughs wrote in his journal that he and Rickert—who was then working in the Cryptographic section of Military Intelligence in Washington—went out to visit George Washington’s home at Mount Vernon (Barrus, II:367). That’s all we have now, from the published record—but stay tuned.

In sum, Rickert was one of the most accomplished and engaging Burroughs aficionados. Before she was out of her thirties, she had published ten books, including medieval studies and five novels in seven years, novels set in Provence, the Shetlands, Louisiana, and elsewhere, novels that are rich with a sense of place, close attention to nature, folkspeech, folklore, folkways. And she spends the last two decades of her life as—by all reports—an amazingly stimulating teacher at the University of Chicago, where, as I have already noted, one of her most distinguished students was Elizabeth Madox Roberts. One more thing I should mention: In her influential 1920s textbook, *Contemporary American Literature*, she featured Burroughs as a major American writer, praised him as the master of the nature essay, citing his “devoted study of Nature in America,” his “rich and deep philosophical interpretation of the phenomena he lovingly studied... his broadly grounded and capacious idealism” (Rickert, 78).

Rickert, then, belongs in the company with Roberts, Aldington, Durrell, Pound, and Hemingway and many other regionalists and modernists anchored in close attention to nature, and it is in that terrain, that *terroir*, that we must continue to search for Burroughs influences and confluences.

In the final movement of this essay I want to say—speaking as a regionalist and as a Modernist from the heart of my anecdotage—a few words about my own Burroughsian influences and confluences. When I moved to the Hudson Valley from Tennessee four decades ago, I settled—purely by chance, it seemed then, in West Park. I lived a short walk from both Slabsides and Riverby. I do not remember being aware, when I bought property and settled in West Park, that it was Burroughs country. Of course, unlike most Ph.D.s in English these days, I *knew* who John Burroughs was, but most of my *conscious* associations came from my early knowledge of and passion for the work of Walt Whitman—my Burroughs associations, I thought then, had nothing to do with Sense of Place, little to do with nature study. As I settled into West Park, my knowledge and deep awareness of Burroughs grew. In 1970 there were still many people in West Park who knew and remembered Burroughs. The Burroughs anecdotes were plentiful, and almost always genial and loving. In short, Burroughs became my *neighbor*—as I worked in my garden (and especially as I pursued the detestable woodchucks) Burroughs was often with me; and he was always with me as I explored the backcountry around Slabsides and fished Black Creek. My West Park rituals formed a kind of reversal of the Burroughs pattern, since my house was down the road from Slabsides, and my escape, my rustic retreat, my cabin, my Slabsides was down on the Hudson, two doors down from Riverby. Then Burroughs' granddaughter, my neighbor Elizabeth Burroughs Kelley, became my good friend. And thus my true education in Burroughs began, as did my involvement in the work of the John Burroughs Association. I had many long, long conversations with Betty Kelley, and even though we were neighbors we also wrote—in the good, old-fashioned way—long letters to each other filled with literary talk, place-talk, Burroughs-talk.

To attain the proper mode of meditation on history that was necessary for me to write the keynote address that was forerunner of this essay, I dug out some of my old correspondence with Betty. Her distinctive handwriting alone brought back a flood of memories. One letter package contained a draft of one of her lectures on Burroughs and Thoreau, on Slabsides and Walden, and how and why “each built a cabin in the woods which has an [important] place in American Literature” (Letter to author, c. 1975; undated, unpaginated). In this long letter, she asked for my editorial commentary on these matters. And seeing and reading her old handwriting—nothing has more evocative memory-force than handwriting—brought back our old conversations. One day we discussed all the schools all over America that were named after John Burroughs. For example, one of Hemingway's wives went to a John Burroughs school in St. Louis. Only that day did long-forgotten memory come back to me—I had attended Burroughs Junior High School in

Camden, New Jersey. Betty was excited—she did not have that school on her list.²

Now, as I think of that Burroughs school, long since torn down, its site unmarked in one of America's ruined cities—Camden is a perennial chart-topper in the annual lists of America's most violent and dangerous cities—now as I think of that school for the first time in a half-century, since I fled as soon and as far and as fast as I could from the ruins of Camden, I make my meditative Composition of Place and Epiphanic Memory.

In the principal's office at Burroughs Junior High there were, among other historic photographs, old framed but faded photographs of John Burroughs and Walt Whitman. I don't believe I thought much about that at the time, since I was usually in the principal's office for some disciplinary action, not for meditation on history. It was a very violent school and to survive you had to be a member of one gang or the other. On the way home, we always walked past Walt Whitman Stores, a chain of neighborhood groceries located on every third corner. And we often walked past the rundown Walt Whitman House on squalid Mickle Street. A few months ago, when the national news reported that the Robert Frost house had been trashed and vandalized by teenagers, I was reminded of one night in the 1950s. I was out with the gang, a gang that specialized in what solipsistic early teenaged punks do—smashing and trashing things, breaking and burning things. They had been breaking windows near the Whitman house. Then we were there on the street by the historical marker in front of the Whitman House, rocks ready in hand, lighter fluid flaming from the gangleader's burning hand, overturned garbage cans being kicked down Mickle Street. I was probably the only one in that gang, peripheral on-trial member that I was, who had ever toured the house, seen the artifacts (including the old photographs of Burroughs and Whitman). Then, I remember saying, "Don't trash this house—Whitman was a great writer"—just before we heard the cop car sirens and ran down the alley. A few days later, my eighth-grade English teacher kept me after school and had a long talk with me. She said: "Stop being stupid and hanging out with gangs. Do you think your precious Whitman or John Burroughs would approve of what you do? Your passion is literature. Your vocation, your calling, is to be a writer." Miss Evaul—that was her name and I salute her now—knew all this because I had discussed Whitman and Burroughs and many other writers with her and she always gave me A+s on my essays. After that conversation, I never ran with the gangs again. And I remember now the look and color and feel of Horace Traubel's multivolume *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, where I first read about Burroughs in the grand old library at Second and Cooper Streets (where there were also framed pictures of Whitman and Burroughs on the walls). And, too, the long shelf of Burroughs

books, multiple copies of the complete works, all green and blue and dusty on the ruined library shelves.

In brief, I ran far from ravaged Camden, where Burroughs had so often visited Whitman. And I thought I had forgotten all that, as I made a new life in the South. If, as a *New York Times* article recently put it, the Hudson Valley is now in a new phase of “what might be called post-industrial repastoralization” (August 1, 2008)—although I would prefer to see that as a phase that began long ago, with Burroughs farming and writing nature essays on the Hudson as industry began its century-long decline, then the location of my post-Camden post-industrial *repastoralization* was the rural South in the 1950s. After dropping out of college and getting out of the Marine Corps at age twenty-one, I built a log cabin in the wilderness of Alabama. It was a *real* log house, and I felled every tree with my axe, skimmed the logs down the hillside with a team of borrowed workhorses, skinned every log with a drawknife, and built the whole thing without any nails, without any tools but an axe and a drawknife. I remember being proud of the *authenticity* of my cabin, and though my imagination was more on fire with images of Daniel Boone and the frontier, I *had* seen photographs of Walden and Slabside, and I remember thinking my cabin was better than anything Burroughs or Thoreau built. I would learn soon enough that the real house that a writer must build is made of the books that the writer writes, that literature endures longer than log cabins. But then, in 1962, when I walked every morning at birdcall sunrise through those woods that I knew every inch of, every detail, every plant and creature and spring; then, when I walked over the old logging trace two miles into the forest, sun-shafted by the time I reached my cabin and clearing, I only knew that I had to build that house so that I could get down to the serious business of writing—later. And every morning as I walked into the woods with my axe over my shoulder, I sang at the top of my voice, in part because I’d been told by an old-timer that loud singing would ward off rattlesnakes. But my singing seemed to draw a great and genial black snake to rise like the Spirit of Place and meet me at the same place in the trail every morning, to lead the way sliding as I went singing down to the creek that ran through my clearing under the hawk-slanting sky. I don’t remember knowing this consciously then, but I know now that John Burroughs walked through that wilderness with me.

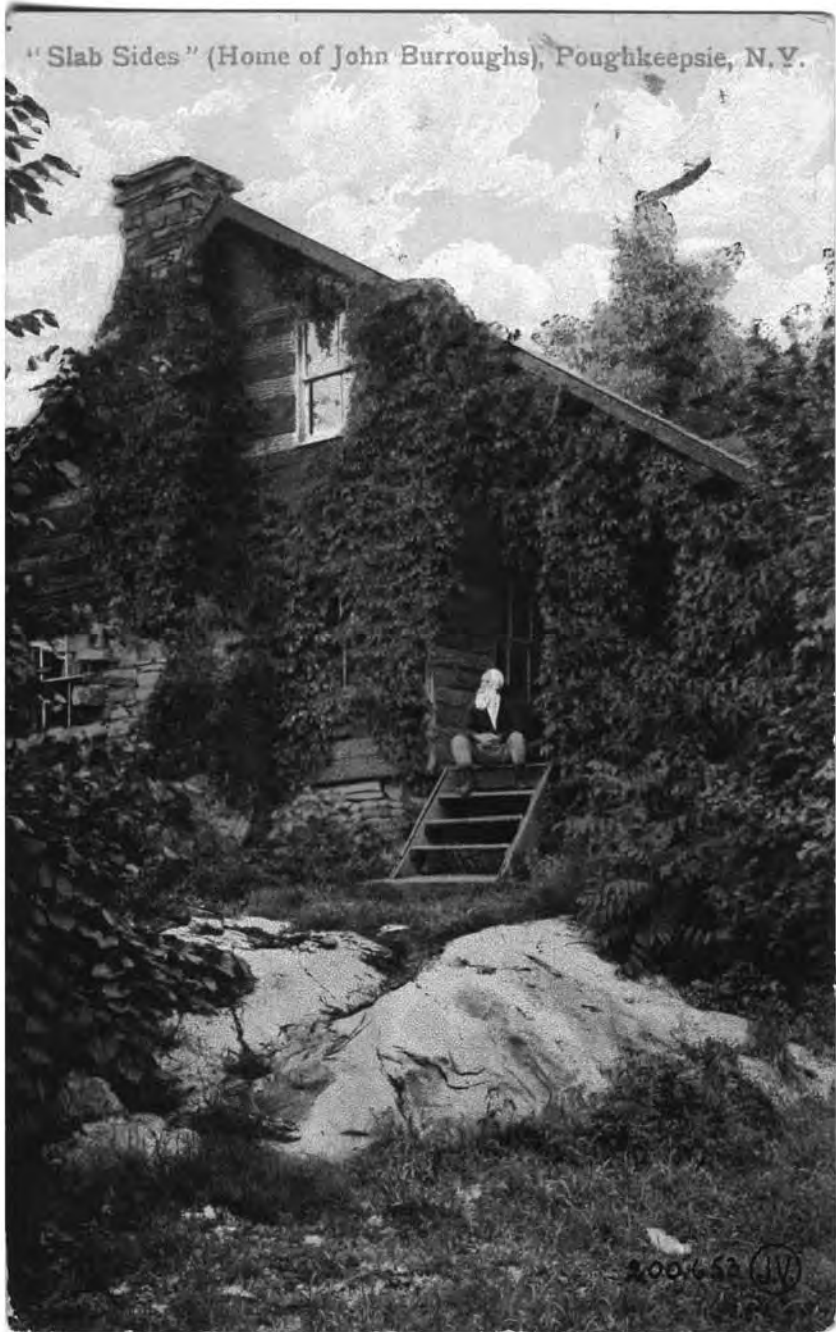
It is because of all these influences and confluences that I write these words, from the amplitude of experience stranger than time, from the depths of my open heart—Thank you, John Burroughs.

Notes

Just before this essay went to press, someone with a firmer grasp of the history of Camden than I possess informed me that Burroughs Junior High was actually named after Clara Burrough, a South Jersey educator. *Burrough* or *Burroughs*? If the school was indeed named after Ms. Burrough, then why did we all refer to it as Burroughs, as in the sentence “I go to Burroughs”? Maybe I wasn’t the only one who had heard of John Burroughs and his associations with Camden and Whitman, and thus assumed the school was named after Burroughs. I also remember making jokes in eighth grade about how the school was not named after the other Burroughs, Edgar Rice Burroughs, famous author of the *Tarzan* books (and Hemingway’s boyhood neighbor in Oak Park, Illinois).

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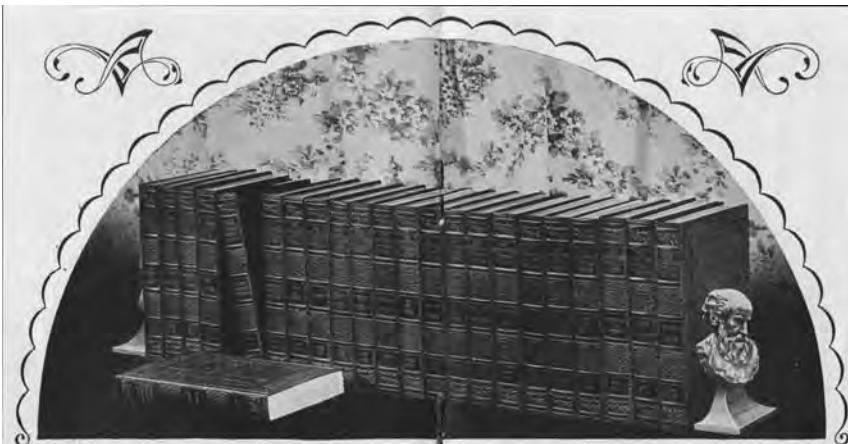
COURTESY HUDSON RIVER VALLEY HERITAGE

Historic Postcard of John Burroughs' Slabsides

John Burroughs' Writing Retreats

James Perrin Warren

Over the past ten years, there has been a heartening resurgence of interest in the life and writings of John Burroughs (1837-1921). For some modern readers, it is a literary curiosity as to what happened to Burroughs' reputation. How did he lose his place among American nature writers? Although Burroughs never strayed far from the Hudson River Valley and Catskill Mountains, he enjoyed a remarkable popularity as a writer of nature essays from 1870 to 1920. These works focused on nature that was near at hand and readily accessible to the perceptive observer. Most especially he evoked the lively behavior of common birds and the home-spun beauty of common wildflowers and trees. His prose was plain and unadorned during a period in which the style, even in journalism, was often florid and overwrought. For over fifty years, Burroughs published a steady stream of articles in the best magazines in America. Editors of *The Atlantic* and *Century* eagerly sought out his work, and the publishing house of Houghton Mifflin published more than



A vintage advertisement for the complete works of John Burroughs. The top half features a black and white photograph of a large stack of books, with a bust of John Burroughs on the right side. The photograph is framed by a decorative, scalloped border. Below the photograph, the text reads: "AT last, the complete works of John Burroughs in a choice edition, yet at a saving of \$103.50 over the only other fine edition published." The word "AT" is written in a large, decorative font.

AT last, the complete works of John Burroughs
in a choice edition, yet at a saving of \$103.50
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COURTESY HUDSON RIVER VALLEY HERITAGE

twenty individual volumes of essays as well as the collected works, under the title *The Writings of John Burroughs*. In short, John Burroughs was a celebrity author in his day—if not the equal of Mark Twain, at least not far behind him in success, influence, and renown.

Much of Burroughs' celebrity was owing to the marketing of his works by the Houghton Mifflin Company. A key moment in this strategy appears to have occurred in 1887, when Oscar Houghton visited Mary E. Burt's classroom in Chicago and observed her teaching Burroughs' *Pepacton* to thirty-six enthusiastic pupils (*Life and Letters*, 1:285). As Eric Lupfer has shown, the firm established several institutional programs for building readership, especially targeting schools. Collections of Burroughs' essays were created specifically for the Riverside Literature Series and the Riverside School Library, titles that were never part of *The Writings of John Burroughs*, known most commonly as the Riverby Edition. Mary Burt's editions called *Birds and Bees* (1887) and *Sharp Eyes* (1888), for instance, sold well over 200,000 copies between 1896 and 1907.¹ *Birds and Bees* had its greatest sales in 1902, a total of 17,596, averaging 11,000 copies sold annually for 1904 to 1906; *Sharp Eyes* had its greatest sales in 1906, a total of 16,285, averaging 11,500 copies sold annually for 1904 through 1906.² Burroughs himself edited a third volume, *Squirrels and Other Fur-Bearers*, which was published by the Riverside Press in 1900 as one of its "Outdoor Books."³ A fourth volume, *Studies in Nature and Literature*, appeared in 1908 in the Riverside Literature Series, edited by Ada L.F. Snell.⁴ In addition to the Houghton Mifflin books, Burroughs allowed Burt to edit *Little Nature Studies for Little People from John Burroughs*, published by Ginn and Company in 1895.⁵ In my own experience, it is not at all uncommon to have a friend show me yet another pamphlet-sized paperbound book of Burroughs' essays, clearly intended for school use in the late nineteenth century or early twentieth century.

In addition to these specific titles by Burroughs, Houghton Mifflin Company records indicate that several anthologies designed for use in public schools were available in the early twentieth century. For example, in a letter to Burroughs dated 25 September 1912, the editorial staff writes that "in the Seventh Reader that we now have under way we are planning to make a special study of your writings and of you as an author. We expect to have a full page portrait of yourself, a biographical sketch, and several of the best selections from your writings for children of this grade. In this group of selections we should like very much to have a letter from you addressed to the school children of the country, which will tend to arouse greater interest in nature. If you will kindly accommodate us by writing such a letter, we believe that it would give a great deal of pleasure and would be very

much appreciated by the thousands of school children who will use the book.”⁶ Another successful anthology, *In American Fields and Forests* (1909), included works by Thoreau, Burroughs, Muir, Olive Thorne Miller, Dallas Lore Sharp, and Bradford Torrey, selling thousands of copies in the Ohio Teachers’ Reading Circle and other continuing education courses (“Reading Nature Writing,” 37-58). The anonymous writer of the preface to *In American Fields and Forests* claims, with some justification, that the book is “something more than a collection of essays. It represents both the literary outcome and the literary inspiration of an important movement in American life,—that which has come to be known as the Nature Movement” (vi). In addition, the preface asserts that Burroughs is “the man who probably more than any other one writer is responsible for the present interest in nature-study” (v). The cumulative evidence suggests, then, that Burroughs enjoyed enormous popularity and exercised considerable influence in American schools from the 1880s through the first decade of the twentieth century.

If Emerson was right about the eternal balance of opposites, celebrity probably has as many costs as rewards. In Burroughs’ case, the main cost of celebrity was a lack of solitude and time for his writing, the very work that had produced the celebrity in the first place. As a result, from early on in his career, Burroughs was interested in building and maintaining retreats for himself. He created four distinct writing retreats during his long career, and the idea of the retreat runs even more deeply than any number or list of places can suggest. For Burroughs, too, the writing retreat was much more than an escape from other people, whether they were hordes of admiring readers or a difficult wife. The writing cabin is much more significant than an evasive tactic; it is a strategy for a life of writing.

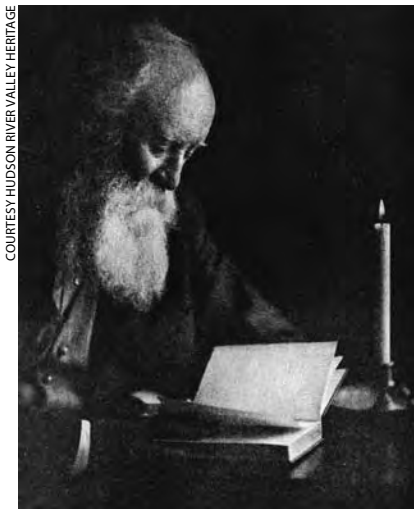
The Bark Study

In January 1882, Burroughs began writing in a simple one-room outbuilding that he built on the property of his home, Riverby, in the Hudson River Valley near West Park. The cabin was sided with chestnut bark, and it had a large fireplace built of smooth river stones. Burroughs named the building the Bark Study, and he spent more than ten years working inside its friendly confines. During that time, he published dozens of essays and four books—*Fresh Fields* (1884), *Signs and Seasons* (1886), *Indoor Studies* (1889), and *Riverby* (1894). In his letters and journals, Burroughs refers to the Bark Study as his “little hermitage” and “bark-covered shanty,” and he often figures it as a kind of cave or den of solitude. In January 1882, for instance, he wrote to his friend Myron Benton, “I have builded me a new house, and there is a big chair in it for you. I am alone with my books and my thoughts now, down on the brink of the hill, beyond the orbit of house-



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hold matters, and hardly ever perturbed by them. I have the solitude of Bruin in his den, and I suck my paws pretty industriously” (*Life and Letters*, 1:232-33). The letter is humorous and good-natured, but beneath the charm one senses some basic tensions in Burroughs’ writing life. He needs to be alone with his books and thoughts, away from “household matters” and their perturbations. He wants the hibernating peace of a bear, the contemplative life of sucking one’s paws in a winter sleep. But he also makes sure to invite Benton to be his guest, an invitation that he would repeat constantly to friends and admirers over the next forty years.



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Burroughs’ letter to Benton suggests that the conflict inherent in the idea of a retreat may be internal rather than external. Or perhaps better, the conflict resides both in external circumstances and internal perspectives, rising to significance when the two meet in some provocative way. That means that the writer’s need for solitude and the circumstance of perturbing household matters meet to form both a conflict and the imagined solution to the conflict, the “hibernating peace of Bruin.” If that reading seems a bit forced, consider Burroughs’ journal entry



Desk and fireplace in the Bark Study as it is preserved today



PHOTOS BY CHRIS PRYSLIOPSKI, COURTESY OF RIVERBAY STUDY CONSERVATOR

for 5 January 1882: “The first day in my new Study. Moved in yesterday. My books in their new places last night. I contemplated them with a strange, sad feeling, my faithful, silent companions” (*Life and Letters*, 1:233). Here Burroughs registers his escape from perturbing household matters with the string of three sentence fragments, which suggest the activities of moving in, unpacking books, and arranging them in the new study. But it is more than the books that have been moved. The writer is moved, enough so that he elaborates on his full-sentence contemplation of the books as his “faithful, silent companions.” The “strange, sad feeling” he experiences seems clear enough: only here, away from the family and its perturbations, can Burroughs experience a sense of faithful companionship, but the faithful companions are silent, and the experience is strange and sad because the writer’s best friends are inanimate objects.

I do not want to insist on the particular readings I have given, but rather that the kind of writing we find in such passages is rich and revealing. It is intense and emotionally heightened, even if the circumstances are mundane or prosaic. And it reveals contradictory tensions, as in this passage from “A River View,” an essay in *Signs and Seasons*:

The river never seems so much a thing of life as in the spring when it first slips off its icy fetters. The dead comes to life before one’s very eyes. The rigid, pallid river is resurrected in a twinkling. You look out of your window one moment, and there is that great, white, motionless expanse; you look again, and there in its place is the tender, dimpling, sparkling water. But if your eyes are sharp, you may have noticed the signs all the forenoon; the time was ripe, the river stirred a little in its icy shroud, put forth a little streak or filament of

blue water near shore, made breathing-holes. Then, after a while, the ice was rent in places, and the edges crushed together or shoved one slightly upon the other; there was apparently something growing more and more alive and restless underneath. Then suddenly the whole mass of the ice from shore to shore begins to move downstream,—very gently, almost imperceptibly at first, then with a steady, deliberate pace that soon lays bare a large expanse of bright, dancing water. The island above keeps back the northern ice, and the ebb tide makes a clean sweep from that point south for a few miles, until the return of the flood, when the ice comes back. (*Writings*, 7:197)

As in much of his best writing, Burroughs teaches a reader how to see, and he does so by making the riverscape into an object lesson. The river is not inanimate but “a thing of life,” or a dead thing that “comes to life before one’s very eyes.” The resurrection of the river at first seems miraculous and sudden, but then Burroughs teaches the blind to see, insisting on the progressive, infinitesimally small changes that accumulate to create dramatic actions. The imperceptible becomes visible, just as the apparently static river becomes “something growing more and more alive.” Thus the “great, white, motionless expanse” becomes “a large expanse of bright, dancing water.” In this passage, as in many others in his best essays, the magic of Burroughs’ prose rests in the tensions between stasis and motion, the dead and the quick, the nearly invisible causes and their dramatically visible effects.

Slabsides

In 1895, after nearly thirteen years in the Bark Study, Burroughs bought twenty acres of “muck-swamp” a mile away from Riverby. (*Life and Letters*, 1:353). In November 1895, he began building the cabin known as Slabsides. Like the Bark Study, the new cabin had a large chimney and fireplace that Burroughs built himself. By Christmas, he was close to finishing the building. The exterior siding was made from bark-covered slabs of hemlock that Burroughs bought from a local sawmill. The porch was framed in yellow birch poles, with cedar railing. Cedar rafters had their shaggy bark on them; Burroughs used split-birch saplings to cover interior board seams. Yellow birch provided the wood for much of the finish carpentry and furniture. Sumac figured into the legs of the worktable and the framework of the window-seat. In short, the new retreat had a provisional, shack-like, improvisatory quality. The slabs were the waste parts of the hemlock, and doubly so: by cutting off the exterior sides, the mill produced square pieces of lumber for framing or planking; the hemlock bark, once so valuable for tanning leather, was no longer of use in the late nineteenth century. Burroughs’ imagination extended to several



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Interior of Slabsides from a historic postcard

fanciful names for the new place—Echo Lodge, Echo Castle, Slab Rest, Foot Cliffs, Crag’s Foot, Rock Haven, Whippoorwill’s Nest, Coon Hollow—but a neighbor, Mrs. William van Benschoten, suggested the name Slabsides, and Burroughs took it on readily (*Life and Letters*, 1:355).

Yet a more imaginative name that Burroughs gave to the twenty acres and writing cabin was “Whitman Land.” Burroughs had known Whitman for nearly thirty years before the poet’s death in 1892, and his first book, *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*, was published in 1867. Now, as he moved into the new retreat, he began writing one of his best books of literary criticism, *Whitman: A Study* (1896). After finishing the cabin and the book, Burroughs regarded the two as intimately bound together. In the “Preliminary” chapter to *Whitman: A Study*, he looks out on the landscape of his retreat and the landscape of Walt Whitman’s poetry:

The writing of this preliminary chapter, and the final survey and revision of my Whitman essay, I am making at a rustic house I have built at a wild place a mile or more from my home upon the river. I call this place Whitman Land, because in many ways it is typical of my poet,—an amphitheatre of precipitous rock, slightly veiled with a delicate growth of verdure, inclosing a few acres of prairie-like land, once the site of an ancient lake, now a garden of unknown depth and fertility. Elemental ruggedness, savageness, and grandeur, combined with wonderful tenderness, modernness, and

geniality. There rise the gray scarred cliffs, crowned here and there with a dead hemlock or pine, where, morning after morning, I have seen the bald eagle perch, and here at their feet this level area of tender humus, with three perennial springs of delicious cold water flowing in its margin; a huge granite bowl filled with the elements and potencies of life. The scene has a strange fascination for me, and holds me here day after day. From the highest point of rocks I can overlook a long stretch of the river and of the farming country beyond; I can hear owls hoot, hawks scream, and roosters crow. Birds of the garden and orchard meet birds of the forest upon the shaggy cedar posts that uphold my porch. (*Writings*, 10:3-4)

The most salient theme in the opening paragraph is combination. Burroughs combines the poet and the landscape in his name for the place. As he describes the place and its attractions, he also is describing what he finds most attractive about Whitman's poems. In both cases, the attraction stems from a combination of the "elemental ruggedness, savageness, and grandeur" with "wonderful tenderness, modernness, and geniality." The landscape evokes death in the imagery of "gray scarred cliffs" and "a dead hemlock or pine," and it also evokes life in the imagery of "a huge granite bowl filled with the elements and potencies of life." The place seems enclosed and removed from the world, but Burroughs also can "overlook a long stretch of the river and of the farm country beyond." Likewise, birds of garden or orchard meet birds of the forest.

Burroughs plays upon the idea of combination as he finishes the paragraph, remarking that "this scene and situation, so primitive and secluded, yet so touched with and adapted to civilization, responding to the moods of both sides of the life and imagination of a modern man, seems, I repeat, typical in many ways of my poet, and is a veritable Whitman land" (4). Whitman, he insists, does not suggest merely "the wild and unkempt," but the "cosmic and the elemental," and Whitman's poems deliver "the tonic and fortifying quality of Nature in her more grand and primitive aspects" (4). The paragraph creates Whitman Land as a combination of civilization and wildness, community and seclusion, primitiveness and modernity, culture and nature. In all of these combinatory aspects, moreover, Whitman Land acts as a therapeutic, fortifying tonic.

The combinations of Whitman Land are significant because they characterize Burroughs' ideas about place, none more so than those about his writing retreats. In the 1899 essay "Wild Life About My Cabin," published in the volume *Far and Near* (1904), Burroughs gives his most developed discussion of the writing retreat. Indeed, he says, "I do not call it a retreat; I call it a withdrawal, a retirement, the

taking up of a new position to renew the attack, it may be, more vigorously than ever." Besides, he adds, "it is not always easy to give reasons. There are reasons within reasons, and often no reasons at all that we are aware of" (*Writings*, 13:131). But of course Burroughs can find plenty of reasons for Slabsides. He notes that he "had been so long perched high upon the banks of a great river, in sight of all the world, exposed to every wind that blows... that [he] was pining for a nook to sit down in." He was "hungry for the private and circumscribed." The slabs of the house, he finds, are like "the first cut from the loaf" of bread, and for Burroughs this was to be a "fresh cut of life," a life "reduced to simpler terms" and "shorn of many of its disguises and entanglements" (132-33). In these sentences Burroughs sounds more like Thoreau than Whitman. He exercises the kind of reductive economy that Thoreau practices relentlessly in the pages of *Walden*, most especially in the "Realometer" passage of "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," in which Thoreau plants his measuring stick in order to fathom the depths of "shams and appearances" by which we measure our lives.⁷ For Burroughs, the writing retreat is a means of reducing life to simpler terms, but the reduction is also productive, for the slabs will yield a "fresh cut of life" that is more authentic and real.

By 1899, Burroughs was entangled and exposed in many ways, for he was one of the most celebrated writers in the country and was considered a kind of nature sage, answering queries from a host of amateur naturalists who sought him out, both through letters and visits. The retreat to Slabsides was clearly a means of withdrawing from the ready access of the world's visitors, who came to see Burroughs in droves during the 1890s. The writer's cabin was supposed to give him the private and circumscribed arrangements that feed the writer's appetite for solitary contemplation. But Slabsides always seemed to invite yet more visitors. Indeed, the tension in the very idea of the cabin can be seen in the magazine publication of the essay "Wild Life About My Cabin." The essay first appeared in the August 1899 *Century* magazine, one of the most widely circulated publications in the country.⁸ The essay promotes the ideal of the writer's necessary isolation, but it also includes illustrations that idealize both the writer and the cabin, insisting on the easy, leisurely solitude of both. What could be more inviting to a magazine reader in 1899, inviting the reader to become a visitor or pilgrim?

In the rest of "Wild Life About My Cabin," Burroughs notes many visitors of feather and fur. The familiar songbirds follow him, building nests in and around the house. Even the thrushes approach him, and he especially appreciates the wood thrush, "the leading chorister in the woods about me" (144), and thinks that "he does not voice the wildness, but seems to give a touch of something half rural, half urban,—such is the power of association in bird-songs" (144).



Hearth at Slabsides

As for mammals, small rodents abound, and there is the occasional otter or fox. But the confined, domestic tones of the essay end on a grand note. Burroughs focuses last of all on the repeated visits of a bald eagle. The “days on which I see him are not quite the same as the other days... . The lift or range of those great wings has passed into my thought.” As he closes the essay, Burroughs imagines the eagle’s “long elevated flights to and from his eyrie upon the remote, solitary cliffs. He draws great lines across the sky; he sees the forests like a carpet beneath him, he sees the hills and valleys as folds and wrinkles in a many-colored tapestry; he sees the river as a silver belt connecting remote horizons. We climb mountain-peaks

to get a glimpse of the spectacle that is hourly spread out beneath him. Dignity, elevation, repose, are his. I would have my thoughts take as wide a sweep. I would be as far removed from the petty cares and turmoils of this noisy and blustering world” (156). Burroughs refuses to accept Slabsides as a retreat or a confinement. The writer’s cabin allows his thoughts to take a wide sweep, far removed from petty cares and turmoils of the noisy, blustering world. The essay closes expansively, the writer weaving the landscape into an artful tapestry with his vision of intersecting lines. The homely seclusion of the writer’s cabin is transformed into great dignity and elevation, the commanding, powerful vision of a soaring eagle. And Burroughs implicitly claims the same authority for the writer’s imaginative vision, reaching near to the eagle’s eye.

Woodchuck Lodge and the Hay-Barn Study

By the fall of 1910, Burroughs had found himself too closely involved with the noisy and blustering world, and he once again moved to a new writing retreat. In the autumn of that year, he started renting and repairing the gray farmhouse on the east end of the old Burroughs homestead farm at Roxbury, where he had been born and grown up. That same summer, he wrote “The Comfort of the Hills,” later published as “In the Circuit of the Summer Hills” in the volume *The Summit of the Years* (1913). Burroughs had helped his brothers Hiram and Curtis hold onto the family land, co-signing more than one mortgage on the property. After spending parts of two summers at the house, Burroughs received the property as a gift from



Woodchuck Lodge, Home of John Burroughs, Roxbury, N. Y. 10

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Henry Ford, who bought the Burroughs farm outright in 1913. Burroughs named the house Woodchuck Lodge, in honor of the groundhogs that abounded on the land. Or, as he humorously put it in the essay “In the Circuit of the Summer Hills,” “I call my place Woodchuck Lodge, as I tell my friends, because we are beleaguered by these rodents. There is a cordon of woodchuck-holes all around us. In the orchard, in the meadows, in the pastures, these whistling marmots have their dens. Here one might easily have woodchuck venison for dinner every day, yea, and for supper and breakfast, too, if one could acquire a taste for it” (*Writings* 17:26).

Originally, Burroughs thought of Woodchuck Lodge as a summer writing retreat, and his son Julian built him an oak writing table to place in the parlor of the farmhouse. But as had been the case with Slabsides, his readers, tourists, literary admirers, and family members quickly found him out. His response was similar to the strategy he used at the Bark Study and Slabsides—he improvised. At first he began simply by escaping the visitors, walking up the road to use the old haybarn as a retreat. At the start of the third summer, he repeated the pattern of his first two studies, making himself a rough writing table out of cast-off boards. He used it as his primary writing table for the rest of his life.

Imagination, humor, and inventiveness mark the essays of Burroughs’ best late volumes, *Time and Change* (1912) and *The Summit of the Years* (1913). In finding his way to Woodchuck Lodge and the Hay-Barn Study, Burroughs returned to a tone and treatment that we find in some of his very best essays from the first three decades of his career. As he remarks in closing the title essay, “The Summit of



Henry Ford and John Burroughs on the steps of Woodchuck Lodge

the Years,” Burroughs learned to read a lesson in his own life: “That one may have a happy and not altogether useless life on cheap and easy terms; that the essential things are always near at hand; that one’s own door opens upon the wealth of heaven and earth; and that all things are ready to serve and cheer one. Life is a struggle, but not a warfare, it is a day’s labor, but labor on God’s earth, under the sun and stars with other laborers, where we may think and sing and rejoice as we work” (*Writings*, 17:23).

A decade earlier, Burroughs had appeared ready for warfare. Writing in a dedicatory letter to Burroughs, penned at the White House on 2 October 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt opened his fourth book on American hunting, *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter*, by addressing his friend as “Oom John,” a pet name he had given Burroughs during their trip to Yellowstone National Park in April 1903. Roosevelt’s affection and admiration for Burroughs are evident in the letter. “Every lover of outdoor life must feel a sense of affectionate obligation to you,” the president writes. “Your writings appeal to all who care for the life of the woods and the fields, whether their tastes keep them in the homely, pleasant farm country or lead them into the wilderness. It is a good thing for our people that you should have lived; and surely no man can wish to have more said of him.”⁹ The praise is absolute and all-encompassing, and it accords well with Roosevelt’s penchant for fearlessly hyperbolic generalizations. He treats “Oom John” as a representative national figure, the avuncular nature sage.

At the time, however, Burroughs was in no way a kindly uncle to other nature writers, at least not to those he found lacking in accuracy and truth. In the long second paragraph of the dedication, Roosevelt congratulates Burroughs on his “warfare against the sham nature-writers” and praises him for illustrating “what can be done by the lover of nature who has trained himself to keen observation, who describes accurately what is thus observed, and who, finally, possesses the additional gift of writing with charm and interest” (390). Roosevelt alludes



John Burroughs on the porch at Woodchuck Lodge

directly to Burroughs' article, "Real and Sham Natural History," which appeared in the March 1903 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*.¹⁰ In a series of attacks and counter-attacks, Burroughs clashed with nature writers Ernest Thompson Seton and Reverend William J. Long, accusing them of grossly misrepresenting animal psychology and inventing stories to corroborate their aberrant theories. For most of his presidency, Roosevelt kept a lightly guarded silence on the controversy. The dedicatory letter clearly shows that he supported Burroughs wholeheartedly, and his private letters to Burroughs and others indicate that he did not exaggerate his admiration for Burroughs' nature essays.¹¹ Eventually, Roosevelt was unable to contain himself, publishing two articles in 1907. He attacked Long, Thompson Seton, and Jack London, and he praised Burroughs along with John Muir, Stewart Edward White, the artist Frederic Remington, Olive Thorne Miller, C. Hart Merriam, and a half-dozen others.¹²

The story of Burroughs, President Roosevelt, and the "Nature Fakers" controversy is a fascinating tale of intellectual debate and the cultural definition of nature. Ralph Lutts has told the story with great detail and clarity, and there is no need to repeat his work here.¹³ What matters in the present argument is that for much of the period between 1903 and 1913 Burroughs was involved in a heated public debate about whether animals think, reason, and feel, and whether animal behavior shows traces of the ability to teach and learn. The effect upon Burroughs' writing was to put a hard edge to his observations of animals, so that he often sounds like a mechanist when describing birds. While many readers find the

anthropomorphism of nineteenth-century nature writing sentimental and even offensive, others are surely warranted in being wearied by polemical posturing. Burroughs himself was aware of the change of tone, remarking on it in his collection of argumentative essays, *Ways of Nature* (1905).

Burroughs does not completely abandon the “Nature Faker” controversy in his later essays, and several essays in *The Summit of the Years* recur to what Burroughs calls “the vexed question of the animal mind” (17:vi). But a major strength of the volume is Burroughs’ embrace of a mixture of tones, perspectives, and styles. He can be immensely humorous, as when he describes his unsuccessful race with a woodchuck in the apple orchard by Woodchuck Lodge. Then in the very next section of the essay, he writes poetically of cows and “wide, open, grassy fields, of smooth, broad-backed hills, and of long, flowing mountain lines” (31). The scene recalls “Our Rural Divinity,” Burroughs’ humorous early essay in praise of the milk cow. And there is ready humor in his description of the herd near his Hay-Barn Study: “I suppose no more vacant mind could be found in the universe than that of the cow when she is reposing in a field chewing her cud. But she is the cause of tranquil if not of great thoughts in the lookers-on, and that is enough. Tranquility attends her wherever she goes; it beams from her eyes, and lingers in her footsteps” (33).

The effect of gentle delight marks the opening of “A Barn-Door Outlook”: “I have a barn-door outlook because I have a hay-barn study, and I chose a hay-barn study because I wanted a barn-door outlook” (93). The obvious circular reasoning opens up to “a wide, near view into fields and woods and orchards where I could be on intimate terms with the wild life about me, and with free, open-air nature” (93). The Hay-Barn Study affords a mixed perspective, both panoramic and intimate, reaching wide and yet remaining near. By sitting in the doorway “day after day and week after week,” Burroughs comes to know his wild neighbors in their habits and habitats. Thus the marsh hawk comes in for repeated observations, as when the writer notes, “He, or rather she (for I see by the greater size and browner color that it is the female), moves very slowly and deliberately on level, flexible wing, now over the meadow, now over the oat or millet field” (102). In describing the actions of red squirrels, gray squirrels, chipmunks, and songbirds, Burroughs focuses on the concrete details themselves, without straining for some grand lesson. It is as if the barn-door outlook brings the writer back to the fundamental habit of observing nature, accessible and near at hand.

The Hay-Barn Study becomes a focal point for Burroughs’ observations. In “A Hay-Barn Idyl,” for example, he calls it “a point in the landscape where the wild and the domestic meet” (223). As the essay continues, the barn becomes the place

of meeting for the writer and a series of nesting birds. Swallows, phoebes, and juncos nest and raise broods all about him, and Burroughs lovingly records the successes and failures of his “little neighbors.” The writer’s success resides in his ability to describe the flight and nesting of birds in human terms without making the birds seem like caricatures of humanity. He does not overreach in his claims for attention: “There is no sphere of life so lowly that such tragedies and failures do not come to it” (235).

In other short essays like “The Bow in the Clouds” and “The Round World,” Burroughs meditates on the mixed, paradoxical world around him. He has returned to the scenes of his boyhood and youth, but now he is facing his own mortality, an elder past the age of seventy-five. The rainbow is suitably paradoxical, because it is both of the earth and beyond it: “Born of the familiar and universal elements, the sun and the rain, it is yet as elusive and spectral and surmising as if it were a revelation from some other sphere” (212). The rainbow comes to symbolize “the heaven-born in nature and in life—the unexpected beauty and perfection that is linked with the eternal cosmic laws. Nature is not all solids and fluids and gases, she is not all of this earth; she is of the heavens as well. She is of the remote and the phenomenal; seen through man’s eyes she is touched by a light that never was on sea or land. Neither is life all of the material, the tangible, the demonstrable; the witchery of the ideal, the spiritual, at times hangs the bow of promise against the darkest hours” (215-16).

The Hay-Barn Study opens upon a world of spirituality, but it also allows the writer to recognize the limits of our knowledge. In “The Round World,” Burroughs notes that “to our senses the bullet-like speed of the earth through space amounts to absolute rest,” and that “all is fixed, yet all is in motion” (221). Science corrects the errors of our senses and sheds the light of day into the darkness, but the writer maintains a steady viewpoint:

We can never penetrate the final mystery of things, because behind every mystery is another mystery. What causes life? What started evolution? Why are you and I here? Who or what ordered the world as we see it? We cannot help asking these questions, though we see when we try to take the first step that they are unanswerable. When we find the end or the under side of the sphere, we may hope to answer them. There is no ending, and no beginning, there is no limit to space or to time, though we make our heads ache trying to think how such can be the case. There is no final Cause in any sense that comes within the range of our experience in this world. We are prisoners of the sphere on which we live, and its bewildering contradictions are reflected in our mental lives as well. (222)

Although some readers might take this final paragraph as an admission of ignorance and defeat, it seems rather a balanced acceptance of our condition as limited human beings. The gap between perception and reality is already apparent in the invisible processes of ice breaking up on the Hudson River in March. How much greater and deeper the gap when we pose those necessary and unanswerable questions concerning last things. Like Burroughs himself, then, I would end with a set of tensions and contradictions.

John Burroughs retreated repeatedly from one study to another, one cabin to another, one writer's retreat to another. He was always ready to remove himself from the noisy and blustering world, but he never retreated at all from his work as a writer. Each retreat was a strategic way of renewing his place as a writer. There are many ways of explaining the strategy—reasons within reasons. But the best reason, finally, seems to focus on what kind of place a writer needs. Burroughs needed a place where the domestic and the wild might meet, where a celebrated writer might rest his eyes and ears on the intimate, common, and familiar place of nature, and where he might transform that place into an even better place, a place of profound and beautiful mysteries.

Preserved much as the writer left it, Slabsides is open to the public noon to 4:30 p.m. on the third Saturday in May and the first Saturday in October. The surrounding 170-acre John Burroughs Sanctuary is open year-round. The sanctuary is located on Floyd Ackert Road in West Park, Ulster County. For more information, visit research.amnh.org/burroughs/.

Although the Hay-Barn Study no longer exists, Woodchuck Lodge is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on select weekends May through October. It is located on Burroughs Memorial Road near Roxbury, Delaware County. Further down the road is Boyhood Rock, Burroughs' burial site. For more information, visit the Web site above.

For the time being, The Bark Study is open by appointment only. Please call 845-518-7955 for additional information, or write Riverby 1873, PO Box 100, West Park, NY 12493.



COURTESY STEPHEN M. MERSAND

John Burroughs in one of Henry Ford's own custom automobiles

Endnotes

- 1 Eric Lupfer, "Reading Nature Writing: Houghton Mifflin Company, the Ohio Teachers' Reading Circle, and *In American Fields and Forests* (1909)," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 13 (Spring 2002): 55. Lupfer's research in the Houghton Mifflin Company Archives at Houghton Library, Harvard University, is extremely important for setting an economic and social structure for the emergence of nature writing as a genre in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two of Burroughs's collections, *Riverby* (1894) and *Signs and Seasons* (1886), were assigned in the Ohio Teachers' course for 1895-1896 and 1900-1901, respectively.
- 2 bMS Am 1925 (300), Houghton Mifflin Company Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- 3 The book contains fifteen brief, charming accounts of mammals, with accompanying illustrations, and it would seem to be designed for use in schools. The advertisement at the end of the volume includes many of the same titles discussed by Eric Lupfer, "Before Nature Writing: Houghton, Mifflin and Company and the Invention of the Outdoor Book, 1800-1900," *Book History* 4 (2001): 177-204.
- 4 Only 112 pages long, this pocket-sized book features a brief preface by Snell, who calls Burroughs "our greatest literary naturalist," and nine essays selected from Burroughs' fifteen volumes published by that time.
- 5 Neither Burt nor Burroughs was ever satisfied with their publishers. Writing on 20 May 1908, Burt rails against all publishers, none of whom has taken adequate pain in producing Burroughs' books, notes that he is legally due five percent per annum from sales of *Little Nature Studies*, and

then proposes producing yet another anthology of his work for schoolchildren (Vassar Folder 68.10). In another letter, Burt comments, "Oh yes, I love Mr. Ginn. If I were a man I'd kick him." In a letter of 21 September 1893 to Houghton Mifflin Company, Burroughs defends the Ginn contract because "a man's life work ought to bring him more than \$500 a year. One successful school book would do much better than that" (bMS Am 1925 [300], Houghton Mifflin Company Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University).

- 6 bMS Am 1925 (300), Houghton Mifflin Company Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard University. I have not been able to identify the Seventh Reader by title.
- 7 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 95-98.
- 8 *Century* 58 (August 1899); 500-12.
- 9 *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*. National Edition, ed. Hermann Hagedorn (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 2:390.
- 10 *Atlantic Monthly*, 91:298-309.
- 11 In a letter of 8 June 1903, for example, Roosevelt thanks Burroughs for the set of his works that has just arrived at the White House, plans a visit to Slabsides for July, recounts some of the birds he saw in California, and promises to send Burroughs a copy of *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (Clifton Waller Barrett Collection, University of Virginia). In a 24 April 1903 letter to George Bird Grinnell, editor of *Forest and Stream* and Roosevelt's co-founder of the Boone and Crockett Club, the president blasts a negative editorial by a writer called "Hermit" who has dared to attack Burroughs in the controversy, assuring the editor that there is "no writer of Mr. Burroughs' type who is in Mr. Burroughs' class," adding that he is "one of the Americans to whom good Americans owe a debt" (*The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Elting E. Morison, 8 vols. [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951], 3:468, 470).
- 12 The first was in the form of an interview by Edward B. Clark, "Roosevelt on the Nature Fakirs," *Everybody's Magazine* 16 (June 1907), 770-74, reprinted as "Men Who Misinterpret Nature" (*Works*, 5:367-74), the second was an essay, "Nature-Fakers," which appeared along with Clark's article, "Real Naturalists on Nature Faking," in *Everybody's Magazine* 17 (September 1907), 423-30, and is reprinted in the National Edition (*Works*, 5:375-83).
- 13 *The Nature Fakers: Wildlife, Science & Sentiment* (New York: Fulcrum Publishing, 1990; rpt. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).



Our River: The Essay Art of John Burroughs

Jeff Walker

John Burroughs' house at Riverby is located on a high bluff overlooking the Hudson River. From this vantage point Burroughs watched nearly fifty years of American industrial history as waves of progress swept up the valley along the river. Over that same period, he observed the timeless pageant of natural history that also used the Hudson River Valley as a highway. In "A River View," published in *Signs and Seasons* in 1886, Burroughs explores the interplay of humans with the landscape, juxtaposing the human and the wild as they interacted along the Hudson River in the late nineteenth century. Whereas Burroughs had earlier written that the landscape could be an "outlying part" of oneself ("A Sharp Lookout," *Signs and Seasons*), in "A River View" he finds the landscape of the Hudson River Valley almost too grand, more to be observed than to know intimately.

Burroughs did not always feel put off by the Hudson. In fact, when he purchased the Riverby property in 1873, he seems to have been almost ambivalent toward it, for he made little mention of its location on the banks of the Hudson. He chose the site because it was close to New York City (with its literary connections) and Roxbury (with its familial connections), and because he thought it could be farmed successfully. Less than two years after moving to Riverby, writing in "Our River" (*Scribner's Monthly*, August 1880), the magazine precursor to "A River View," Burroughs had clearly warmed to the Hudson, for he concludes that, in compar-

ison with other North American rivers, “our river [the Hudson] is undoubtedly the most beautiful of them all.” The Columbia River, for instance, is “haughty and impetuous,” whereas the Hudson “pleases like a mountain lake.” Twenty-five years later, however, in the opening passages of “Wildlife About My Cabin” (*Far and Near*, 1904), Burroughs stated that one reason he built his cabin Slabsides a mile back from the river in the middle of a swamp was that the grandeur of the Hudson River had grown “wearisome.” Clearly, something had changed in Burroughs’ feelings toward the Hudson River. The modifications Burroughs made to “Our River” as he revised it for inclusion in *Signs and Seasons* as “A River View” can help us understand that evolution.

The changes Burroughs made to these essays also offer a glimpse into the way Burroughs wrote and revised his work, for we have writings on this subject spanning nearly a decade, first in Burroughs’ journal, then in “Our River,” and finally in “A River View.” In this paper I will discuss the topics in the essays themselves. I will then describe the revisions Burroughs made from one essay to the next, attempting to put them in the context of the revision process that Burroughs used for other essays. As we shall see, the modifications Burroughs made to “Our River” were more extensive and thorough-going than was his custom, reflecting his shift from ambivalence through attraction to vexation.

Subject Matter

“Our River” and “A River View” are distinctive among Burroughs’ writings in that they describe nature on a much larger scale than the nature-walk essays for which he is justifiably famous: instead of the backyard or a neighboring woodland, Burroughs’ subject is the Hudson River as seen from Riverby. He has limited his discussion somewhat by describing only winter and spring activities on the river, but gives detailed descriptions of many aspects of those activities.

“Our River,” illustrated with eleven woodcuts by Mary Hallock Foote (one of the most well-known and respected illustrators of the day) was published in *Scribner’s Monthly* in the summer of 1880. In it, Burroughs discusses many aspects of the Hudson River as seen from Riverby: the beauty of the river and its place among North American rivers; the geological setting and history of the Hudson River Valley; ice harvesting; the fall freeze-up; winter leisure activities such as ice boating and skating; the spring break-up; spring activities like duck hunting, eagle watching, and shad and sturgeon fishing; and finally, a description of the aftermath of a remarkable spring flood a few years previously. Some of these sections are primarily descriptive of the scenes as Burroughs observed them, whereas others contain long anecdotes illustrative of the material. For instance, the fall freeze-up

section contains several pages describing the wreck of the steamer *Sunnyside* when the river froze almost overnight, and subsequent attempts to recover the boat.

Mary Hallock Foote's illustrations are generic scenes of the Hudson Valley only loosely connected to the subject matter of Burroughs' article. Foote was among those illustrators known as the "New School of American Wood Engraving" whose work in illustrating nature essays such as "Our River" contributed to the increasing popularity of both the nature essay and the illustrated magazine (Warren, 82). However, the picturesque perspective of these illustrators depended, in the words of James Perrin Warren, on maintaining "the distance between the reader's 'artificial' life and the ideal of a natural antidote... the pastoral imagination depends on fundamental gaps between real and ideal, life and literature." Foote's illustrations for "Our River," with their picturesque qualities and placid atmosphere even in the face of potential catastrophe like a spring flood, maintain Warren's distance between people living in the real world and a nostalgic yearning for a world that is past.

Foote was probably chosen to illustrate Burroughs' article for several reasons. Her ability to capture the picturesque in woodcuts matched well Burroughs' ability to do the same in words, for Foote was an admirer of Burroughs and sympathetic to his literary goals. Furthermore, Foote was a native of the Hudson Valley, born and raised in Milton, about ten miles south of Riverby. In the 1870s and '80s, Foote was in the process of moving to the West Coast with her husband. In July 1876 she moved to California, but returned to Milton in March 1878 (when, coincidentally, she illustrated another of Burroughs' *Scribner's* articles, "Picturesque Aspects of Farm Life in New York"). She moved to Leadville, Colorado, in April 1879, returning to Milton in October of that same year—at which time she drew the illustrations for "Our River."

Mary Hallock Foote's illustrations show aspects of life along the Hudson, but do not convey the same impression as Burroughs' prose. For instance, the first illustration in the article "Spring Flood," shows a fashionably dressed woman on horseback riding placidly over a bridge (Figure 1). Two men in a boat are seen in the background, but they do not seem alarmed by the "flood." This engraving may illustrate Burroughs' observation that even a huge rainfall ("the heaviest fall of rain in the valley of the Hudson in 50



Figure 1



Figure 2

a dark sky. The subtly illuminated river in the middle distance has an indistinct surface that could be just about anything.

Other illustrations for “Our River” have little at all to do with Burroughs’ text. Some seem to be more from Foote’s life than from Burroughs’ article. For instance, “Crossing the Ice to the Train” (Figure 3) depicts a wild ride in a horse-drawn sleigh across the frozen Hudson River, a scene that comes not from Burroughs in “Our River” but from Foote in her own memoir (Miller, 4). “A Bird’s-Eye



Figure 3

View,” possibly a self portrait of Foote (Figure 4), shows a woman artist sitting on a bluff high above the Hudson (perhaps in the Catskills near the Catskill Mountain House), sketching placidly among the rocks and not looking at the river at all. “The Old Cemetery at Marlborough Landing” (Figure 5) is a bucolic scene a few miles south of Foote’s home in Milton, yet neither Marlborough nor graveyards are mentioned by Burroughs. Clearly, Foote’s engravings were not meant to be illustrative of the material in Burroughs’ essay per se,

but rather to provide atmosphere and to sell magazines by promoting the pastoral or picturesque view of the landscape and all that went with it.

In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, it was common for magazines such as *Scribner’s Monthly* to pair illustrations by artists such as Foote with articles by authors such as Burroughs (Warren, 82). Readers loved these glimpses of bygone times, and magazine publishers competed in presenting



Figure 4

picturesque aspects of life. Even writings that were not illustrated catered to the desire of audiences for depictions of the picturesque.

In this context, it is interesting to compare Burroughs' description of the Hudson River with that of Walt Whitman, who visited Burroughs in 1878 and 1879, and recorded some of



Figure 5

his observations in short pieces in *Specimen Days*. For Whitman, the river was a great highway of commerce. He loved how the railroad ran along the east shore (few valley residents today can love the train for that reason), and the steamboats he describes are working boats, towing strings of barges. Whitman's description of eagles is typical: soaring into the teeth of the wind, "lord[s], among the power and savage joy." During one of his visits, Whitman even borrowed an entry from Burroughs' journal (January 29, 1878, interestingly enough observed at Marlborough Landing) and used it as the basis for a poem in *Leaves of Grass* ("Dalliance of Eagles").

Burroughs, on the other hand, does not mention the railroad, although he routinely rowed across the river to the Hyde Park depot to pick up visitors. His steamboat is a passenger boat (which sinks), and his eagles are besieged by crows trying to steal their food, or stand stoically in the wind and snow on ice floes. Burroughs' focus, as this paper hopes to demonstrate, is the juxtaposition of nature and civilization in which he feels that the "wild and savage" will ultimately outlast human activity.

Writing and Revising

Despite the fact that, "Our River" and "A River View" deal with many of the same subjects, they are very different, reflecting the changes in Burroughs' attitude toward the Hudson River from 1876, when he started to keep a journal, through 1880 with the publication of "Our River," to 1886 and the publication of "A River View." During this time, Burroughs became less and less enchanted by the river that flowed by his doorstep. The second essay reflects that disaffection. Burroughs' construction of the initial essay, and the revisions that produced the latter essay, reflect this evolution.

Many of Burroughs' essays are based on observations made during work in his fields or orchards, or on daily walks around the neighborhood. He recorded some of these observations in his journal, sometimes revising them right on the journal



PHOTO BY CHRIS PRYSLOPSKI, COURTESY OF RIVERBY STUDY CONSERVATOR

Riverby today, looking past the laundry house and well

page. At other times, Burroughs revised and reorganized the material that he included in his essay. In the winter of 1877 he made the following journal entry:

One of the peculiar sounds here is the croaking of the great ice-frogs on the river rip, rip, they go in the still nights, and again when the sun first strikes the ice in the morning. It is a singular sound. Thoreau calls it a “whoop”, Emerson a cannonade, and, again, “the gasp and moan of the ice-imprisoned flood.” Sometimes it reminds me of a huge gong, then of a giant staff beating the air. It seems always in the air and to proceed from something in swift motion—it ricochets like a cannon shot and glances from side to side. It starts sometimes from under your feet, and rips or explodes and vanishes in the distance. Then again it seems like a grunt, as if some great ice-god were turning over in his sleep (February 11, 1877).

This entry—trimmed, rearranged, and embellished by the addition of the title of the Emerson poem from which the quotation is taken—ends up as the following passage in “Our River”:

No sooner has the river pulled its icy coverlid over him than he begins to snore in his winter sleep. It is a singular sound. Thoreau calls it a “whoop” and Emerson a “cannonade,” and in “Merlin” speaks of

“The gasp and moan
Of the ice-imprisoned flood”

Sometimes it is a well-defined grunt—e-h-h, e-h-h, as if some ice god turned uneasily in his bed.

Then again I am reminded of loud croaking, as if some huge ice-frogs had come down from the polar regions; r-rip they go, now here, now there (485)

To create his trademark nature essay, Burroughs strung passages such as these together with new prose observations or ruminations. The fact that many of the observations in Burroughs' essays were not recorded in his journals attests to his fine memory or his creative abilities.

Burroughs did not always have a clear plan or outline for an essay before he started, and often surprised even himself by the time he was finished. "A Sharp Lookout" (*Signs and Seasons*, 1886) is one of his most famous essays, and yet after he finished it, he wrote in his journal:

Finished my "Observations of Nature" "Signs and Seasons" today, begun two weeks ago. Writing is like fishing, you do not know that there are fish in that hole until you have caught them. I did not know that there was an article in me on this subject till I fished it out. I tried many times before I had a bite, and I done much better some days than others. Stormy days, either snow or rain (tho' snow is best) were my best days. The same is true of the Thoreau article, and indeed of nearly all my articles; they have been discoveries and have surprised me. (February 28, 1882)*

Once an essay was written, Burroughs' strategies for revisions were several. Taking the volume *Signs and Seasons* as an example, ten of the thirteen essays had been previously published in magazines. Some were not revised at all, but reprinted in their entirety; "A Taste of Maine Birch" (describing a fishing trip in Maine) is a good example. Other essays were revised by adding new material. For instance, "Tragedies of the Nests" (about the many disasters that can befall a bird's nest), ends with several new paragraphs set off by the phrase "Let me conclude this chapter with two or three more notes..." (*Signs and Seasons*, 92). More extensive revisions were made to create the essay "Roof Tree" (describing the building of Burroughs' stone residence, at Riverby), including new introductory material, a new conclusion ("There remains only to be added that..."), and numerous deletions within the body of the text (see detailed discussion in Walker, 2007). A major section extracted from "A Sharp Lookout" (discussing the methods and goals of a naturalist), the opening essay of *Signs and Seasons*, became the basis for the second

*"A Sharp Lookout" was originally published under the title "Signs and Seasons," and this entry shows that it had an even earlier title, "Observations of Nature," each successive title more inspired.)

essay “A Spray of Pine” (on the natural history of the pine and the hemlock). The titles of several essays also were changed.

The most extensive revisions during the preparation of *Signs and Seasons* were those made to “Our River.” The title was changed, a new opening section was written, and the material within the essay was rearranged. These three changes, and how they help us gauge Burroughs’ evolving feelings toward the river, will be discussed in turn.

Changing the Title

It is understandable that Burroughs would change the title of the essay in light of his changing feelings toward the river. “Our River” suggests a community treasure or a welcome friend and neighbor, whereas “A River View” implies something that can only be observed. In fact, in “A River View” it is now the Hudson River that is “haughty,” lacking the qualities Burroughs looks for in a companion, keeping him instead “at arm’s length.” Apparently, Burroughs would have been more comfortable in a river landscape that he could know intimately, perhaps in the same way that Wendell Berry, a century later, would come to know and write about the Kentucky River, upon whose banks his farm sits.

New Introductory Material

In the new introductory material, Burroughs describes the haughtiness of the river by contrasting it to a small stream:

One can make a companion of [a small stream]; he can walk with it and sit with it, or lounge on its banks, and feel it is all his own... You cannot have the same kind of attachment and sympathy with a great river; it does not flow through your affections like a lesser stream (195).

The emphasis on walking with, and sitting with, the stream underscore the sense that the small stream can be a companion. Later in this same opening paragraph, Burroughs attributes the unsociability of the Hudson in part to the fact that it is an estuary, bringing the “austerity and grandeur” of the sea far inland.

Ever able to find the good in any situation, however, Burroughs asserts that a great river like the Hudson can do something that a small stream cannot—“idealize” the landscape. Here, the emphasis is again on a relationship based on detached observation and not personal engagement. By idealizing the landscape, Burroughs is referring to the way in which it:

multiplies and heightens the beauty of the day and of the season. A fair

day it makes more fair, and a wild and tempestuous day it makes more wild and tempestuous. It takes on so quickly and completely the mood and temper of the sky above. The storm is mirrored in it, and the wind chafes it into foam. The face of winter it makes doubly rigid and corpse-like. How stark and still and white it lies there! But a bright day in Spring, what life and light possess it! (195-96)

This notion first appears in Burroughs' journal in early May 1883. Some rudimentary editing can be seen in the following journal entry, but the finished paragraph (above) contains many embellishments on the material contained here:

At sun rise this morning the river was like a mirror, duplicating the opposite shore perfectly. Presently a breeze came and tarnished it, or made it white like ground glass. The river idealizes the landscape. It multiplies and enhances hightens [sic] the beauty of the day and season: a fair day it makes more fair, and a tempestuous day it makes more wild. The face of winter it makes doubly rigid and corpse-like; and to the face of spring and summer it adds new youth and sparkle. (May 2, 1883)



COURTESY HUDSON RIVER VALLEY HERITAGE

Burroughs crossing a woodland stream

Rearranging Material

Writing before the advent of word processors, and before he had anyone to type his manuscripts, John Burroughs wrote entirely with pen or pencil on paper. This meant that revisions to documents were most easily accomplished by adding to the beginning or end of the article, and/or by deleting portions of the text. The revisions described above for other essays in *Signs and Seasons* adhere to this pattern. For Burroughs to accomplish the revisions to “Our River” that he felt necessary, he needed to “cut and paste” in a literal sense.

One of the most drastic changes to the essay was to move the section describing the geologic history of the Hudson River from the beginning of the essay to the end. This section is based on an article by a Professor Newberry in *Popular Science Monthly* (1878), one of Burroughs' favorite magazines. Burroughs'

interests in geology were long-standing, eventually culminating in the publication of *Time and Change* (1912), a book of essays on geology and the evolution of life. As the title suggests, *Time and Change* focuses on two topics: the immensity of geologic time and the effectiveness of tiny changes in organisms and rocks given very long periods of time over which to act. By the end of the nineteenth century, many geologists had become comfortable with an earth that was millions (or even billions) of years old, but the notion was not generally accepted by the public, or even by other scientists.

Burroughs felt it important to include a discussion of the geologic history in both “Our River” and “A River View” because of his conviction that geologic history is an important influence on the natural and cultural histories of the valley (Walker, 2006). The Hudson River may be one of the shortest major rivers in the world, yet its history, both natural and unnatural, is full and interesting. Three hundred years of European settlement, preceded by several thousand years of inhabitation by native peoples, all in the context of 15,000 years of history since the retreat of the last glaciers and more than a billion years of bedrock geologic history, combine to create a physical and cultural landscape rich in diversity.

In “Our River” the geologic history section provides an opening background to the rest of the essay. For instance, the Hudson River is described as an estuary, the mouth of a river flooded by rising sea level. As far north as Albany, 150 miles above its mouth at New York City, the river is subject to the twice-daily fluctuations of the tides. In fact, tidal flows explain why Burroughs’ ice floes move down and up the river during the spring break-up. The interaction between ocean and river water in the estuary also affects the kinds of fish caught: salt or fresh water species can be found off Riverby depending on the volume of fresh water in the river, which is directly correlated to the amount of rainfall in the watershed. This is described in an episode included in both essays in which drought conditions bring salt water species as far north as Riverby (twenty miles north of the normal wintertime “salt front”), where they are caught in great numbers from beneath the ice.

Moving the geologic history section to the end of “A River View” suggests that Burroughs had come to place more emphasis on the magnitude of geologic changes over time, and to feel that nature would outlast the works of human civilization. The essay now ends with a surprisingly modern image (previously buried within the essay) of Manhattan inundated by rising sea level, with “the top of Trinity Church steeple alone standing above the flood,” and of “the surf beating on our doorstep” at Riverby. This topic will be taken up in more detail later.

The first part of “A River View” after the new introductory material is a section

on the spring break-up. This is interesting because it compels Burroughs to treat the river phenomena in mixed chronological order: after the break-up comes the freeze-up and then a long section on ice harvesting and ice boating. In “Our River,” the order also was mixed chronologically, discussing first the ice harvest, followed by the freeze-up and then break-up.

After a paragraph describing various aspects of the break-up (how to recognize it, why the river appears swept clean of ice at some times) comes a new paragraph, which is “Ovidian” in the words of Frank Bergon (1986). It describes the river:

transformed into a strip of firmament at night dotted with stars and moons in the shape of little and big fragments of ice. One day I remember, there came gliding into my vision a great irregular hemisphere of ice that vividly suggested a half-moon under a telescope. . . . Sometimes during [calm] weather, [the ice] drifts by in forms that suggest the great continents, as they appear on the map, surrounded by the oceans, all their capes and peninsulas, and isthmuses and gulfs, and inland lakes and seas, vividly reproduced. (198-199)

These observations are drawn from an entry in Burroughs’ journal in the winter of 1883:

A singular spectacle on the river almost daily. The great black pool lies still and calm, when a vast field of ice comes drifting slowly along. One day it was the shape of a half moon and it had decidedly an astronomic effect. The ice was of the same silvery whiteness as the moon, and marked with similar lines and depressions. The river was the still, dark, fathomless sky; a small bit of ice here and there shone like a star. The motion was hardly perceptible [sic] and a veritable moon, enormously magnified, seemed to be passing my window. At other times a vast field of ice will take the form of some of the continents—one day it is Africa, another North or South America that drifts into my field of vision, with bays, capes, peninsulas, rivers, mountains all clearly sketched. The absence of wind for the past ten days causes the ice to mass in this way and assume these suggestive forms. I have never seen it so before. (January 1, 1883)

Whereas many of the descriptions of ice harvesting, ice boating, and eagles are taken directly from “Our River” (albeit rearranged), much of the writing about both the break-up and freeze-up of the river is new material taken from journal entries made after the publication of the original article (the two passages discussed above are good examples) or from memories and direct observations.



Overlooking the frozen Hudson
from Riverby

The new material adds significantly to the “Ovidian” imagery of the entire piece.

Inserted into the material taken directly from “Our River” are two new transitional statements that are significant. In the opening paragraph of the section on ice harvesting, Burroughs adds the following sentence: “A dweller upon its banks, I am an interested spectator of the spring and winter harvests which the waters yield” (202). He describes in great detail the ice harvest, but deletes the whole section from “Our River” that described fishermen working on the river. A person who reads only “A River View” is liable to be confused by this because no spring harvests are described.

As a transition into the geology section, Burroughs adds the following paragraph in which he juxtaposes nature and human civilization, and finds satisfaction in the fact the constructs of human society (especially the rich) still must share the water and the air with wild birds and aquatic animals:

This great metropolitan river, as it were, with its floating palaces and shores lined with villas, is thus an inlet and a highway of the savage. The wild ducks and geese still follow it north in the spring, and south in the fall. The loon passes in his migrations and disports himself in its waters. Seals and otters are occasionally seen in it. (209)

The fact that this passage is inserted just before the geology section that forms the essay’s conclusion suggests that expressing this sentiment (that nature’s presence on the river is timeless in a sense) was an important reason that Burroughs revised the essay.

Because “Our River” was relatively old when Burroughs chose to revise it for *Signs and Seasons* (six years, whereas most of the essays in Burroughs’ books were recently published or written specifically for the volume in which they were included), one has to wonder why he revised the essay in the first place, especially since his thoughts had changed so much. On the one hand, he may have revised it precisely because his feelings had changed so radically. Burroughs’ writings are characterized by an honesty that endeared him to his readers. He was never shy of



Residence of John Burroughs in West Park

making contradictory statements in different essays, and even pointed his inconsistencies or inaccuracies out on some occasions (see, for example, the critical commentary on “A Sharp Lookout” in Walker’s 2006 reissue of *Signs and Seasons*, p. 297ff). On the other hand, Burroughs may have wanted to revise the essay so he could emphasize his growing conviction that humans were a smaller part of the landscape than “Our River” gives the impression: by 1886 Burroughs seemed to see humans as small (though important) players in a larger landscape, akin to the tiny, though not insignificant, figures in paintings of the Hudson River School artists.

In the decades after he moved to the shores of the Hudson River, John Burroughs’ feelings toward the river underwent a marked transformation. His initial feelings appear to have been somewhat ambivalent: as previously noted, he chose the Riverby site because of its convenience and practicality, not its scenic location. Several years later, he wrote quite fervently in “Our River” of the wonder and beauty of the Hudson, describing many mundane, yet picturesque, activities that he observed. “Our River” also was written at about the same time (1880) that Burroughs was enamored by the picturesque stone house he had built at Riverby (Walker, 2007). However, for Burroughs, the picturesque proved to be a shaky foundation upon which to base his life: the house at Riverby was cold and impractical, and the view from Riverby turned “wearisome.” When he revised “Our River” for inclusion in *Signs and Seasons*, therefore, Burroughs deleted some material, rear-

ranged what was left, and wrote major new passages in order to try to express his changed feelings.

At times it seems that Burroughs was not paying attention when he made these revisions. He added some new ideas, like the notion that the river idealizes the landscape and his description of ice masses that look like the moon. However, Burroughs did not rearrange the material in chronological order, even though there does not seem to be any reason to have kept it out of order. In addition, he added introductory remarks for material that he later cut.

Inconsistencies notwithstanding, Burroughs' goal with the revision was to emphasize the interaction between wild nature and human civilization as he witnessed it from the banks of the Hudson. The new "Ovidian" descriptions add to the mystery of nature, and to the sense that nature is outside human control. Placing the geology section at the end of the essay emphasizes that geologic changes happen, and will continue to happen, on spatial and temporal scales far exceeding the human scale. Finally, the "wild and metropolitan" paragraph, with its references to human artifacts ("floating palaces and shores lined with villas") conveys the message that ducks, geese, and loons will use the river just as they always have, despite the presence of humans. Referring to the river itself as "metropolitan" co-opts a word that is usually reserved for urban environments. This message was important enough to Burroughs that he went to extraordinary lengths of cutting and pasting, adding and deleting to revise an essay that was relatively old at the time.

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John Burroughs and the Hudson River Valley in Environmental History

Stephen M. Mercier

Long before the environmental movement as we now know it took shape; before the landmark Storm King case, the heated controversy over Consolidated Edison's proposed massive hydroelectric plant (1962-1980); before the General Electric Company dumped approximately 1.3 million pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the Hudson River (1947-1977); before Pete Seeger envisioned the potential of raising environmental awareness through the building of the Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater* and its maiden voyage (1969); before the Hudson River Fisherman's Association and the publication of Robert Boyle's *Hudson River: A Natural and Unnatural History* (1969); and before ecology emerged as a formal field of study, John Burroughs was paying very close attention to the flora and fauna of the Hudson River Valley, particularly the birds.

In *The Hudson River: A Natural and Unnatural History*, Robert Boyle recognizes that "The sense of being at the center of the world—this has always been part of the lure of the Hudson. John Burroughs, the naturalist, felt it" (62). Boyle contends that during the period in which the Hudson River Valley saw the development of railroads, steamboats, and canals, writers and artists were helping the river to receive national attention and thus, "the case may be made that the valley, more than any other locale, inspired a new American attitude toward nature" (59). John Burroughs, as the most famous spokesperson for the region, should be rightly recognized for his role in shaping Americans' attitudes toward the natural world. Before such terms as "ecology," "ecosystem," and "bioregion," became popular parlance to environmentalists, Burroughs was detecting important dynamics between human cultural activity and natural systems.

In "The Hudson River Valley: A Bioregional Story," Catholic priest Thomas Berry views the Hudson Valley as a bioregion, "broadly defined as a geographical area of interacting life systems—geological, economic, cultural—that is life-sustaining" (quoted in Marranca, 387). In his hope to make a treaty or spiritual

bond with the land, Berry argues that the river:

is the ultimate psychic as well as the physical context out of which we emerge into being and by which we are nourished, guided, healed, and fulfilled. As the gulls soaring above the river in its estuary region, as the blossoms along its banks, the fish within its waters, so, too, the river is a celebration of existence, of life lived in intimate association with the sky, the winds from every direction, the sunlight. The river is the binding presence throughout the valley community. (quoted in Marranca, 394)

John Burroughs likewise shared similar sentiments regarding the “binding presence” of the river. His celebration of the flora and fauna of the Hudson River Valley helped to make visions like Berry’s possible. For over half a century, millions of readers enjoyed Burroughs’ endearing accounts of rambles around the Hudson Valley.

In his *The Hudson: A History*, English Professor Tom Lewis writes: “Early in the twentieth century the Hudson served as the cradle for early environmental advocates, including John Burroughs and Edward Henry Harriman. They awakened citizens to the ravages of lumbermen who were systematically clear-cutting their way through the Adirondacks and the Catskills, and quarries who sought to carve up the Palisades and Highlands” (7). In the nineteenth century, Burroughs reacted to the over-commercialization of the river and to a spirit of industrialization that was gripping the nation. Although his writings were not characteristically “political,” he should rightly be recognized as an early advocate for environmental protection of the Hudson River Valley. For example, he was sensitive to the mass-scale clear-cutting of hemlocks for tannin. He was so greatly troubled by the extinction of the passenger pigeon, once so incredibly abundant in the region, that he broadcast his concerns to the masses through his writing. Certainly, if Burroughs were alive today, he would be very cognizant of the impact of industrialization upon all his beloved creatures—especially the birdlife—of the region. Indeed, Burroughs can be identified with an environmental ethos still worthy of admiration.

For Julianne Lutz Warren, Burroughs is the key figure who helped citizens realize that “in an era of rapid and immense changes, people might reconcile and perhaps even weave together love of nature, industrial and economic development, and the processes and facts of science into an enduring story of humans and nature living well and in concert.” Most importantly, Burroughs sought “right relationships” between humans and the “earth as a whole” (232-34). Lutz Warren includes a quotation from Burroughs’ *Leaf and Tendril* (1908) that indicates his realization

of the inescapable interdependence of humans upon their environment: “We are rooted to the air through our lungs and to the soil through our stomachs,” he wrote. “We are walking trees and floating plants. We cannot separate ourselves from nature any more than we can jump off the planet” (200). Such large-scale reflections are abundant in Burroughs’ writings, particularly in his later essays; importantly, they are grounded in his appreciation of local species of the Hudson River Valley. Considerations of his favorite species—birds—led Burroughs down the path of environmental awareness and protection. His writings and powerful acquaintances had a large impact on the development of environmentalism in the United States. His persuasive language deserves close attention, as his endearing combination of natural history observation and emotion may help to save species and habitats.

John O’Birds and the Hermit Thrush

In the spring of 1863, Burroughs began to study ornithology. According to biographer Edward J. Renehan, Jr., he:

had become fascinated with a copy of Audubon’s Elephant Portfolio edition of *The Birds of America* in the library of the [West Point] Military Academy. He bought binoculars. He invested sixty cents in an illustrated reference book for use in the field. He began recording his sightings of birds beside his notations to flowers. “... I am much interested in the birds,” he wrote [Myron] Benton, “at least of late I can think or talk of nothings else.” (64-65)

Biographer Clara Barrus explains that at the Library of the United States Military Academy at West Point Burroughs “chanced upon Audubon’s ‘Birds.’ Its spirited illustrations at once fired his imagination and kindled his enthusiasm. Thenceforth love of flowers and birds went hand in hand” (74-75). The importance of Burroughs’ encounter with Audubon’s work cannot be overstated. As Jack Kligerman explains, “it was Audubon’s monumental work that reoriented Burroughs’ imagination and gave him a vocation” (13). In *Birds and Poets* (1877), Burroughs asserts that Audubon’s sensibility was that of a great poet. On the opening page of the book, Burroughs writes that Audubon “certainly had the eye and ear and heart—‘the fluid and attaching character,’ as well as the ‘enthusiasm,’ and ‘the love,’ that characterizes the true and divine race of bards” (3). Burroughs was attracted not only to Audubon’s accurate observations of birds’ habitats and traits, but also to his devotion to them. Burroughs felt the same sentiment toward birds and repeatedly challenged ornithologists to go beyond strict systems of classification in their depictions. He wanted scientists and lay people to feel genuine

bonds with birdlife.

Burroughs contemplated his love of birds throughout his lifetime. In *Time and Change* (1912) he reflects: “If the bird has not preached to me, it has added to the resources of my life, it has widened the field of my interests, it has afforded me another beautiful object to love, and has helped make me feel more at home in this world” (253). Leading ornithologists, amateur birders, and lay people in various settings all testified that Burroughs’ texts helped to foster in them a love for birds and an urge to learn more information about birdlife.

In particular, many readers were drawn to his depictions of birdsong. A strong emotional connection to birdsong may lead to the subsequent protection of birds on both a personal and political level. How do his texts accomplish this value-laden mission? What rhetorical strategies does he employ toward this end? How does perception interact with emotional response in a meaningful manner?

In his first book of natural history, *Wake-Robin* (1871), Burroughs explains his intention in the opening line of the preface: “This is mainly a book about the Birds, or more properly, an invitation to a study of Ornithology, and the purpose of the author will be carried out in proportion as it awakens and stimulates the interest of the reader in this branch of Natural History” (v). He shares his observations and experiences, “written less in the spirit of exact science than with the freedom and love of an old acquaintance” (v).

Indeed, a close look at Burroughs’ construction of passages upon the hermit thrush reveals his sensory, cognitive, and emotional bonding with the natural world. To be sure, nowhere in Burroughs’ writings does he celebrate birdsong more than the passages in which he sings paeans of joy to the hermit thrush. In what is one of the most striking and appreciative quotations on birdsong in *Wake-Robin*, Burroughs expounds upon his consideration of elated emotions in the presence of birdsong; he expresses his response while listening to “the serene beauty and sublimity” of the hermit thrush. In his respected opinion, “The emotions excited by the songs of these thrushes belong to a higher order, springing as they do from our deepest sense of the beauty and harmony of the world” (*Wake-Robin*, 25).

Aesthetic appreciation has its own intrinsic value. Three elements combine: the birdsong itself, the human auditory realization of how remarkably it truly is, and the correspondent emotions to which these recognitions give rise. Burroughs intimately fuses these together as he labels the song of the hermit thrush “the finest sound in nature” (*Wake-Robin*, 51).

I detect this sound rising pure and serene, as if a spirit from some remote height were slowly chanting a divine accompaniment. The song appeals to the sentiment of the beautiful in me, and suggests a religious beatitude as

no other sound in nature does. [...] It is very simple, and I can hardly tell the secret of its charm. 'O spheral, spheral!' he seems to say; 'O holy, holy! O clear away, clear away! O clear up, clear up!' interspersed with the finest trills and the most delicate preludes. It [...] seems to be the voice of that calm, sweet solemnity one attains to in his best moments. It realizes a peace and a deep, solemn joy that only the finest souls may know. [...] Listening to this strain on the lone mountain, with the full moon just rounded from the horizon, the pomp of your cities and the pride of your civilization seemed trivial and cheap. (*Wake-Robin*, 51-52)

This treatment of the thrush's song expresses several ambient qualities, such as deeply sensed feelings of spirituality and serenity. To translate his appreciation into discourse, Burroughs makes the analogy between birdsong and human musical composition. Curiously, this joyous epiphany ends with a "social" critique that implies nature's "supremacy" over material constructs developed by civilization. Here, the song of the hermit thrush, in which he so wonderfully delights, is contrasted, albeit briefly and generally, with the pomp of "cities" and "pride." The emotion this passage attempts to realize is that of "peace" and "solemn joy," which Burroughs clearly does not associate with cities; he feels that the serenity of country life is not available in cities—that they corrupt the natural world and denigrate the moral values one gleans in the presence of a relatively pristine countryside. He often equates cities with a rather harried or frenzied emotion that is incompatible with the pastoral peace of the atmosphere surrounding his family farm. One might say that Burroughs' rural feeling here is rather idyllic. Nevertheless, this idyllic sensibility implies an unstated ethic about "modernization" at a surprising time in the text. In the context of a consideration of birdsong, the reader faces Burroughs' opinion that "natural" birdsong is far more impressive and beneficial to human emotion than "artificial" human constructions. Additional social critiques accompany the context of birdsong.

After summarizing his joy and vividly describing his surroundings with emotive language, Burroughs provides another subtle cultural critique that gives preference to the hermit thrush's song over human "artifacts," even of the arts:

Mounting toward the upland again, I pause reverently as the hush and stillness of twilight come upon the woods. It is the sweetest, ripest hour of the day. And as the hermit's evening hymn goes up from the deep solitude below me, I experience that serene exaltation of sentiment of which music, literature, and religion are but the faint types and symbols. (*Wake-Robin*, 75)

This contrast shows his exceptional appreciation for the sound of the thrush, and the emotions to which it gives rise. On a larger scale, nature, signified by the thrush's song, is felt to be the primary place where a pure "sentiment" can be found.

One might consider these emphatic descriptions of the hermit thrush's song to constitute what rhetoricians call an "emotive appeal." Vivid and dramatic depictions, such as Burroughs' passage on the hermit thrush, may arouse an emotion in readers. Hyperbolic descriptions and honorific terms may further excite readers' emotional responses. Emotive prose often relies upon the cadence of a sentence as well as the smoothness of consonants and vowels. As the emotive language of the above passages on the hermit thrush demonstrates, Burroughs gears his writing style toward the creation of emotion in his readership. As rhetoricians have recognized, "The euphony and rhythm of sentences undoubtedly play a part in the communicative and persuasive process—especially in regard to producing emotional effects" (Corbett and Connors, 363). Although the creation of emotion for birdsong can be considered an act of persuasion in a "political" sense, Burroughs intends for his emotive language first and foremost to create a joyous love for birds in their natural habitats. Accordingly, he wishes for readers and others to enjoy the experience of birdsong for themselves. Burroughs not only loves the birds; he also relishes in his own deeply emotive responses to them, and hopes his readers will do the same.

In the following hermit thrush scene, Burroughs includes beautiful descriptions of flora and how he senses them; of course, his knowledge of the type of flora surrounding him heightens his appreciation. He once again attempts to paint an atmosphere of peace and serenity:

At the foot of a rough, scraggy yellow birch, on a bank of club-moss, so richly inlaid with partridge-berry and curious shining leaves—with here and there in the bordering a spire of the false winter-green strung with faint pink flowers and exhaling the breath of a May orchard—that it looks too costly a couch for such an idler. The sun is just past the meridian, and the afternoon chorus is not yet in full tune. [...] it is not till the twilight that the full power and solemnity of the thrush's hymn is felt. (*Wake-Robin*, 59-60)

Burroughs describes the flora poetically as he absorbs himself in sensory and emotive experience. Burroughs continues to place himself in the setting by purposefully engaging his senses to enjoy various birdsong: "I lie on my back with eyes half closed, and analyze the chorus of warblers, thrushes, finches, and flycatchers; while, soaring above all, a little withdrawn and alone rises the divine contralto of the hermit" (*Wake-Robin*, 60). Fine crafting of language with such

profound eloquence and emotive power should be hailed by environmentalists for its potential impact upon readers and laws protecting species.

It is precisely Burroughs' intense love of birds, as represented through his writings, that allowed him to have such an impact upon future legislation on their behalf. His earlier exaltations of birdsong as somehow superior to the "pomp of your cities" and as more meaningful than the sentiment produced by "music, art, and religion" paved the way for a political process leading toward bird protection. Additionally, Burroughs' celebrity allowed him to influence acquaintances who had powerful influence in the political arena.

John Burroughs, Theodore Roosevelt, and the first National Wildlife Refuge of Pelican Island, 1903

Environmental history celebrates authors who in their own lives have fought great battles for protection of the natural world. Few critics have acknowledged or hashed out the possibility that Burroughs' friendship with President Theodore Roosevelt may have contributed to Roosevelt's love for—and eventual protection of—significant portions of the natural world.

One of the few scholars who emphasizes Burroughs' role in regard to bird protection is State University of New York at Oneonta English Professor Daniel G. Payne. Payne persuasively argues for Burroughs' indirect influence upon Roosevelt's conservation policies. As Payne recognizes, Burroughs was not directly on the battle lines of preservation: "Even though Burroughs was aware that many considered his political detachment to be a fault, writing: 'I was never a fighter. I feel at times I might have been a shirker, but I have shirked one thing, or one duty, that I might the more heartily give myself to another'" ("Camping," 3). Self-admittedly, Burroughs' constitution was not temperamentally suited for battle. Payne argues that Burroughs "wasn't argumentative by nature—this is why he was the most beloved naturalist of the time. He was a kindly, open teacher, for millions of people through his books, and in person" ("Interview," 2). Payne contends:

If it was not for Burroughs, gathering together a huge, huge number of nature lovers through his writings, and popularizing other nature writers, such as John Muir, such as Henry David Thoreau—if it wasn't for Burroughs getting that audience together, who would have been there to listen to people like John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Bob Marshall? Burroughs does not get enough credit for getting the audience there. ("Interview," 3)

Payne asserts that Roosevelt was at relative ease with Burroughs and greatly enjoyed his texts and company; he explores the close personal friendship between

the two before, during, and after Roosevelt's presidency. Roosevelt stayed in contact with Burroughs well after his presidency, and continued to refer to him as "Oom John," meaning uncle in Dutch. In a letter dated September 22, 1911, Roosevelt writes:

Dear Oom John: Did you ever get the pamphlet on Concealing Coloration? If not, I will send you another. I do hope that you will include in your coming volume of sketches a little account of the time you visited us at Pine Knot, our Little Virginia Camp, while I was President. I am very proud of you, Oom John, and I want the fact that you were my guest when I was President, and that you and I looked at birds together, recorded there—and don't forget that I showed you the blue grosbeak and Bewick's wren, and almost all the other birds I said I would! Ever yours, Theodore Roosevelt. (Vassar File 66.71)

As the letter indicates, Burroughs and Roosevelt birded together at the President's retreat, Pine Knot, and went on several camping trips together, most notably an outing to Yellowstone Park in 1903, on which Burroughs based *Camping and Tramping with Roosevelt*, published four years later. Payne investigates Roosevelt's life-long interest in Burroughs' literary naturalism: "Roosevelt had been familiar with Burroughs's essays on birds ever since his youth, and like tens of thousands of other Americans, those essays encouraged Roosevelt's early passion for natural history, particularly ornithology" ("Camping," 13). In regard to Roosevelt's eventual initiation of conservation policies, Payne explains, "Burroughs's essays seemed to at least confirm Roosevelt's tendencies toward nature appreciation, and helped him move in a direction he was already inclined to go" ("Camping," 13). Payne thus recognizes that Burroughs' strong influence upon Roosevelt was specifically in regard to bird protection.

Payne relates a specific instance in which Burroughs' particular influence over Roosevelt did yield some political fruit: the case of Pelican Island in Florida, a small island that provided important habitat and protection for numerous exotic birds being hunted for the millinery trade. "On March 14, 1903, just days before leaving Washington, D.C., with John Burroughs for the Yellowstone trip, Roosevelt asked his advisors, 'Is there any law that will prevent me from declaring Pelican Island a Federal Bird Preservation?' When assured there was none, he said, 'Very well, then I so declare it.'" In the next six years, Roosevelt created fifty more wildlife refuges, primarily aimed at the protection of birds" ("Camping," 13-14). Most significantly, as Payne observes, Roosevelt's "love of birds which Burroughs helped to foster resulted in direct action" ("Interview," 1). The president's declaration of Pelican Island as a federal preserve represents a momentous occasion in the

history of environmental conservation.

“The Evolution of the Conservation Movement,” published by the federal government, emphasizes the importance of this initiative to protect Pelican Island as the first of over fifty “wildlife sanctuaries Roosevelt creates while President” (1); most importantly, it “establishes the precedent on which the system of national wildlife refuges will be based” (2). Following Payne’s argument that Burroughs had an influence upon Roosevelt’s decision to preserve Pelican Island—along with the fact that Pelican Island became the precedent upon which later wildlife refuges are enacted—Burroughs may properly be seen as having an impact upon far-ranging environmental policy designed to protect species.

Today, the refuge system totals “nearly 95 million acres” and “consists of 540 refuges spread across all 50 states and 12 US territories” (Ross, 2). The national parks cover thirteen percent less acreage. Officials designate refuges to support wildlife and to “protect the last existing habitats for some of the most endangered animals and plants. The majority of wildlife refuges are “concentrated along major bird migration corridors and serve as vital sanctuaries for millions of migratory birds” (Scheer, 2). In addition to the more than 700 species of birds, refuges protect “229 mammal species, 250 reptile species and more than 200 species of fish” as well as providing habitat for “nearly 250 threatened and endangered species” (Scheer, 2). Burroughs would have been pleased with the creation of the National Wildlife Refuge system, the very habitats Roosevelt put aside for the protection of species from human interference.

My research has indicated that a speech delivered by Roosevelt at the Governor’s Conference on May 13 to 15, 1908, in Washington, D.C., directly mirrors a famous passage in one of Burroughs’ essays. (It should be noted that Burroughs had lunch with President Roosevelt on February 27, 1908, though I have found no record of their conversation.) In an essay titled “The Grist of the Gods” (*Leaf and Tendril*, 1908), in which Burroughs appreciates the life-giving and sustaining forces of the soil, he contemplates the impact of industrial development upon natural resources in a prescient manner:

...one cannot but reflect what a sucked orange the earth will be in the course of a few more centuries. Our civilization is terribly expensive to all its natural resources; one hundred years of modern life doubtless exhausts its stores more than a millennium of the life of antiquity. Its coal and oil will be about used up, all its mineral wealth greatly depleted, the fertility of its soil will have been washed into the sea through the drainage of its cities, its wild game will be nearly extinct, its primitive forests gone, and soon how nearly bankrupt the planet will be! (204)

Note the direct comparisons implicit in Roosevelt's famous speech:

In the development, use, and therefore the exhaustion of certain of the natural resources, the progress has been made more rapid in the past century and a quarter than during all preceding time of which we have record (4). ..Finally, we began with soils of unexampled fertility, and we have impoverished them by injudicious use and by failing to check erosion and their crop-making power is diminishing instead of increasing. In a word, we have thoughtlessly, and to a large degree unnecessarily, diminished the resources upon which not only our prosperity but the prosperity of our children and our children's children must always depend. ... the time has come to inquire seriously what will happen when our forests are gone, when the coal, the iron, the oil, and the gas are exhausted, when the soils shall have been further impoverished and washed into the streams, polluting the rivers, denuding the fields, and obstructing navigation. (7)

It may be argued that Roosevelt shared, to some extent, Burroughs' environmental ethos; they may have been kindred spirits in this regard. Roosevelt was able to convey in speeches and put in practice with federal legislation some of the sentiments Burroughs expressed in his writings. His status as the most famous writer of his day allowed Burroughs to become friends with the powerful and influential.

John Burroughs, Henry Ford, Ernest Thompson Seton, and the Weeks-McLean Law of 1913

The Weeks-McLean Law, sometimes referred to as The Federal Migratory Bird Law, was the first law designed to protect birds on a national level. On March 14, 1913, the Weeks-McLean Act was introduced by Representative John W. Weeks of Massachusetts and Senator George P. McLean of Connecticut to eliminate commercial hunting and shipping of migratory birds across state lines.

Be it enacted [...] That all wild geese, wild swans, brant, wild ducks, snipe, plover, woodcock, rail, wild pigeons, and all other migratory game and insectivorous birds which in their northern and southern migrations pass through or do not remain permanently the entire year within the borders of any State or Territory, shall hereafter be deemed to be within the custody and protection of the Government of the United States, and shall not be destroyed or taken contrary to regulations herein provided therefore. (*Congressional Record*, 1484)

By the late nineteenth century, ornithologists recognized the need for a federal law to protect migratory birds. For decades, states had tried to institute laws within their own borders to protect birds. However, as migrating birds do not recognize state borders, these measures proved ineffective.

On January 14, 1913, a little over a week before the vote, there was a long and intense congressional debate over the act's passage. Senator McLean was the leading proponent. He presented a scientific, constitutional, and emotionally impassioned case in what would amount to about forty pages of standard text. He argued for the national protection of birds on economic grounds, as they protected crops from insects (such as the army worm, boll weevil, and gypsy moth), and read from agricultural reports and testimony of farmers. In addition, McLean contrasted the false notion of the "land of plenty" with the effects of economic development upon the populations of species: "The splendid abundance... in pristine times caused our people to prosecute a campaign of relentless annihilation upon the treasures of nature's storehouse, believing that the supply could not be exhausted" (*Congressional Record*, 1488). (Environmental historians continue to point to the notion that flora and fauna are overabundant, or constantly renewable, as a factor leading to their decline.) McLean argued in anthropocentric terms for the importance of birds as a natural way of keeping down insect damage on agricultural crops. This strategy had great weight in Congress.

McLean's plea for national uniformity of protective laws constituted an extension of powers of government, applying the Constitution's declared national priority to "promote the general welfare" toward the protection of species. McLean urgently argued for the protection of migratory birds: "Future generations will never forgive us if we delay this matter longer, and we will not deserve forgiveness if we delay longer" (*Congressional Record*, 1492). Species protection is thus figured as a question of natural heritage for citizens. McLean pronounced in strong language: "if the birds are worth saving, we had better save them before they are all destroyed" (*Congressional Record*, 1494).

McLean's final presentation before Congress in support of Weeks-McLean followed. Appearing under the heading "Protection for Birds" for January 22, 1913, the *Congressional Record* includes a transcript of his last request to "secure the consent of the Senate to a vote upon" the bill. McLean told Congress he had received many telegrams, letters, and petitions. Then he asked the secretary to read the following telegram:

You cannot possibly comprehend how widespread and deep is the sentiment generally in favor of your bill for the protection of migratory birds. Your appeal for an early and favorable vote on this matter should have the

earnest support of all the Members of the United States Senate who would serve their country by saving for it one of our most valuable and interesting natural resources, now being rapidly destroyed. No measure now pending before Congress is more far-reaching in its importance or is more greatly needed. We strongly urge its passage. Glenn Buck. For John Burroughs and Ernest Thompson Seton. (*Congressional Record*, 1870)

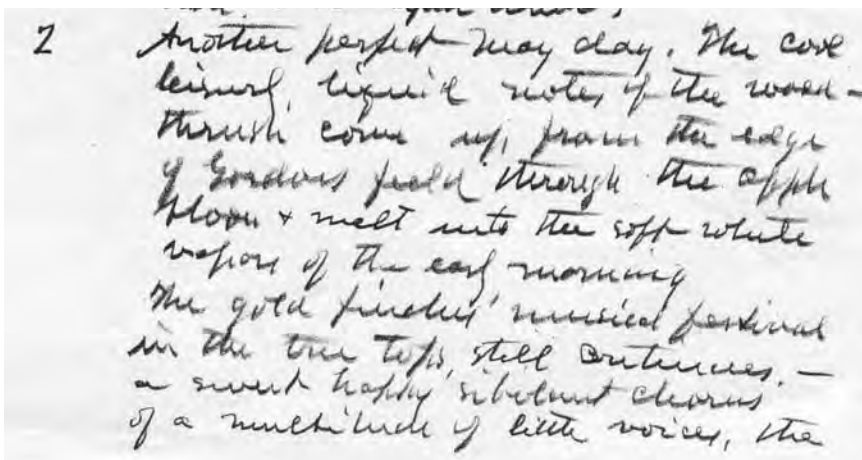
McLean then addressed Congress directly: “The telegram, as you will note, was received from John Burroughs and Ernest Thompson Seton, who represent the very highest authority we have upon this subject, and it seems to me that it is an authority to which we should lend a willing ear before it is too late” (*Congressional Record*, 1871). The record then continues with: “The bill was reported to the Senate without amendment, ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, read a third time, and passed” (*Congressional Record*, 1871). The fact that McLean chose to read a telegram from Burroughs and popular author Ernest Thompson Seton as the final piece of support in favor of the bird protection bill emphasizes the extreme importance of those two figures. One might suggest that McLean saw in Burroughs a figure commanding respect. In addition to affixing his name to the telegram, Burroughs appeared in person in Washington to show his support for Weeks-McLean.

In his autobiography, Seton explained that after the first passage of Weeks-McLean, which he described as “a most important bill that was essential to the preservation of our migratory birds,” the House encountered difficulty owing to two senators “rabidly opposed to it.” Seton wrote: “There was only one hope left. If some person or persons could influence the obstinate Senators to let the bill come up at once, ‘by consent’ it had a chance of becoming law” (372). Seton and Burroughs were called upon by industrial magnate Henry Ford, who Seton describes as “greatly interested in bird conservation.” His affection for birds had been nurtured by the writings of Burroughs and prompted Ford to send his own personal assistant, Glenn Buck, to drive to Slabsides. Buck picked up Burroughs and drove him to Washington, D.C., in order to win over the bill’s passage. Ford paid all of the expenses. There, Seton and Burroughs met with the “two recalcitrant Senators... in one of the committee rooms” (372). There is no record of what was said behind closed doors, yet Burroughs’ presence alone as a noted and famously loved authority on birdlife must certainly have created a degree of persuasion. Owing largely to the presence of Burroughs and Seton, the two senators eventually gave their consent for the bill to come up at session (Seton, 373). However, their effort would not have been possible if not for the enthusiasm and support of Ford.

By all accounts, Ford was very taken with Burroughs' writings since his childhood, and was himself a serious amateur birder. Ford and Burroughs went on several camping expeditions together. Some contend that Ford saw Burroughs as a father figure. Furthermore, when Burroughs' family had financial difficulty in 1913, Ford helped Burroughs purchase the deed to his old homestead in Roxbury. Directly nurtured by Burroughs' texts, Ford developed a long-standing love for birds so deep that he fought for laws to protect them. His appreciation for bird-life was largely instilled by Burroughs, and therefore, one might argue, Burroughs had the same kind of salutary influence upon Ford in regard to bird protection as he did with Roosevelt. Ford's role as a wealthy and famous tycoon allowed him to lobby very effectively for Weeks-McLean. Without Ford's finances, a powerful lobby for Weeks-McLean would have been very unlikely, and Burroughs and Seton certainly would not have arrived in person to face the opposing senators.

One can only hypothesize about the vast amount of support Burroughs' texts served in increasing public opinion toward the safeguarding of birds. Birdsong was one of Burroughs's favorite phenomena in nature and he wrote about it during his entire career, which spanned over fifty years. Even in his journal, continual love of birdsong is quite clear, as he writes in an entry for May 2, 1913:

Another perfect May day. The cool leisurely, liquid notes of the wood-thrush come up from the edge of Gordon's field through the apple bloom & melt into the soft white vapors of the early morning. The gold finches' musical festival in the tree tops still continues.—a sweet happy sibilant chorus of a multitude of little voices. (Vassar Folder 21.6)



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COURTESY VASSAR COLLEGE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Detail from John Burroughs' journal

Weeks-McLean passed as a rider on the Agricultural Appropriation Bill and was finally signed by President William Howard Taft on March 14, 1913. Weeks-McLean was later challenged and ultimately deemed unconstitutional; nevertheless, it had an enormous influence upon succeeding bird protection and the direction of future legislation.

In *The Audubon Ark*, historian Frank Graham, Jr., states one of the most significant consequences of the bill: “the Biological Survey immediately banned the hunting of waterfowl in spring and put in motion the machinery to assume responsibility of regulating the hunting of game birds and the outright protection of other migratory species” (93). Perhaps most significantly, Weeks-McLean led to the firm establishment of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. This act followed closely “on the heels” of the Weeks-McLean Law and “decreed that all migratory birds and their parts (including eggs, nests, and feathers) were fully protected” (“US Fish and Wildlife Service,” 2). The treaty established a federal and international prohibition against the killing, selling, purchasing, or delivery of birds within several countries, including Mexico, Japan, and Russia. Though amended since its first passage, it maintains to this day its core mission of protecting birds. Wildlife officials continually safeguard migratory birds owing to the legislation that started with Weeks-McLean.

“The Spring Bird Procession” and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918

It is not a coincidence that Burroughs wrote and published timely essays with emotional responses to persuade readers and influence legislation. In fact, Burroughs’ texts may have had an influence upon the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. My research has revealed that Burroughs published one particularly brilliant article in appreciation of migratory birds in April 1918, just three months prior to the act’s passage. Although *Field and Study* was published in 1919, its opening chapter, “The Spring Bird Procession”—a major aesthetic celebration of migratory birds—was published originally as a journal article in *The Atlantic* in April 1918. The appearance of Burroughs’ article coincides remarkably with the passage of the federal law. In this essay, Burroughs spends a great deal of time explaining his feelings over the extinction of the passenger pigeon.

To exert an influence on public consciousness, Burroughs relies upon several rhetorical techniques to gather sympathy and appreciation for birdlife. He employs his trope of childhood to make a sympathetic analogy between birds and human beings, expresses joy over the presence of migratory birds, mourns with pathos over their disappearance, bonds meaningfully with one particular bird, and main-

tains his enthusiasm for common species. These techniques all combine to make “The Spring Bird Procession” one of Burroughs’ most effective essays in terms of his crafting of rhetorical strategies.

In the essay, Burroughs shares his love of this aerial parade with his readership: “One of the new pleasures of country life when one has made an acquaintance with the birds is to witness the northward bird procession as it passes or carries with us in the spring—a procession which lasts from April to June and has some new feature daily” (*Field and Study*, 3.) The very scale of this bird “procession” is fascinating and worthy of observance and respect: “The migrating wild creatures, whether birds or beasts, always arrest attention. They seem to link up animal life with the great currents of the globe. It is moving day on a continental scale” (*Field and Study*, 3). The phrase “arrest attention” marks the vital importance of sensory perception. For Burroughs, the presence of migratory birds near his residences of Woodchuck Lodge, Riverby, the Bark Study, and Slabsides would never become an old story. He wants to experience the procession of birds with the excitement of a novel event, even though the sight of migratory birds is rather common. However, for certain species—such as the passenger pigeon—the event had become far less common by 1918.

In my boyhood the vast armies of the passenger pigeons were one of the most notable spring tokens. Often late in March, or early in April, the naked beechwoods would suddenly become blue with them, and vocal with their soft, childlike calls; or all day the sky would be streaked with the long lines or dense masses [...]. The last great flight of them that I ever beheld was on the 10th of April, 1875, when, for the greater part of the day, one could not at any moment look skyward above the Hudson River Valley without seeing several flocks, great and small, of the migrating birds. But that spectacle was never repeated as it had been for generations before. The pigeons never came back. Death and destruction, in the shape of greed and cupidity of man, were on their trail. The hosts were pursued from State to State by professional pot-hunters and netters, and the numbers so reduced, and their flocking instinct so disorganized, that their vast migrating bands disappeared, and they were seen only in loosely scattered and diminishing flocks in different parts of the West during the remainder of the century. (*Field and Study*, 4)

In this passage, Burroughs develops several means of appreciation. He first connects the birds to an event in his youth to garner an emotional connection, while his own observation acts as evidence of the great number of birds. Vivid and emotive descriptors blanket the passage as the sky becomes “suddenly blue,”

and filled with their “childlike calls.” Burroughs thus introduces a figurative equation between pigeons and children. The juxtaposition between images of childhood and war may be particularly striking to readers and catch their attention. To imagine something “childlike” shot out of the sky may horrify certain readers. Furthermore, Burroughs’ humanization of “Death and destruction” stresses the need for defense. Finally, he makes the direct link between hunters and the falling numbers of birds. Importantly, this realization may be seen as a rebuttal to arguments that deny the relationship between hunting practices and species decline. Historical accuracy regarding the slaughter of passenger pigeons helps us to understand the plight of these now-extinct birds.

Burroughs’ response to the dwindling numbers of passenger pigeons is better understood when one learns more about the birds themselves and considers the human practices that contributed to their extinction. Passenger pigeons were beautiful birds. According to Christopher Cokinos, author of *Hope is The Thing With Feathers*, “the pigeons’ necks shimmered purple, gold, yellow and green, as if the feathers had been sprinkled with a metallic rainbow dust” (200). With blue-gray heads, backs, and wings, they were shaped like mourning doves, but larger, and their legs and feet were pinkish and red. Burroughs kept a large painting of two passenger pigeons in his Bark Study at Riverby that still hangs there today. Burroughs’ son Julian also was fond of passenger pigeons and painted a large picture of a flock majestically sweeping through the beech woods near Woodchuck Lodge.

Most startling are accounts of their mass numbers: Pioneering naturalist Alexander Wilson estimated one flock in Kentucky to consist of 2,230,272,000 birds. With each bird about sixteen inches long, this one flock would stretch around the equator 22.6 times. There were approximately five billion birds. According to Joel Greenberg, “It was the most abundant bird the world has ever known and may have comprised 25-40% of this country’s avian population” (348). Flocks were sometimes one mile wide by 300 miles long. Passenger pigeons engaged in communal breeding and nested in colonies; sometimes 100 nests were located in a single tree.

The name “passenger pigeon” was actually coined by early French settlers who first referred to the birds as “Pigeon de passage,” meaning Pigeon of passage, or migratory pigeon because their immigration (i.e., their passage) was so phenomenal, as they *passed* overhead in such tremendous numbers. Even their scientific name, *Ectopistes migratoria*, translates to “Wandering wanderer.” They ate beechnuts, acorns from oak trees (called “mast”), and also blueberries, huckleberries, pokeberries, fruits, and sometimes grasshoppers, locusts, and caterpillars.

The two main reasons for the extinction of the passenger pigeon are generally considered to be habitat loss (deforestation) and their slaughter in mass numbers, the result of their roosting and nesting in colonies. Hunters developed diverse methods of trapping and killing the pigeons. They were shot down and netted with 100-foot-long nets. Chicks were knocked out of their nests with poles, trees were felled, roosting and nesting sites were set ablaze, and sulfur was burned to asphyxiate squabs and brooding adults. People soaked grain with alcohol to intoxicate the birds so they would be easier to catch. Strychnine also was used. People would shoot randomly into flocks; one shot would kill and injure dozens of birds. So easily targeted were the pigeons, it was more like shooting fish in a barrel; in fact, shooting pigeons was not even considered a sport. One observer called the killing sprees “a pandemonium for a saturnalia of slaughter” (quoted in Cokinos, 216). People had to shout to be heard above the din of injured birds and gunfire. In Petoskey, Michigan, at one of the largest nesting sites in 1878, 50,000 birds were killed each day for nearly five months. Most gruesomely, hunters would blind a single bird by sewing its eyes shut with a needle and thread. These live decoys would be placed on a stump. Hunters would allow them to flutter up and down a bit, to perform a fake landing, so others would land. (This is the origin of the term “stool pigeon.”)

Passenger pigeons were hunted for several reasons. They were commercially exploited for their meat, providing cheap food for slaves and the poor. They also were used for agricultural fertilizer, and to feed pigs. It may disturb modern readers' sensibilities to learn that these beautiful birds were used as live targets in shooting contests. In 1851, 1.8 million pigeons were shipped from Plattsburgh, New York. In 1875, 2.4 million were shipped from Michigan. In 1881 on Coney Island, one pigeon shoot killed 20,000 birds. In 1878, three million birds were shipped by a single market hunter. Developments in modern technology greatly aided the hunting and shipping. The telegraph helped hunters track the pigeons and communicate their whereabouts. In 1830, the United States had twenty-three miles of railroad; by 1860 there were 30,000 miles of track with which to ship “goods” to market. By the beginning of the twentieth century, only one passenger pigeon, raised in captivity and named “Martha,” was known to exist. Many scholars believe that the extinction of the passenger pigeon resulted in legislation that has prevented other species from extinction.

Burroughs continues his paean to the passenger pigeon:

What man now in his old age who witnessed in youth that spring or fall festival and migration of the passenger pigeons would not hail it as one of the gladdest hours of his life if he could be permitted to witness it once more?

It was such a spectacle of bounty, of joyous, copious animal life, of fertility in the air and in the wilderness, as to make the heart glad. (*Field and Study*, 4-5)

He furthers the sense of sentimental bonding by associating this “festival” with a glad “heart.” He valorizes the human joy that the procession brings him as the most important factor of consideration. In his introduction to *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, Stephen R. Kellert recognizes that many thinkers have tried to comprehend “how human life is enriched by its broadest affiliation with the natural world—and, conversely, how the impoverishment of this relationship with nature could foster a less satisfactory experience” (20). Burroughs clearly develops a sensibility in favor of preserving biodiversity. Furthermore, he asks readers to consider the happiness of physically witnessing this spectacle of bird migration in their own experience. Thus, his appreciation of viewing such natural processes as the migration of birds, and his subsequent implication that these migrations could *end* due to human violence, represents a powerful way to engage the sympathy of the reader. Migration is an event worthy of commemoration; the loss of this symbol of fertility of life is an event to mourn. Burroughs impressively frames his pathos, the intense sentimental feeling of loss, to illuminate a potentially harmful contemporary situation: the extinction of species caused by human error and interference.

Virtually everyone can share the experience of watching migrating birds. Firsthand aesthetic perception unites citizens all over the country: “in every neighborhood throughout the State, and throughout a long, broad belt of States, about several millions of homes, and over several millions of farms, the same flood-tide of bird-life is creeping and eddying or sweeping over the land” (*Field and Study*, 13-14). To add specifics to his poetic characterization, Burroughs lists several migratory birds in addition to the passenger pigeon, such as “warblers, flycatchers, finches, thrushes, [and] sparrows,” among others. Burroughs presents bird migration as a majestic biological event sweeping across the nation. The migrating birds signify evidence of nature’s bounty and vitality; he envisions the world as teeming with life. He then beckons directly to his reader: “think of all this and more, and you may get some idea of the extent and importance of our bird-life” (*Field and Study*, 13).

Burroughs uses another rhetorical strategy: he focuses on an individual bird: “One winter, in December, a solitary red-breasted nuthatch took up his abode with me, attracted by the suet and nuts I had placed on a maple-tree trunk in front of my study” (*Field and Study*, 22). A friendship between Burroughs and this nuthatch ensues, and he becomes emotionally attached: “He was my tiny guest

from unknown lands, my baby bird, and he left a vacancy that none of the others could fill" (*Field and Study*, 23). While some may consider this last statement to be overly sentimental, the passage shows the important function of particularizing a species. Some readers may have difficulty developing a high regard for random masses of migrating birds; however, some may more easily appreciate one distinct bird in their vicinity.

In fact, through letters of testimony Burroughs became well aware of readers' attachments to individual birds near their homes. Overall, letters to Burroughs reveal readers' deep affection toward his writings. In a correspondence dated November 17, 1877, Mrs. Almon J. Gibbs shares her experience with a hummingbird and writes that nature observers "listen breathfully for your translation of her [nature's] mood" (Vassar File 67.32). This emotional response characterizes most letters. On August 20, 1917, J. Nelson Gowanlock writes: "In ten years time—I began to study birds when I was twelve—I have become familiar with over two hundred and thirty species of our wild-birds and I owe all the large measure of my delight to the first glimmer of the open sunshine caught in reading your 'Sharp Eyes'" (Vassar File 67.32). Throughout his career, Burroughs deeply invested himself in sharing his experiences with readers, and in creating "human interest" in birdsong. In "The Invitation" in *Wake-Robin* (1871), for example, he encourages his readers to experience "the thrill of delight" and "feeling of fresh, eager inquiry" while birding (218).

Through his various strategies of aesthetic appreciation, Burroughs' essay performed a very important national function at the critical historical moment when citizens and politicians were debating over the constitutionality of national legislation in regard to protecting birds versus states rights. "The Spring Bird Procession" is a rhetorical masterpiece for instilling love for birds. Burroughs' piece helped create a national atmosphere in which many citizens came to see emotional bonding with birds as acceptable. Following such deep emotional attachment, protection becomes imperative.

Marshlands, bird sanctuaries, and preserves come into being through the efforts of caring individuals and societies. Without the kind of love developed in Burroughs' texts, it is very unlikely that the Weeks-McLean Law, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the National Wildlife Refuge system, or the Endangered Species Act would ever have been incorporated into law. Emotions influence the politics of preservation in essential ways. An intense love for other life forms may lead to their preservation. Caring for other life forms and the habitats that support them may in fact be the most central force toward their survival. The combination of scientific knowledge and emotion is more effective than either alone. By the very

nature of his methodology as a literary naturalist, John Burroughs emphasizes both. He teaches readers “about” birds and also ways to love birds. His works contain the strategies many environmentalists seek in their fight to save species.

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COURTESY OF CRYSTAL BRIDGES MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Asher B. Durand, *Kindred Spirits*. 1849 oil on canvas, showing nature poet William Cullen Bryant and Hudson River School artist Thomas Cole in a setting in the Catskill Mountains, commissioned by art patron Jonathan Sturges upon the death of Thomas Cole.

America's First Artists and Writers:
The Sacred River of Thomas
Cole, the Mythic River of
Washington Irving and
James Fenimore Cooper

Frances F. Dunwell

In the autumn of 1825, while Sylvanus Thayer was still in charge at West Point, a young man named Thomas Cole visited the military post. An English-born itinerant artist, he had scraped together a living painting portraits and designing wallpaper to support his real passion: landscape painting. He had recently moved to New York City, and the scenery of the Hudson Valley captured his imagination. As a friend later wrote, “from the moment when his eye first caught the rural beauties clustering around the cliffs of Weehawken, and glanced up the distance of the Palisades, Cole’s heart had been wandering in the Highlands, and nestling in the bosom of the Catskills.”¹ At the first opportunity, twenty-four-year-old Cole embarked on a sketching trip up the Hudson Valley.

On reaching the Highlands, Cole rambled through the ravines and forested hills above West Point. In all likelihood, he carried with him his writing and sketching pads and his flute, pausing here and there to play a few notes as he sought to capture the mood of the place he intended to paint. Climbing to the highest vantage point, he probably pulled out pen and paper, as was his habit, to record his observations.

“Mists were resting on the vale of the Hudson like drifted snow,” he once wrote of a river scene. “The sun rose from bars of pearly hue. . . . The mist below the mountain began first to be lighted up, and the trees on the tops of the lower hill cast their shadows over the misty surface—innumerable streaks.” He would refer to such notes later, when he returned to his studio to paint.

Cole found the ruins of Fort Putnam particularly interesting. Crumbling and overgrown with vines after forty years of neglect, the fort brooded over a panorama

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of spectacular beauty—bold and rugged mountains, the dark river far below, and to the north, in the distance, a broad bay and prosperous farm country. From this granite promontory, rich with history, Cole, like many other early nineteenth century West Point visitors, must have felt close to God and country.

From West Point, Cole continued his journey upriver to the Catskills, where he traveled to Kaaterskill Falls and other nearby wilderness spots. Later, when he returned to his cramped apartment on Greenwich Street, he painted the scenes that had impressed him on his trip—dramatic portraits of wild scenery. The river focused the sense of divine presence Cole felt in nature. It awoke in him a deeper feeling, a sense of the harmony of creation. In the rural beauty of the Hudson Valley he found a fountain “where all may drink,” and he was able to convey this in his art.²

A New York City frame maker put three of the canvases on display in his shop window. One of New York’s leading artists, John Trumbull, was passing by, spied Cole’s work, and admired it. Trumbull bought one of the paintings, *The Falls of the Catskill*, which he hung in his own studio. The same day, he invited his friends, fellow artists William Dunlap and Asher Durand, to come see Cole’s paintings and make the acquaintance of the artist, whom Trumbull had invited as well.

The encounter was embarrassing for Cole, “a slight young man whose eyes shone with a combination of eloquent brightness and feminine mildness.” He was tongue tied and nervous. He didn’t know what to say when Trumbull exclaimed, “You surprise one, at your age, to paint like this. You have done what I, with all my years and experience, am yet unable to do.”

Despite his reticence, Cole was pleased with the results of the encounter. Durand immediately purchased a painting of Fort Putnam, and Dunlap purchased the third canvas, titled *Lake with Dead Trees*. They paid \$25 each. Dunlap soon sold his to Mayor Philip Hone, one of the city’s most important collectors and a patron of the arts, who offered him \$50 for it. Dunlap later wrote: “My necessities prevented me from giving the profit, as I ought to have done, to the painter. One thing I did, which was my duty. I published in the journals of the day an account of the young artist and his pictures; it was no puff but an honest declaration of my opinion, and I believe it served merit by attracting attention to it.”

With such important backing, Cole’s life and fortunes were transformed almost overnight. “His fame spread like fire,” said Durand. Cole’s solitary venture into the Hudson Valley wilderness and the discovery of his work launched a celebration of nature in art that became known as the Hudson River School of painting. Following Cole’s lead, scores of artists would make pilgrimages in search of spectacular scenery to paint. Like him, they found inspiration in the varied aspects



COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON. GIFT OF MARTHA C. KAROLIK FOR THE M. AND M. KAROLIK COLLECTION OF AMERICAN PAINTINGS, 1815-1865. PHOTOGRAPH © 2005 MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

Thomas Cole, *View of the Round-top in the Catskill Mountains*. Circa 1827. In this painting of the Hudson from the Catskills, the river is shown as a distant gleam of silver. Depicting such a big river dwarfed in the landscape added to the sense of awe that romantics called “sublime.”

of the Hudson: the sheer cliffs of the Palisades; the Highlands’ crumbling ruins, rugged mountains, and dark river; the combination of distant vistas and intimate woodland scenes in the Catskills; the pastoral views of Albany; and the rushing waterfalls of the upper Hudson.

Thomas Cole presented nature in its raw beauty, full of the unexpected, the dramatic, and the intimate. He captured its mood and a sense of its mystery. On his canvases, streaks of ethereal light broke through luminous clouds, signifying divine creation, while twisted trees with gnarled roots seemed to hold the ancient secrets of the primeval forest in their grasp.

His work was new and fresh. Most painting at the time portrayed the families of wealthy patrons (who commissioned the portraits as proof of their status and distinction) or depicted historical events—such as the four famous Revolutionary War scenes Trumbull painted for the U.S. Capitol’s rotunda. Landscapes appeared primarily as engraved illustrations in travel books or on military maps, or as the pleasant background of a portrait to convey a sense of property and wealth. They were functional works, not intended to stand alone as art.

Cole’s painting struck a responsive chord in his viewers, and Durand soon

emulated it. Others who joined the roster of Hudson River School artists included John Frederick Kensett, Sanford Gifford, Thomas Doughty, George Inness, Jervis McEntee, David Johnson, John Casilear, Thomas Rossiter, Jasper Cropsey, Robert Havell Jr., Robert Weir (professor of drawing at West Point), and Frederic E. Church (a student of Cole's). There were dozens of other less-known painters. Among them were several women, now being rediscovered—such as Julie Beers, Eliza Greatorex, and Laura Woodward—who exhibited at the prestigious National Academy of Design and the Brooklyn Art Association.³ The term “Hudson River School” was first coined in a contemptuous article in the *New York Herald* meant to ridicule these landscape paintings.⁴ However, these works attracted international attention and acclaim for the next fifty years. The Hudson River School artists were united more by their reverence for nature and their desire to portray its spiritual and moral value than by a common style. A landscape painting “will be great in proportion as it declares the glory of God, by a representation of his works,” declared Asher Durand.⁵ Most, though not all, chose the Hudson River as a primary subject, and they portrayed it as a sacred landscape. Though they broke with artistic tradition, they were perfectly in tune with current notions of romanticism expressed in the writings of Rousseau in France and Sir Walter Scott in Britain. In their view, nature was God's finest work, and viewing scenery was a religious experience. By 1825, such ideas were beginning to take hold in America.

On the Hudson, nineteenth-century romantics found a landscape that moved them like a sermon. In 1832, Fanny Kemble, the British actress, expressed such feelings in her diary as she recounted her experience hiking up to the ruins at Fort Putnam above West Point—a place painted by Cole and many other Hudson River School artists—and looking down on the river below:

Saturday, November 10, 1832...

Alone, alone, I was alone and happy, and went on my way rejoicing, climbing and climbing still, till the green mound of thick turf, and ruined rampart of the fort arrested my progress. I coasted the broken wall, and lighting down on a broad, smooth table of granite fringed with young cedar bushes, I looked down, and for a moment my breath seemed to stop, the pulsation of my heart to cease—I was filled with awe. The beauty and wild sublimity of what I beheld seemed almost to crush my faculties—I felt dizzy as though my senses were drowning—I felt as though I had been carried into the immediate presence of God. Though I were to live a thousand years, I never can forget it. The first thing that I distinctly saw was the shadow of a huge mountain, frowning over the height where I stood. The shadow moved down its steep sunny side, threw a deep blackness over the sparkling river,

and then passed off and climbed the opposite mountain on the other shore, leaving the world in the full blaze of noon. I could have stretched out my arms and shouted aloud—I could have fallen on my knees and worshipped—I could have committed any extravagance that ecstasy could suggest. I stood filled with amazement and delight, till the footsteps and voices of my companions roused me. I darted away, unwilling to be interrupted.⁶

Two of the most important concepts of romanticism were the “sublime” and the “picturesque,” words used frequently to describe and sanctify natural scenery. While people in the age of Enlightenment defined beauty as that which is logical and harmonious, the romantics valued the unpredictable. Wild aspects of nature that showed God’s power—thunderstorms, rushing waterfalls, dense and tangled vegetation, plunging cliffs, and cosmic sky—caused them to take a deep breath and declare it “sublime.” The tamer pastoral landscape, with scenes of cows and fields along a sail-dotted river, gave them sentimental pleasure. Noting the irregular forms, textures, or details of the scene, they would exclaim, “How picturesque!” Such scenes of human endeavor complemented God’s handiwork.⁷

The qualities that the painters sought to capture on canvas could be readily found in the Hudson River Valley. Popular places to illustrate the “picturesque” included the harbor and surroundings of Brooklyn Heights, Staten Island, Hoboken, Weehawken, and, farther north, the view from river estate Hyde Park. These paintings often feature a broad expanse of water, with the setting sun casting shadows on a forest of masts or pastoral fields and distant mountains.

Paintings of sublime landscapes, in contrast, are more rugged and wild. The Highlands, particularly, conformed to the romantic ideal of the sublime landscape, with craggy precipices, wind-swept trees, and the river following a twisting, tortured course through the gorge below moldering Revolutionary War forts. Paintings of the Catskills tended to show a remote wilderness of rocky ledges, cascading waterfalls, and dark, forested mountains with no evidence of mankind. Paintings of the Adirondacks revealed a Hudson that most Americans had never seen: in place of a broad estuarial panorama was a rippling trout stream surrounded by forest, with wild animals inhabiting its shores.

In all of the Hudson River School paintings, both sublime and picturesque, nature’s grandeur was suggested by the extension of mountains, clouds, and rivers beyond the observer’s vision. In the foreground, the artist might place small figures—their backs turned, leading the viewer to face the scene with them and share their sensation of vastness. For those who liked to think of America as a budding empire—a common concept at the time—such a scene cemented the image of the Hudson as an imperial river, a setting that spoke of American

destiny.

Artists of the Hudson River School ventured deep into nature. They studied the play of light and shadow in the woods and over water and observed cloud formations. They carefully examined leaves, bark, and rocks in pencil sketches. Many adopted a rustic lifestyle, roughing it in the countryside and going to great lengths to find the right spot for their easels. They also searched for scenes that looked like paintings—that could portray the romantic ideals. If a scene in nature did not quite fit the formula, the artists sometimes interpreted. For example, the painter might add a northward-setting sun and celestial rays of light to illuminate the setting and imply a heavenly presence. The position of a mountain might be moved so the view of the river behind it could be seen.

Painters roamed far and wide in search of awesome wilderness, and the Hudson led them to other subject matter: the Catskills, Lake George, the Connecticut Valley, the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and Niagara Falls. One of Frederic Church's most famous paintings is of the Andes in Peru. Yet in the Hudson Valley, where the long ribbon of river links the harbor, the Palisades, the Highlands, the Catskills, and the Adirondack high peaks, artists found some of the most dramatic and varied scenery in eastern America. More than 500 oil paintings of the Hudson from this period have been preserved, including works by almost all major artists. Hundreds more are documented from nineteenth-century exhibitions, but have since been lost.⁸ Thomas Cole always returned to the river, his friend Louis Noble said, "with the tenderness of a first-love."⁹

In the mid-nineteenth century, residing and painting in the Hudson Valley was considered essential to art education in much the same way as living and working in Paris was the ideal for the next generation of artists. Many of the Hudson River School painters established themselves in estates and studios on the shores of the river they loved, making a statement of affinity in their choice of location. Thomas Rossiter built a palatial mansion in Cold Spring, and Thomas Cole set up a modest studio in Catskill. Asher Durand painted from New Windsor, overlooking the Highlands, and Albert Bierstadt had a great mansion on the river near Tarrytown. Robert Weir painted from the military academy at West Point. Jasper Cropsey fell on hard times and had to sell his country estate, but still managed to have a modest studio, Ever Rest, in Hastings-on-Hudson, which looked out over a highly industrial waterfront, the river, and the Palisades. By far the most elaborate studio was Frederic Church's Moorish castle Olana—itsself a work of art, located high on a hill above the river near the city of Hudson, with a sweeping view of the Catskills. Several of these studios remain, and Cole's and Church's are now preserved as historic sites.

The painters' work struck a chord with hundreds of thousands of Americans, whose enthusiasm helped the artists pay their way. Exhibits at the New York Art Union between 1839 and 1851 drew as many as 250,000 people per year at a time when the population of New York was not even double that number. The visitors included "noisy boys and girls" and "working Men by the hundreds," according to *Knickerbocker Magazine* in 1848.¹⁰

The achievements and world acclaim of the Hudson River School would not have been possible without the support of a growing merchant class. The opening of the Erie Canal, in 1825, brought great prosperity to New York City, and it became fashionable for businessmen to display their wealth through patronage of American artists. They not only maintained impressive art collections but also commissioned major works of Hudson River scenes and sent artists abroad to study. Jonathan Sturges, a New York merchant, financed Durand's 1840 trip to Europe, where he joined Kensett, Casilear, and Rossiter in copying old masters and painting Swiss and Italian landscapes. Cole had several important backers, among them Mayor Philip Hone and Luman Reed, a wholesale grocer and business partner of Sturges. Thomas Gilmor of Baltimore loaned Cole \$300 in 1829 so he could travel abroad. James Pinchot, the owner of a wallpaper firm, befriended and patronized Sanford Gifford, Jervis McEntee, and Eastman Johnson.

The Hudson River painters were also aided by the "Knickerbocker" writers, so-called after Washington Irving's fictional *Knickerbocker's New York: A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* by Diedrich Knickerbocker (1809).¹¹ Almost two decades before Cole's historic sketching trip, Irving had made the American landscape a fashionable topic in literature, and other authors soon followed his lead, becoming the first Americans to make their living solely by writing. By 1825, when Cole took his historic sketching trip up the Hudson, the Knickerbockers had already published major works that popularized nature in America. Influenced by the same romantic concepts, they prepared the way for the painters' break with artistic tradition.

The Knickerbockers began to be published in the same year that Fulton and Livingston's steamboat *Clermont* was launched, 1807. Steamboat travel stimulated great national and international interest in the region, and the river appeared frequently as a subject and setting in the Knickerbockers' work. These writers created a body of legend, poetry, caricature, and supernatural lore about American scenery and landscape that helped to enhance the Hudson Valley's romantic image. Works such as the poem "The Culprit Fay"—a fairy spirit of the Highlands—soon appeared in steamboat guidebooks, helping to give the region definition and character.



William Bartlett, *View of New York from Weehawken*.
In N. P. Willis, *American Scenery*, 1840.

Technically, the term “Knickerbocker” could apply to any author working out of New York City in the early nineteenth century. Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and William Cullen Bryant were the brightest lights. However, the “Knickerbocracy” included some twenty lesser luminaries, such as Nathaniel Parker Willis, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Joseph Rodman Drake, James Kirke Paulding, and Washington Irving’s brother William—writers who were popular in their day but whose reputations have faded with time. The reputation of America’s literary romanticists only began to wane in the 1850s, as writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Walt Whitman, and Nathaniel Hawthorne emerged with new and different styles.

During these forty years, however, the Knickerbockers became as famous in the world of letters as the Hudson River School painters were in the world of art. Their numbers and prestige, the literary magazines they produced—such as the *New York Mirror* and the *Knickerbocker*—and the publishing businesses they fostered wrested cultural preeminence from Boston and Philadelphia, establishing New York as the literary capital of America. Between 1820 and 1852, 345 publishers operated out of New York City, more than twice as many as in Philadelphia. Influential people like DeWitt Clinton fostered the cultural life of the city as well, creating institutions such as the American Academy of Fine Arts and the Literary and Philosophical Society.



View from Hyde Park, the country estate of Dr. David Hosack, some 80 miles north of Manhattan. With its extensive lawn sloping down to the river and the profile of the Catskills rising in the distance, the estate embodies the picturesque.

In N. P. Willis, *American Scenery*, 1840.

The works of individual Knickerbockers used literary forms as diverse as epic poetry, satires, and historical novels. Some were serious, some sentimental, and others downright funny. In addition to their romantic vision, these writings shared a nationalistic temperament—giving shape to the American character and helping to define an American identity. Born in the infancy of the nation’s independence, these authors were stirred by tales of the Dutch explorers and Revolutionary War generals. Many used the history, landscape, and folklore of the Hudson River as their subject matter, making the rugged primitiveness of American life interesting and acceptable, even a selling point. The people and the landscape became as one, and the Hudson River became symbolic of American life.

Washington Irving was one of the acknowledged leaders in the movement, and he was the first to give river scenes a new kind of meaning. He wrote in the introduction to *Knickerbocker’s New York* that he sought to “clothe home scenes



Lossing, *The Hudson from the Wilderness to the Sea*, 1866



Frederic Edwin Church, *The Hudson Valley in Winter from Olana*. 1871, oil on canvas, the view from his studio in Greenport, New York.

and places... with those imaginative and whimsical associations so seldom met with in our new country, but which live like charms and spells about the cities of the old world, binding the heart of the native inhabitant to his home.”¹² He left few spots untouched in this and future books. Irving reinvented practical Dutch place names with humorous retellings of local tales and populated places like the Highlands, the Catskills, the farm country, and the Tappan Zee with goblins and ghosts. He attributes the naming of the Hell Gate, a narrow strait between the East River and Long Island Sound known for its rocks and whirlpools, to Oloff Van Kortlandt, who sailed up the East River, convinced that a pod of jolly porpoises was towing him to a fair haven, only to be brought to near disaster on the roaring waters. Later, Van Kortlandt was delighted to see the porpoises broiling on

the Gridiron and the Frying Pan, other nearby landmarks.

Irving’s writings often drew upon his youthful experiences. As a child, in 1793, he had been sent to Tarrytown for the summer to avoid the yellow fever epidemic in New York City. Westchester County was then farm country and still very Dutch (the name Tarrytown is based on the Dutch word *tarwe*, meaning wheat), and Irving spent the summer roaming the neighborhood and soaking up everything around him. Later, these scenes would burn bright in his memory. In 1819, while living in Europe, he published *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, containing “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” which featured the people he had met, such as the Van Tassels, and places he had visited, such as the Dutch church on Pocantico Brook. It begins with the following scene:

In the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson, at that broad expansion of the river denominated by the ancient Dutch navigators the Tappan Zee... there lies a small market-town or rural port... which is... known by the name Tarry Town. This name was given we are told, in former days, by the good house-wives of the adjacent country, from the inveterate propensity of their husbands to linger about the village tavern on market days. Not far from this village... there is a little valley... known

by the name of Sleepy Hollow... . Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie. They are given to all kinds of marvelous beliefs; are subject to trances and visions; and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air. The whole neighborhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions; stars shoot and meteors glare oftener across the valley than in any other part of the country... .

The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region,... is the apparition of a figure on horseback without a head...known, at all the country firesides, by the name of the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.¹³



AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Washington Irving at the age of twenty-seven. Frontispiece to *Knickerbocker's New York: A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty* by Diedrich Knickerbocker, 1861 edition.

Irving personally witnessed the Yankee invasion of New Englanders moving to New York. He played up the resulting culture clash in stories like this, where the ambitious Yankee, Ichabod Crane, comes to the Dutch village to teach—but is driven out by the locals and his fear of their superstitions.

The Hudson Valley of Irving's childhood was gradually changing from Dutch to English culture. Though the British took control of the Hudson in 1664, Irving grew up hearing Dutch spoken in many places. He studied Dutch heritage eagerly and became quite an expert on it. *Knickerbocker's History* is a fictional retelling of

historic events, and authentic early histories of New Netherlands are cited in the footnotes. His stories include details gleaned from these accounts, such as the fireflies that lighted on the mast of Peter Kalm's ship in 1749 and the dolphins that sported about the ships of Dutch sailors, seeming to guide them through the harbor. Irving's books also contain faithful portrayals of Dutch customs in architecture, dress, food preparation, courting, smoking,



William J. Wilgus, *Ichabod Crane, Respectfully Dedicated to Washington Irving. The Headless Horseman from Irving's Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Circa 1856.

and drinking—touching on topics such as demonism, witchcraft, songs, ghost lore, and tall tales with great accuracy.¹⁴

Unfortunately, his caricatures of pipe-smoking, round-bottomed Dutchmen, which were written to be funny, were so widely read and accepted that they came to be perceived as accurate. *Knickerbocker's History* obscured the other, industrious side of the Dutch personality, focused on commerce, trade, and reward for hard work. For generations to come, the book distracted the public from the great contribution of the Dutch to the history of America and New York and of leading Dutch citizens, Peter Stuyvesant, Adriaen Van der Donck, and others.¹⁵

Knickerbocker's History and *The Sketch Book* were popular and lasting favorites overseas, further cementing Irving's reputation as an American writer of note. Curious European readers enjoyed the novelty of the American scene and Irving's wit and satire. Lord Byron claimed to have memorized every word of *The Sketch Book*, Sir Walter Scott laughed uproariously on reading it the first time, and when Charles Dickens arrived in New York aboard a packet steamer in 1842, he reported happily: "I awoke from my nap in time to hurry up, and see Hell Gate, the Hog's Back, the Frying Pan, and other notorious localities, attractive to all readers of famous Diedrich Knickerbocker's History."¹⁶

Irving credited his love affair with the Hudson River to early boyhood, when he first traveled upriver by sloop. On this journey, black deck hands regaled him with frightening stories about the passing scenes, an oral tradition that he later wove into his books.¹⁷ It was a time, he wrote, "before the steamboats and railroads had annihilated time and space," when a voyage to Albany "was equal to a voyage to Europe at present, and took almost as much time."¹⁸ The passage through the Highlands delighted him, and he later recalled the heavy splash of the leaping sturgeon and the song of the whippoorwill echoing in the night as the sloop lay at anchor below those dark and mysterious mountains. As he continued his voyage, another river vista impressed him even more:

Of all the scenery of the Hudson, the Kaatskill Mountains had the most witching effect on my boyish imagination. Never shall I forget the effect upon me of the first view of them predominating over a wide extent of country, part wild, woody, and rugged, part softened away into all the graces of cultivation. As we slowly tided along, I lay on the deck and watched them through a long summer's day; undergoing a thousand mutations under the magical effects of atmosphere sometimes seeming to approach; at other times to recede; now almost melting into hazy distance.¹⁹

From this mystical scene, he later wove the story of Rip Van Winkle, a reworking of a German lost-time folktale, in which Rip discovers the ghosts of Henry Hudson's crew playing ninepins in the Catskills, their bowling balls making sounds like "long, rolling peals, like distant thunder." Rip sneaks a drink of their beer, when no one is looking, and promptly falls asleep—for twenty years. Waking as if he has slept but a single night, he stumbles home to find his village completely changed. A painting of King George on the sign at the inn has been touched up and is now labeled George Washington. Indeed, "the very character of the people seemed changed. There was a hustling, bustling disputatious tone about it, instead of the accustomed phlegm and drowsy tranquility."²⁰ Rip spends the rest of his days at the inn, telling his story to any who will listen until every man, woman, and child knows it by heart.

Some always pretended to doubt the reality of it, and insisted that Rip had been out of his head.... The old Dutch inhabitants, however, almost universally gave it full credit. Even to this day they never hear a thunder-storm of a summer afternoon about the Kaatskills, but they say Hendrick Hudson and his crew are at their game of ninepins; and it is a common wish of all henpecked husbands in the neighborhood, when life hangs heavy on their hands, that they might have a quieting draught out of Rip Van Winkle's flagon.²¹

This story helped imprint a new image of the valley as a place haunted by the spirits of the past, but also alive with the promise of a new country/ Not until 1832—two decades after it appeared in print—did Irving first set foot in the mountains that had bewitched him from the sloop's deck. Even so, the legendary sound of rolling thunder in the Catskills was well known to him.

In 1835, Irving returned to the pleasant summer home of his childhood and bought ten acres of land in Tarrytown. He remodeled a Dutch cottage along the Hudson River into the fanciful country house he called Sunnyside, where he kept the public's interest in Sleepy Hollow alive. He is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery near the Old Dutch Church made famous by the Headless Horseman.

While Irving created a body of humorous folklore around the well-known features of the Hudson River landscape, the historical novels of James Fenimore Cooper were far more serious. For Cooper, love of country was strongly linked to appreciation of wild nature. His first best-seller, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground*, set along the Hudson, contains moving descriptions of river scenes. Published in 1821, soon after Irving's *Sketch Book*, it tells the story of a double agent—an unsung hero of the American Revolution. The story inspires patriotic

memories and reminds the reader that the Hudson Valley is historic ground where freedom was won at great cost. Soon thereafter, Cooper's Leatherstocking series explored the changing relationship of Americans to the land, chronicling the French and Indian War, the settlement of the frontier of central New York, and the westward migration to the prairie states.

In Cooper's books, the characters move from one scenic spot to another. The river, the woods, the hidden mineral springs are not just a backdrop—they become characters in the story, willful or secretive personalities, sometimes friend and sometimes foe. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Hawk-eye, the scout, and his Mohican companions, Uncas and Chingachgook, have rescued Major Duncan Heyward, a British officer, and the two lovely daughters of Major Munro from an attacking band of Hurons (who were allied with the French). Hawk-eye guides his fleeing charges to the shelter of a hidden cavern on an island in the upper Hudson at Glens Falls, where they try to elude the pursuing Hurons. Night has fallen, and the scout describes the hiding place to Alice and Cora Munro, noting its personality:

Ay! There are falls on two sides of us, and the river above and below. If you had but daylight, it would be worth the trouble to step up on the height of this rock, and look at the perversity of the Water! It falls by no rule at all; sometimes it leaps, sometimes it tumbles; there, it skips; here, it shoots; in one place 'tis white as snow, and in another 'tis green as grass; hereabouts it pitches into deep hollows, that rumble and quake the 'arth; and thereaway, it ripples and sings like a brook, fashioning whirlpools and gullies in the old stone. . . . After the water has suffered to have its will for a time, like a headstrong man, it is gathered together by the hand that made it, and a few rods below you may see it all, flowing steadily towards the sea.²²

Cooper's books also explore nature's spiritual value. *The Pioneers* (1823), set in rapidly growing central New York a decade after the revolution, mentions the Hudson only briefly, as an example of the divine in nature. Written in 1823, just as the Catskill Mountain House was being built, the story takes place in 1793, when the spot is still an undiscovered wilderness. The scout, Hawk-eye—called Natty Bumppo in this story—describes a “paradise” to his friend Edwards:

“The place I mean is next to the river, where one of the ridges juts out a little from the rest, and where the rocks fall, for the best part of a thousand feet, so much up and down, that a man standing on their edges is fool enough to think he can jump from top to bottom.”

“What see you when you get there?” asked Edwards.

“Creation,” said Natty, . . . sweeping one hand around him in a circle: “all

creation, lad. . . The river is in sight for seventy miles, looking like a curled shaving under my feet, though it was eight long miles to its banks. . . How should a man who has lived in towns and schools know anything about the wonders of the woods? . . . None know how often the hand of God is seen in the wilderness, but them that rove it for a man's life."²³

Like the Hudson River School artists, the Knickerbockers were nature worshipers, and their high priest was William Cullen Bryant. "The groves were God's first temples," he wrote in "A Forest Hymn."²⁴ His first poem of importance, "Thanatopsis," written at the age of seventeen, ushered in a new approach to the contemplation of nature in American poetry, with a sincere style that contrasted sharply with the platitudes of the day. Published in 1817, the poem describes the mental and spiritual solace to be found in nature and urges the reader to "Go forth, under the open sky, and list / To Nature's teachings":

To him who in the love of Nature holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language; for his gayer hours
She has a voice of gladness, and a smile
And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
Into his darker musings with a mild
And healing sympathy that steals away
Their sharpness ere he is aware.²⁵

Bryant, who grew up in the Berkshires of Massachusetts, moved to New York City and eventually owned and edited the *New York Evening Post*. He loved exploring the Hudson Valley and wrote many poems about the Palisades, the Highlands, and the Catskills, as well as other spots such as the Delaware Water Gap—places where nature spoke to him in its clearest voice.

Bryant's poems, and the work of other Knickerbockers, began to be published at a time when a great intercontinental debate raged in the popular press, questioning the ability of America to produce any art of merit. In 1817, when Bryant submitted "Thanatopsis" to the *North American Review*, the editor, Richard Dana, is said to have remarked, "No one on this side of the ocean is capable of writing such verse."²⁶ Curiously, the growing American and European acclaim enjoyed by this group of writers did nothing to stem the controversy. In 1832, when Fanny Kemble looked out over the Hudson from Fort Putnam, she lamented, "Where are the poets of this land!" Critics like Sydney Smith focused on America's cultural and intellectual deficiencies. Writing in 1820 for the *Edinburgh Review*, he said bluntly: "In the four corners of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes

to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?" This comment produced "paroxysms of wrath" in the American press, but to some extent, this feeling of cultural inadequacy was shared by Americans and persisted for decades, long after the Knickerbockers and the Hudson River School painters had won wide acceptance in the United States and abroad.²⁷

Comparisons between Europe and America extended beyond art and literature to the merits and defects of the American landscape, and the river became part of the debate. To Europeans—who were accustomed to traveling in Greece, Egypt, Syria, and Germany's Rhineland—landscape was far more beautiful if cloaked in legend or improved by picturesque ruins or other signs of human endeavor. In this, America was considered seriously deficient; however, the Knickerbockers had begun to change that perception with volumes of legends, history, ghost stories, and poetry about every battlefield, mountain, stream, and rock of the Hudson Valley, works that both Europeans and Americans enjoyed. Rip Van Winkle, the Headless Horseman, Natty Bumppo, and the Culprit Fay established the history that Europeans had found wanting. On the river at Fort Putnam and in the forest along the shores could be found a replacement for Old World ruins. "Those vast aboriginal trees," Sir Walter Scott commented to Washington Irving, "are the monuments and antiquities of your country."²⁸

The Knickerbockers also played up the moral power of sublime scenery, as found on the shores of the Hudson. If wild country was the medium through which God spoke most clearly, America was obviously blessed. "We claim for America the freshness of a most promising youth," wrote Cooper, "and a species of natural radiance that carries the mind with reverence to the source of all that is glorious around us."²⁹ Wild nature, which had been scary to earlier generations, was becoming America's big selling point.

The Hudson River School painters joined the Knickerbocker writers in this debate. For them, the Hudson Valley was not just equal to Europe—it was better, especially the sky. Many had traveled to Europe, painted the Alps, and admired the blue horizon of the Mediterranean. They felt qualified to compare the American landscape to the finest scenes of Europe. In 1835, Thomas Cole addressed this issue in his "Essay on American Scenery":

And if he who has travelled and observed the skies of other climes will spend a few months on the banks of the Hudson, he must be constrained to acknowledge that for variety and magnificence American skies are unsurpassed. Italian skies have been lauded by every tongue, and sung by every poet, and who will deny their wonderful beauty? At sunset the serene arch is filled with alchemy that transmutes mountains, and streams, and temples,

into living gold. But the American summer never passes without many sunsets that might vie with the Italian, and many still more gorgeous—that seem peculiar to this clime. Look at the heavens when the thunder shower has passed, and the sun stoops behind the western mountains—there the low purple clouds hang in festoons around the steeps—in the higher heaven are crimson bands interwoven with feathers of gold, fit for the wings of angels—and still above is spread that interminable field of ether, whose color is too beautiful to have a name. It is not in the summer only that American skies are beautiful; for the winter evening often comes robed in purple and gold, and in the westering sun the iced groves glitter as beneath a shower of diamonds—and through the twilight heaven innumerable stars shine with a purer light than summer ever knows.³⁰

Nearly two centuries earlier, in 1656, Adriaen Van der Donck had sung the praises of New Netherlands, commenting on the useful abundance of healing herbs, nut trees, lime and clay deposits, boundless fish and wild game, as well as the winds—“swift and fostering messengers of commerce.” Cole focused on entirely different features of the Hudson Valley, qualities that infused his art and that of his fellow painters—waterfalls, fall colors, clouds, and sky that created a special kind of light.

Nevertheless, the national inferiority complex lingered on, and both painters and writers continued to address it. Knickerbocker essayist Nathaniel Parker Willis sought to cast a different spell of romance over the landscape. In a piece published in the *Home Journal*, he advocated changing the name of Butter Hill to Storm King:

The tallest mountain, with its feet in the Hudson at the Highland Gap, is officially the Storm King—being looked to, by the whole country around, as the most sure foreteller of a storm. When the white cloud-beard descends upon his breast in the morning (as if with a nod forward of his majestic head), there is sure to be a rain-storm before night. Standing aloft among the other mountains of the chain, this sign is peculiar to him. He seems the monarch, and this seems his stately ordering of a change in the weather. Should not STORM-KING, then, be his proper title?³¹

The notion appealed to Willis’s readers, and public sentiment led to the rapid adoption of the new name.

The Knickerbockers formed a close-knit community of people who took delight in writing about the river. A fun-loving group, they met frequently, consuming great quantities of food and drink. One friend reported that after a festive evening

Irving fell through an open grate on the way home. His solitude and depression was relieved after several guests joined him there, where they sat and laughed until dawn. They also rambled together along the river and challenged one another to come up with new ways to fill the New World with old-time legends.³² The poem “The Culprit Fay” resulted from such a conversation among Washington Irving, Fitz-Greene Halleck, and Joseph Rodman Drake while hiking in the Highlands. According to the story, Drake called his friends together three days later and read them the poem, which begins with these lines:

Tis the middle watch of a summer's night,—
The earth is dark, but the heavens are bright...
The moon looks down on old Cro'Nest,
She mellows the shades on his shaggy breast,
and seems his huge grey form to throw
In a silver cone on the wave below.³³

“The Culprit Fay” is a lengthy epic tale, the story of a fairy, or fay, who has broken his vows of chastity and fallen in love with an earthly maid. It takes place at midnight on the summit of Crow's Nest, to the south of Storm King. The assembled spirits of the forest impose a penance whereby the “culprit fay” braves the cold waters of the Hudson, captures a drop of spray from the leaping sturgeon, and eventually succeeds in returning to the mountaintop just as dawn is breaking, and so recovers his fairy powers.

The Knickerbocker writers also developed close friendships with Hudson River School painters, with whom they shared a romantic philosophy and a common interest in the river. When Thomas Cole died in 1848, William Cullen Bryant delivered the eulogy, recalling Cole's paintings “which carried the eye over scenes of wild grandeur peculiar to our country, over our aerial mountain tops with their mighty growth of forest never touched by the axe, along the banks of streams never deprived by culture and in the depth of skies bright with the hues of our own climate; skies such as few but Cole could ever paint, and through the transparent abysses of which it seemed that you might send an arrow out of sight.”³⁴

Deeply moved by Bryant's testimonial, art patron Jonathan Sturges commissioned a painting by Asher Durand. *Kindred Spirits* portrays poet Bryant and painter Cole on a rocky ledge in the Catskills wilderness. The painting is a lasting testament to the respect that these artists, writers, and patrons had for one another, and the bonds of friendship that grew from a shared love of the Hudson and its landscape.



AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

William Bartlett, *Bridge at Glen's Falls, on the Hudson*.
Engraving in N. P. Willis, *American Scenery*, 1840.

Both artists and writers felt anxious about changes they observed. America's ancient forest was rapidly disappearing—even as it was being celebrated in art and song—causing Knickerbocker George Pope Morris to write his famous poem “Woodman, Spare That Tree.” When mills turned wild waterfalls into tame trickles and resorts sprung up around mineral springs that had once bubbled quietly in the forest, the artists and writers began to wrestle with conflicting feelings. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, after Hawk-eye has described the waterfall to Cora, Alice, and Heyward, Cooper provides a footnote:

The description of this picturesque and remarkable little cataract as given by the scout [Hawk-eye], is sufficiently correct, though the application of the water to the uses of civilized life has materially injured its beauties. The rocky island and the two caverns are well known to every traveler, since the former sustains a pier of a bridge, which is now thrown across the river, immediately above the fall. In explanation of the taste of Hawk-eye, it should be remembered that men always prize that which is least enjoyed. Thus, in a new country, the woods and other objects, which in an old country would be maintained at great cost, are simply gotten rid of, simply with a view of “improving” as it is called.³⁵

Some of the Hudson River School artists painted scenes where the forest had been logged. Sanford Gifford's *Twilight at Hunter Mountain* shows a clear-cut stand

of hemlocks in the Catskills. This painting is thought to have profoundly influenced Gifford's friend and patron James Pinchot, a New York merchant whose family had harvested wood on large tracts of forest in Milford, Pennsylvania. Pinchot later became an advocate for forest conservation and steered his son Gifford toward a famed career in forestry.³⁶

For artists, writers, and patrons alike, it was hard to reconcile the abundance and richness of natural resources that God had so manifestly given America for its people to use with the destruction that accompanied that use. Most of the artists and writers saw progress as necessary and good. They did not oppose it; rather, they watched the wild forests fall, wistfully commenting that a truly civilized country should appreciate its waterfalls, woods, wildlife, and scenery, and undertake the kind of improvement that enhances beauty rather than destroying it. Cole expressed this concern in 1835, writing:

Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise temple and tower—mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness. . . . Yet I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes are quickly passing away—the ravages of the axe are daily increasing—the most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation

The wayside is becoming shadeless, and another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called improvement; which, as yet, generally destroys Nature's beauty without substituting that of Art. This is a regret rather than a complaint; such is the road society has to travel.³⁷

The loss of wild nature in the countryside did not interfere with their enjoyment of life in the artistic, literary, and mercantile capital of the nation. New York City was their gathering place. At the time it was a relatively small city, noted for its congeniality. In 1827, a group of these "kindred spirits" founded the Sketch Club, which later became the Century Association.³⁸ Membership, by invitation only, included leading artists, writers, and their patrons. Originally, Sketch Club meetings were devoted to impromptu drawing and writing. The evening's host provided a subject, usually from literature, and the artists and writers then spent an hour on it. At the end of the evening, the host would collect the sketches and keep them. Occasionally communal authorship was tried, whereby three members would compose a single poem on a topic such as "The Sublime" or "Character."

Although the club members took themselves seriously, they used the gatherings for fun and entertainment as well. The group met on Friday evenings, in

an aura of secrecy. The club had no official address; it met in members' homes. Meetings were announced cryptically in newspapers under the initials of the host for the evening. The January 14, 1830 announcement in the *Evening Post* was typical: "S.C.; H.I. 49 Vesey St." To members it was clear that this meant that Henry Inman was entertaining; however, to the *Post* readership it was intriguingly provocative.

William Emerson, the club's secretary, described the atmosphere of the meetings as a "peaceful, social, laughing, chatting hubbub." Amid discussions of politics and the economy were interspersed speeches on such matters as the "domestic economy... of Bull-frogs," and the "combustion of pea nut shells," which was explained by Thomas Cole. The club also watched demonstrations of phrenology, performed magic tricks, and on one evening, at the home of Robert Weir, raised a ghost. Mock punishments were also meted out, as in the case of William Cullen Bryant, who was instructed to write and publish an account of an art exhibition he had not yet seen. The article appeared, unsigned, in the *Evening Post* the next day.³⁹

Soon the Hudson began to be featured in new works, as the club members collaborated on a number of books about American scenery that they sold to an eager public. *The Homebook of the Picturesque* (1852), for example, contained engraved prints based on paintings by Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, Robert Weir, Jasper Cropsey, and Frederic Church. Vignettes written by Knickerbockers James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, Nathaniel Parker Willis, and others accompanied the engravings. Selling at 7, clothbound, the book was a popular gift item. Another such publication, *Picturesque America* (1872), edited by William Cullen Bryant, contained hundreds of illustrations by Hudson River School painters. *American Scenery*, a two-volume set written by N. P. Willis in 1840, contains 119 illustrations of commonly painted scenes engraved by Englishman William Henry Bartlett. Each is accompanied by a legend, poem, anecdote, or essay. All three books featured the Hudson as the preeminent romantic landscape in America and further enhanced the region's reputation abroad.

These books were popular for decades, allowing even armchair travelers to become familiar with America's natural wonders along the Hudson and in other parts of the country. The images published in them found their way into American homes in other ways as well. They were used as patterns for Staffordshire pottery and in British blue ware and pink ware, produced in great quantities beginning in the 1820s. Jean Zuber printed a popular set of scenic wallpapers in 1834 and exported them to the United States from his headquarters in Alsace. The set, called "American Scenery," based on engravings of the 1820s, was printed from

wooden blocks. It showed views of nineteenth-century America particularly admired by Europeans: Niagara Falls, Virginia's Natural Bridge, Boston harbor, New York Bay, and the Hudson River Highlands at West Point.

In 1961, when First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy remodeled the oval Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House, she chose a set of Zuber wallpaper that had recently been removed from a mansion about to be torn down. She noted that the oval shape of the reception room seemed particularly suited to the panoramic sweep of the scenic views, and it would be "the room people first see when they come to the White House." Though the White House paper was antique, the same wallpaper design was still being manufactured from the original wooden blocks.⁴⁰

The international interest in American nature and scenery kept the best of the Knickerbocker writers and Hudson River school artists employed until after the Civil War. By 1850, however, new American authors who were preoccupied with entirely different issues began to publish books like *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne), *Moby-Dick* (Melville), and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Stowe). Meanwhile, ideas about nature also began to shift from romantic and emotional to a more studied approach. The arrival of Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz in America taught a generation of people to "read nature" through meticulous exploration and so learn to appreciate God's creation. A new transcendental view urged by Emerson and Henry David Thoreau suggested the contemplation of common things—berries, blue jays, flowers, and ponds—as a route to discovery of the miraculous and a path to spiritual growth. "Nature is the symbol of the spirit," wrote Emerson.⁴¹ For these writers, it was not necessary to view sublime scenery to experience the divine, and the focus shifted away from the Hudson to less dramatic landscapes. Even so, it was on a visit to the Catskill escarpment that Thoreau first got his idea for living at Walden Pond.

The Hudson River School painters enjoyed fifty years of celebrity, roughly from 1825—the date of Cole's first sketch trip—to 1875. The eclipse of the Hudson River in painting began after 1860, when a second generation of artists discovered the monumental scenery of the West. Painters such as Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt painted large canvases of Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, the Grand Tetons, and Yosemite. Their work is sometimes known as the Rocky Mountain School.

Attracted by the novelty of these images, American interest in oil paintings of the Hudson Valley waned. However, two new artists working in different media provided a fresh perspective on the Hudson after the Hudson River School had seen its last glory days. In 1873, engraver Winslow Homer began to paint watercolors with a free-spirited brilliance that shook the art world much as Thomas



William Bartlett, *Entrance to the Highlands, Near Newburgh*.
Frontispiece of N. P. Willis, *American Scenery*, 1840.

Cole's work had done five decades earlier. Though he eventually concentrated on seascapes of the Maine coast, his works include glorious scenes of the upper Hudson in the Adirondacks, near Blue Ledge, places he visited in the 1860s and 1870s. About the same time, Seneca Ray Stoddard, of Glens Falls, experimented with the emerging art of photography. His artistic career had started when he painted murals on railroad cars for the Troy-based Gilbert Car Company in 1862, but by 1867 he had developed a portfolio of thousands of photographs. Many of them were sold to tourists as stereographs. He became nationally known when he exhibited his photographs at the Philadelphia Centennial exhibition.⁴² Stoddard's images of nature were like the Luminism adopted by some of the Hudson River

School painters. His photographs of the Hudson are discussed in chapter 12.

From 1807 to 1875, when the Knickerbocker writers and Hudson River painters dominated the cultural scene, the Hudson emerged as a powerful image, an icon well known to the public. Melville used it confidently as a metaphor in *Moby-Dick*: “Human madness is oftentimes a cunning and most feline thing. When you think it fled, it may have but become transfigured into some still subtler form. Ahab’s full lunacy subsided not, but contracted; like the unabated Hudson, when that noble Northman flows narrowly, but unfathomably through the Highlands gorge.”⁴³

Located at the artistic and literary capital, New York, accessible by steamboat, and providing the backdrop for both Dutch folklore and Revolutionary War history, the Hudson served romantic artists and writers well as subject matter. Together they succeeded in establishing the river as sacred ground, a “vast cathedral,” in the words of N. P. Willis: “The Hudson a broad aisle, the Highlands a thunder-choir and gallery.”⁴⁴

In stark contrast, while this romantic image was being popularized in New York and abroad, up and down the river a period of intense industrial growth had begun—capitalizing on the abundant iron, limestone, water power, and forest resources of the river and its shores, as well as the transportation advantages of the Erie Canal and the seaport to which it connected. Governor Kemble of Cockloft Hall, a friend and patron of the artists and writers, was one of the leaders of this business boom, a man who lived in both worlds. Kemble moved to the Highlands in 1817 or 1818 and, in the words of his friend Washington Irving, “turned Vulcan” and began “forging thunderbolts.”⁴⁵ His new enterprise, a gun foundry, was just one of many factories that lined the Hudson in the age of iron. Like many business leaders of his day, he celebrated nature with artists and writers even as he was rapidly destroying it.



COURTESY OF THE CHAPMAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY, GLEN FALLS, NY

Cooper’s Cave. Photograph by Seneca Ray Stoddard of the site at Glens Falls made famous in *Last of the Mohicans*.

Notes

1. Louis L. Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, Elliot S. Vesell, ed. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964, pp. xviii, 34-39.
2. Ibid.
3. All quotes and discussion of Cole that follow are from Noble, *Works of Thomas Cole*, pp. xviii, 34-39.
4. John Driscoll, *All that is Glorious Around Us: Paintings from the Hudson River School*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 9.
5. Durand, quoted in Kynaston McShine, ed. *The Natural Paradise: Painting in America 1800-1950*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976, p. 62.
6. Kemble, *Journal of A Residence in America (1835)* excerpted in Van Zandt, *Chronicles of the Hudson*, p. 199.
7. O'Brien, *American Sublime*, p. 124.
8. The Alice Curtis Desmond and Hamilton Fish Library in Garrison, New York has started a comprehensive reference collection of the work of the Hudson River School.
9. Noble, *Thomas Cole*, p. 35.
10. Statistics and quote from Jeanne Winston Adler, *Early Days in the Adirondacks: The Photographs of Seneca Ray Stoddard*. New York: Harry Abrams, 1997, p. 37.
11. See also chapter 1.
12. Washington Irving, *A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty by Diedrich Knickerbocker*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888 (originally published 1809), p. 13.
13. Wallace Bruce, *Along the Hudson with Washington Irving*, Poughkeepsie, NY: Press of the A. V. Haight Company, 1913, pp. 44-47.
14. Elisabeth Paling Funk, "Knickerbocker's New Netherland: Washington Irving's Representation of Dutch Life on the Hudson," in George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, eds. *Amsterdam - New York: Transatlantic Relations and Urban Identities Since 1653*, Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2005, pp. 135-147.
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16. Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*. London: Penguin Books, 1972 (reprint of the 1842 edition).p. 71.
17. O'Brien, *American sublime*, p. 294.
18. Bruce, *Along the Hudson*, p. 9.
19. Ibid., pp. 9, 11-12.
20. Washington Irving, *Washington Irving's Sketchbook: the Classic Artist's Edition of 1863*. New York: Crown Publishers/Avenel Books, 1985, p. 70.
21. Ibid., p. 77.
22. James Fenimore Cooper, "The Last of the Mohicans," in *Leatherstocking Tales, Vol. I*. New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1985, pp. 531-532
23. Cooper, "The Pioneers" in Cooper, *Leatherstocking Tales*, p. 295-296.
24. James T. Callow, *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists 1807-1855*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967, p. 119.
25. William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis," in *Huth, Nature and the American*, p.31.
26. Ibid., p. 30.

27. Sydney Smith, *Edinburgh Review* (January 1820) 33:79.
28. Washington Irving, *The Crayon Miscellany, The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, vol. 22, Dahlia Kirby Terrell, ed. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1979, p. 136.
29. Cooper, quoted in Driscoll, *All that is Glorious*, p. 5.
30. Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery." *American Monthly Magazine* (1 January 1836)
Available on line at <http://www.geocities.com/steletti/pages/scenery.html>
31. Willis, *Outdoors at Idlewild*. p. 188.
32. Hamilton Wright Mabie, *The Writers of Knickerbocker New York*, New York: The Grolier Club, 1912, pp. 31-36.
33. John K. Howat, *The Hudson River and Its Painters*, New York: Penguin Books, 1978, p. 35.
34. Cooper, *Leatherstocking Tales*, p. 532.
35. Nancy P. Pittman, *Yale F&ES Centennial News* (Fall 1999) Vol. 86, No. 1, pp. 5-6. He gave his son the first name Gifford in honor of the painter.
36. Cole, "Essay on American Scenery." *American Monthly Magazine* (1 January 1836)
Available on line at <http://www.geocities.com/steletti/pages/scenery.html>.
37. Callow, *Kindred Spirits*, pp. 19-28, 169-170.
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39. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, Chap. 4
40. Jeffrey L. Horrell, *Seneca Ray Stoddard: Transforming the Adirondack Wilderness in Text and Image*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999, pp 43-45
41. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick: or The Whale*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, chapter 41, p. 187.
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43. "Gouverneur Kemble," in *Dictionary of American Biography*.

Regional History Forum

Each issue of *The Hudson River Valley Review* includes the *Regional History Forum*, written by Marist College students or written by students interning at Marist College's Hudson River Valley Institute. This section highlights historic sites in the Valley, exploring their historical significance as well as information for visitors today. Although due attention is paid to sites of national visibility, HRVR also highlights sites of regional significance. Please write us with suggestions for future Forum sections.

The Hudson River Almanac

John Burroughs wrote his observations of the Hudson River Valley in his journals before they were reworked into articles and essays. This spirit of "Sharp Eyes," the close observation of the natural world throughout our region, persists today in individuals as well as collective efforts like the Hudson River Almanac. A journal of natural history covering the Hudson from the Adirondacks to Manhattan, it is compiled by editor Tom Lake and has included over 1,700 authors since it began in 1993. In addition to being online and distributed via e-mail, you can order back-issues through Purple Mountain Press, Ltd. (800-325-2665). It is available for \$10 plus New York State sales tax and \$3.50 for shipping. E-mail address is: Purple@mail.catskill.net

We've included some selections below to provide an idea of what you will find when you visit the Almanac at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/25611.html>.

2002

7/2: New Eagle Nest, Dutchess County: In late afternoon the air temperature had climbed to 95°F. The heat index was 104°F. The eaglet was perched in the nest, tongue hanging out, panting. I was surprised when he bounced across the nest, flapped his wings furiously, raised up a bit (at this point I was silently saying "go for it!") but then stopped, right at the edge, peered down, and then settled in the shade. He would not be leaving the nest today. —*Tom Lake*

2005

5/8: New Eagle Nest, Dutchess County: This was the second day of a screaming north wind, gusting over 20 mph, and the nest tree was doing its usual swaying and leaning. Being a supple white pine, it could easily list 10°. To the Mama and her nestlings, it may have seemed like a carnival ride. There was still no indication if there was more than one baby eagle. Directly under the nest tree I found the carcass of a small striped skunk, eviscerated. Eagles have little or no sense of smell. —*Tom Lake*

2006

4/13: Eagle Nest NY62, Dutchess County: At dawn, Mama was alone in the nest. She was in her incubating posture, hunkered down. After a while she stood, stretched, and moved to the side of the nest with a view out to the river. I saw movement on the other side: A small, skinny, wobbly, fuzzy-headed nestling peered over the lip of the nest, a 4 day-old baby bald eagle! –*Tom Lake*

5/31: Eagle Nest 124, Westchester County: This new bald eagle nest, designated NY124, is now the southernmost on the tidewater Hudson. Pete Nye climbed the tree, a huge white pine, to the nest at least 115' off the ground. He found raccoon scat on a horizontal limb near the top, evidence of an earlier predator. To prevent this from happening again, we applied a “predator guard” around the 12½' circumference of the tree. These are a broad and slick band of sheet metal tacked in place just above the ground that raccoons, opossum and others cannot get above.

There were two chicks: a female estimated to be about 7½ weeks old, and a male about 6½ weeks. The remains of 2 huge white catfish were also in the nest, among the favorite foods of eaglets. Pete lowered the male chick down to us in a special bag. The second eaglet was too large to be lowered, so she was banded in the nest.

We took the male eaglet out of the bag and put a soft hood on his head to calm him. If raptors cannot see, they often remain still. This was not a true falconer’s “hood,” but rather a child’s soft sock with the toes cut out. I held the eaglet, his huge yellow, sharp-taloned feet in one hand and the other applying gentle pressure to his chest to keep him in place. I could feel his rapid heartbeat against the palm of my hand. As I looked down into his dark, blinking eyes under the hood, I thought: If he meets with good fortune he will fledge in a month, spend the next four years learning to be an eagle, exploring, making contacts with other birds, eventually finding a mate for life, nesting, and rearing his own young, for the next 30 years.

We finished our task: a blood sample, some measurements like the hallux (rear) talon to estimate its sex, the length of the 8th primary feather to estimate age, and a few others—an impromptu physical. It was hot and humid on the forest floor—the eaglet panted, his tongue pulsed, he reached up and took my fingers in his beak and gave a small squeeze. It was time to return him to the nest in the tree top. Once back in place with the other nestling, in less than an hour life in the forest canopy would resume its normal pace. The female, banded in the nest, is R85. The male, banded down below, R84. –*Steve Joule, Chris Desorbo, Pete Nye, Tom Lake*

2007

9/13: Haverstraw Bay, Westchester County: Margaret Eberle was just going for a leisurely walk along the river but as she glanced down at the pebbles and cobbles along the shore she spotted what looked to her like an Indian “arrowhead.” The projectile point (spear point) was what archaeologist’s call a Sylvan Side-notched, meticulously chipped from gray chert, probably dating to about 4,000 years ago, and at least two millennia before bow and arrow technology came to the Hudson Valley. The artisan who made this spear point was an ancestor of those who greeted Henry Hudson in 1609. These were Algonquian speakers, related to the Lenape, Munsee, Wappinger, and possibly Mohican people who lived in the area around Haverstraw Bay. –*Tom Lake*

9/18: Town of Wallkill, Orange County, HRM 57: In two years we will celebrate the September 1609 arrival of Henry Hudson, marking 400 years of Western culture in the Hudson Valley. Today we held two spear points in our hands that had just showed up in one of our excavation screens. The two styles, a Rossville and a Vosburg, suggested that Native People had visited the south end of this hilltop, overlooking the Wallkill River, off and on for 3,000 years. For us, this air of antiquity created a perspective for the deep time of the Hudson River Valley. –*Tom Lake, Kris Mierisch, Tom Wilson, Jeanette LeClair*

2008

5/20: Green Island, Albany County, HRM 152: Just after 9:00 p.m., the sky in the east took on a silver glow that precedes moon rise. The tide was halfway out and ebbing. A thousand dimples out on the river marked the presence of shad, river herring, and many other fish. This was the night of the full moon in May, the Corn Planting Moon to many Native people. It was going to be a quick glimpse, however, as a thick gray cloud bank was poised just above the horizon to capture the moon. –*Tom Lake*

6/28: South Mount Beacon, Dutchess County, HRM 60: The sun was struggling through the summer haze to the northeast. To be here by dawn, I had to begin my hike before first light. At 1635 feet, this is the highest point in the valley between the Catskills and the sea. Twenty pairs of vulture eyes watched me from the iron work of the old fire tower. It was still too early to lift off. Three ravens were silhouetted in the sky to the east.

A cool southwest breeze dried my shirt after the long hike. On the way up I was disappointed to find that many of the hiking trails of my youth had grown over, vanished. Few people walk here anymore; many are on ATVs. The woods

were alive with the flute-like song of the wood thrush and the plaintive call of the eastern wood pewee: "Pewee? Pewee!" The approach to the summit was bracketed by mountain laurel in full bloom and it had attracted at least one male ruby-throated hummingbird and two monarchs.

This is a special place where striped maple dominates the understory and American chestnut trees still grow, although never very tall. The largest I found had a circumference of eight-inches. It was here, a decade ago, that I came upon the largest bobcat tracks I have ever seen. They were bobcat-bordering-on-puma size, set in the muddy ground. She was not far off, either, as water droplets from her stride had not yet evaporated off the rocks. Today, a doe and her two tiny fawns galloped over the rocks and disappeared into the bright green forest. —*Tom Lake*

7/19: North Germantown, Columbia County, HRM 109: I was snorkeling near midday in the shallows just upriver of the DEC boat launch. The ebb tide brought clouds of young-of-the-year striped bass and herring, swirling into the scattered beds of wild celery. As I drifted, shoals of banded killifish flushed from their cover and dozens of tessellated darters scooted off across the sandy bottom. One of my favorite summer moments is enjoying the exquisite view of the electric blue damselflies from underwater. They hover overhead in twos and threes just off the surface, sunlight refracting and reflecting from a thousand facets—from insects to water ripples to my face mask. The air was 95°, the river was 84°F, a real sauna. —*Tom Lake*

Under contract to the state Department of Environmental Conservation, the Hudson River Almanac project is coordinated by Tom Lake with additional support from the Greenway Conservancy for the Hudson River Valley Inc.; the Hudson River Foundation for Science and Environmental Research; and the J. P. Morgan Kaplan Fund publication program.

To contribute observations to the Hudson River Almanac, write to Tom Lake, 3 Steinhaus Lane, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590-3927, fax 845-297-8935, or e-mail trlake7@aol.com.

Regional History Forum

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The Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater*: Sailing to Save the River

Richard J. Langlois

The bell chimes twice, cutting through the air to tell the crew of the sloop *Clearwater* that lunch is ready. They retreat below deck, where sounds of laughter and talk escape from the cabin. Waves break against the ship's dark-green underbelly, gently rocking the hull and those aboard. A breeze flows across the hardwood deck, its polished finish timeworn by forty years of weather and passengers. A looming mast casts a shadow across the foredeck, standing 108 feet tall. The three canvases used to sail lay still. Lengths of wrist-thick rope lay neatly coiled around the side of the boat, sun-washed to a light brown, cared for by crews of volunteers past and present. Movement is heard from below deck as the crew cleans up, gathers themselves, and prepares for the day ahead. Later, they will sail to Newburgh, but for now there is music from Waryas Park, as the people of Poughkeepsie gather around the forty-year-old vessel. Captain Patrick Flynn issues a few last-minute orders to the crew as the children waiting by the dock can no longer hold back. They rush aboard this environmental icon of the Hudson River.

The Hudson flows from New York Harbor to Albany (in either direction, depending upon the Atlantic's tide) over a span of 150 miles. The estuary's composition of fresh and salt water provides all sorts of creatures and observers with a unique yet delicate ecosystem. Failure to protect this ecosystem could result in the species' extinction. One group in particular watching over the river and its denizens is Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater*, Inc. It was founded in 1966 by folksinger/songwriter Pete Seeger. At the time, the Hudson River's beauty was just surface-

deep. The river itself was being destroyed from below by pollution. Deposits of waste had caused it to become “rank with raw sewage, toxic chemicals, oil pollution, and bacteria too anoxic to support fish life” (www.clearwater.org).

Seeger aimed at saving the Hudson by halting the pollution and raising awareness. “You can’t expect people to fight for a cleaner river until they learn to love it,” he has said. Clearwater organizers feared that simply raising awareness through word of mouth would not be enough to bring about the necessary changes to clean the river, so the organization built the sloop *Clearwater* in 1969 with the notion that if they could give people an incentive to come to the river, they would want to help. Two thousand people were present when the sloop left port for the first time from South Bristol, Maine (www.clearwater.org).

The following year, Seeger and his friend and fellow musician Don McLean sailed the *Clearwater* to Washington, D.C., where a press conference and impromptu concert were held for the House of Representatives; the goal was to raise awareness for polluted waterways such as the Hudson and emphasize the need for aid to clean up the damage. Two years later, the Federal Water Pollution Control Amendment of 1972 was signed. It introduced a permit system for regulating point sources of pollution (www.waterboards.ca.gov). In 1977, this law became known as the Clean Water Act; it “continued requirements to set water quality standards for all contaminants in surface waters. The act made it unlawful to discharge any pollutant into navigable waters; funded the construction of sewage treatment plants; and recognized the need for planning to address the source of pollution” (www.epa.gov). Clearwater has continued to fight for legislation to protect the Hudson and all other wetlands from pollution, and has collaborated with groups such as the Hudson River Watershed Alliance and Town of Poughkeepsie Wetland Protection (www.clearwater.org).

Though legislation helped reduce the damage being done to the Hudson, pollution present before these initiatives still lingers. PCBs are a group of synthetic, oil-like chemicals of the organochlorine family. Until their toxic nature was recognized and their use was banned in the 1970s, they were widely used as insulation in electrical equipment (www.clearwater.org). Five hundred pounds of PCBs discharged for more than 30 years from General Electric plants in upstate Hudson Falls and Fort Edward get washed downriver every year, explained Manna Jo Greene, environmental director of Clearwater. While the threat of PCBs to humans is not direct, it seriously affects wildlife, primarily fish, and crippled the Hudson River’s fishing industry. With some forty separate PCB “hot spots” along the river, the Hudson was until recently the nation’s number-one Superfund site, with a cleanup area stretching 200 miles. The first phase of the cleanup process is

complete; phase two, to begin next year, will require the dredging of contaminated areas.

It has been because of efforts of organizations like Clearwater that, after nearly forty years, the Hudson's remediation is being addressed. Clearwater also offers a number of educational opportunities for communities throughout the Hudson Valley to become more aware of the issues and dangers threatening the river. "The problem goes below just the surface [of the Hudson River]," said Captain Flynn. "People need to be made aware that there is life down there and that it is worth protecting."

The sloop *Clearwater* weighs in at seventy tons, can sleep a crew of eighteen, and carry up to fifty passengers. Those aboard sail from Albany to New York Harbor and Long Island Sound. The design of the ship replicates the Dutch sloops that carried cargo up and down the Hudson in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, the *Clearwater* functions not as a cargo ship, but as a mobile icon for educating people about the Hudson River.

Many of *Clearwater's* passengers are students from local schools. "We do three-hour education sails with students, usually fifth- and sixth-graders. In the history of *Clearwater* we have had over 450,000 students aboard the sloop!" said Captain Flynn. This, he added, is the biggest effect *Clearwater* has had,—that so many people have been touched, been made aware, and educated by the organization to what damage has been done to the river that gives them so much. "We are trying to undo a lot of the myths," noted Greene.

The educational philosophy of *Clearwater's* Classroom on the Waves Program is "learning by doing." Through inquiry-based activities, students help raise the sloop's sails, navigate the boat, set and haul in a fishing net, as well as interact with learning stations on board to examine and touch the day's catch, perform water-quality tests, and study plankton and other invertebrate life under field magnification. *Clearwater's* Tideline Discovery Program is offered to school groups in grades K to 12. *Clearwater* caters to the general community with its Community Educator Programs, designed for adults and mixed ages. *Clearwater* also offers educational programs in classrooms throughout the Hudson Valley. Its educators bring slides, songs, and stories, as well interactive exhibits.

Moving beyond the traditional classroom, The organization also offers onboard experience through sloop apprenticeships, educational internships, and volunteer positions aboard the sloop. Apprentices are selected for two-month campaigns between April and July. They assist the crew in all aspects of sailing, including education and maintenance. Educational interns join *Clearwater* for two to three months between April and October. While serving as full-time crew

members, they focus primarily on assisting with educational programs. Volunteers working as crew hands are part of a two-crew rotation from April to October. They may occupy the positions of first mate, second mate, cook, engineer, bosun, and deckhands.

Aside from providing educational opportunities, Clearwater hosts a number of fun on-shore events. The most prominent of these is the Clearwater Festival, held each June at Croton Point Park in Westchester County. For three decades now, Clearwater has hosted approximately 15,000 attendees who come to enjoy top-quality performances of a diverse mix of contemporary, traditional, World, and American Roots music, dance, and storytelling.

Pete Seeger's dream has changed little since Clearwater was first created in 1966. The *Clearwater* still sails up and down the Hudson River, spreading its message of hope, its crew continuing to educate and fight for the river.

Learn more about the Clearwater, its educational and sailing opportunities, and its work in environmental efforts, and with sloop clubs around the region by visiting the Web site www.clearwater.org or contact them at 112 Little Market St., Poughkeepsie, NY 12601. 800-67-SLOOP or 845-454-7673; office@clearwater.org.

Trout Rising Into Sunlight

for Sparrow Stoneback

Matthew Nickel

I.

Blue skies and sun open above maple and cherry,
On a hill overlooking the curve in Black Creek
Where Ascension Cemetery rolls back in green grass,
Shaking fern and ivy cover ancient graves below
Edging up to the old nuns and crosses, we kneel
And I draw a solitary fish in the soil of a new grave;

Somehow in the distance, the light shifts over
The creek, and I remember fishing that curve and dam
Singing aloud, catching trout in black waters,
I remember walking into the woods along the ridge,
Deep into darkness where Burroughs brought Whitman
Under hemlock boughs up along the black waterfalls

The way Whitman described Black Creek,
savage, solitary, druidical and the sinking feeling
Of the hermit thrush singing low in the pine trees,
How a trout shimmered like a wafer of light
Holding steady in the light-crested dark-rippled
Rushes below Copperhead Hole;

Then I remembered dinner, in the still clean light
The skillet sizzled oil-browned trout and leeks,
Sparrow poured red wine for Stoney and my wife;
I held Sparrow's hand dancing for *herbes de Provence*,
Thinking how she caught her first trout in Black Creek
And we sang hymns about the last good country.

II.

At night sleeping, I feel the rush of water in my legs
Pulling always pulling broken knees bending,
Dreaming of lonesome Catskill streams, hunting
Hudson's slopes in long tree shadows slanting
Along Riverby to the Hudson, Mother-river
That flows-two-ways, cutting the distance

In crossed sunlight, to the Vanderbilt Mansion
Or the wind lifting over the garden, leeks
And garlic shooting skyward, bending leaves
Earthward, all things rising and falling, and
The way Stoney rose from his chair
To clip the rosebush the day of Sparrow's funeral,

It was a bright day, and I cannot forget the way
Our Lady of the Presentation held her hands outward
Before the coffin, pallbearers, family, friends,
Or how it reminded me of the *pietà* in Notre Dame
In Paris, the Blessed Virgin open-armed offering,
Stone-faced suffering, still trying to love the whole world

Or the way Mother Mary reminds me of Sparrow
Arms wide open, eyes bright, singing our favorite songs,
Humming "Lord, Let Me Live by the Hudson,"
In that divine harmony, loving to tell the story,
Teaching us how to be fishers of men in song
In this lonesome high hill country of the heart;

Some days it's harder now to walk back into the woods
By Black Creek, or to fish those dark waters
Where a trout might rise into sunlight, beyond those graves
Where we lowered Sparrow's body into the earth—
But we walk slowly, onward, with infinite care,
While her spirit still sings, still lifts up our hearts to Heaven.

August 15, 2008—Feast of the Assumption

Book Reviews

Land So Fair, Firth Haring Fabend.

New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2008. (348 pp.)



With New Amsterdam now but a brief footnote in most history books, Dutch heritage may be lost to most New Yorkers, but it is palpable nonetheless. Dutch New York still lingers today in the names of many places in the Hudson Valley, from Brooklyn and the Bronx all the way up to Voorheesville and Rensselaer in the Capital Region. Take the Bowery, for example: *bowerij* in Dutch means “farm,” in this case Peter Stuyvesant’s farm, which was located near what is now trendy SoHo. It’s sobering to think that the Bowery’s original tenants were goats and horses. Ask anyone about the American Revolution and they will more than likely describe it as a struggle between the imperial British and their upstart colonists (and for those who paid attention in ninth-grade history, some Hessians for good measure); but of course, the struggle involved many other factions, not the least of which were the Dutch families who had settled in the Hudson Valley long before anyone dumped tea into Boston Harbor.

In her historical novel *Land So Fair*, Firth Haring Fabend explores three generations of Dutch American women and their families living in New York during the years before and during the American Revolution. Fabend employs a historian’s eye for detail in creating an impressive backdrop of the Hudson Valley during the second half of the eighteenth century; historical icons such as the Sons of Liberty, George Washington, and General Sir Henry Clinton, British commander in chief of North America, make their presences known. The novel explores the violent conflicts not only between the armies, but between next-door neighbors, some loyal to the Crown, others loyal to the idea of independence. Here is a depiction of the American Revolution that shows the struggle on a smaller scale, with war going door-to-door in some cases. Readers will undoubtedly enjoy the fresh perspective Fabend employs here in bringing history to life.

However, the real strength of this novel, may lie in the development of its female characters, particularly the younger Margaret, who is exceedingly well-defined as a girl growing up to be a woman aware of her family’s traditions but also looking toward what the future may bring. Margaret’s story can be seen as the story of that time in American history itself, a transition that would require

sacrifice, strength, and above all a strong sense of community. The names and basic biographical information of Fabend's main characters are real, but the characters are more than just historical stick figures. They are fleshed out by detail and character development.

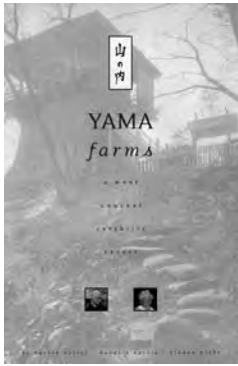
For any historical novel set on such a grand scale, the greatest challenge for an author is to create characters with an engrossing narrative thread while depicting historical figures, places, and events accurately. Fabend does not shy away from this challenge. Instead of merely shifting back and forth between the story of the Blauvelt women and the larger context of the American Revolution, she chooses to meld the frames together at various points. Many times the characters are thrust headlong into their historical backdrop with exciting results: "Margaret... and the child clambered out of the cellar, hastily packed a few effects and fled to the Hudson River, along with scores of others with the same idea: to find a boat, any boat, to take them to security across the river. Margaret lost a shoe in the process, but she didn't stop for it. Half hopping, half running, she hustled her hugely pregnant daughter through the cobbled streets with one thought on her mind: get out of the city." (219) However, this conflation of fiction and fact might be used too often. By the end, it could prove tedious for some readers who are enveloped in the narrative of Margaret and her family, only to have the characters pushed into yet another scene with historical implications. Readers might want to concentrate more on the interesting lives of these heroic women who find themselves surrounded by war, rather than have them merely defined by that war.

For anyone interested in the largely forgotten Dutch heritage of New York, *Land So Fair* is an invaluable read, full of interesting and poignant details brought to life in a way that a purely historical text could never accomplish. Author of five previous novels, Fabend is a scholar of Dutch American culture and the eleventh generation of the family she depicts in *Land So Fair*. That background is clearly used in weaving an accurate and caring portrait that does much to remind all of us that the history of New York is much older and more complex than we may at first think.

Tommy Zurhellen

Yama Farms: A Most Unusual Catskills Resort.

Harold Harris, Wendy E. Harris, and Dianne Wiebe. Highland NY: Cragsmoor Historical Society 2006. (86 pp. plus illustrations, bibliography, and index)



The growth of tourism in the Catskills resulted in at least forty hotels and boarding houses tucked into the Rondout Valley hills between Napanoch and Cragsmoor by the early twentieth-century. None of them were quite like Yama-no-uchi (“Home in the Mountains,” also called Yama Farms Inn), a 1,300-acre idyllic thumb overlooking the Rondout gorge created from 1902 to 1913 by Frank Seaman (1858-1939) and his companion Olive Sarre (1873?-1954). Seaman was attracted to the once-thriving little canal town (laid low by the abandonment of the Delaware & Hudson in 1902) by a stocks and bonds wizard of ostentatious demeanor named William Woodend. Woodend used to travel through the village of Napanoch in a white coach-in-four carriage (complete with driver and coachman in matching livery), showering children with handfuls of pennies. Seaman matched a fifteen-acre acquisition from Woodend with a 60-room Swiss cottage that he purchased in 1912, retaining the former owner’s family at the gate house. Anita Foraste (1906-2004), the daughter of the family, hunted butterflies with John Burroughs in the fields.

Yama Farms was similar to the hotels at Cragsmoor (1904), Minnewaska (1887), Sam’s Point (1871), and Mohonk (1870) in the beauty of its surroundings, unique architectural styling, and atmosphere of traditional charm. Cragsmoor’s development since the 1880s as a haven for artists and illustrators was of special interest to Seaman and Sarre, who were friends with George Inness, Jr., and Frederick Dellenbaugh, the more famous residents of that southeastern ridge. Yet there was nothing quite like George Seaman’s digs. You did not make reservations at Yama Farms: you were invited. Some came by yacht or their own personal train cars; many were picked up in New York City by Seaman and his staff. No one paid; tipping was not allowed; anything desired was available day or night. The guests usually worked out their bills beforehand or paid months later.

Seaman was a wealthy advertising executive who undertook this ambitious project as a resort for his wealthy clients. Among his accounts was Eastman Kodak, the company of his boyhood friend, George Eastman. He also had Palmolive, Studebaker, and his most meteoric account, American Tobacco. He and Sarre’s immersion in the “niceties of hospitality” of Japanese culture and architecture following a visit there in 1906 (fifteen years before Frank Lloyd Wright), coupled

with their interest in the Arts and Crafts Movement (which had attracted Ralph Whitehead to Byrdcliffe a decade earlier) resulted in this stunning retreat for America's elite.

John D. Rockefeller stayed here. Sidney Colgate, Poultney Bigelow, Douglas MacArthur, Rabindranath Tagore, Edgar Lee Masters, Alexander C. Flick, H.H. Westinghouse, Hamlin Garland, U.S. Vice President Alton Parker (he came over from Esopus), U.S. Treasury Secretary Ogden Mills, Jacob Raskob, Edward Everett Hale, the Earl of Sandwich, Leopold Stowkowski, Frank N. Doubleday, Frederic Remington, Rudolph Wurlitzer, Count Felix Von Luckner, Prince Louis Ferdinand, and the Vincent Astors all had their own "keys" to Yama Farms—and their own wooden peg with brass name plates on which to hang their hats and coats. The most well-known guests were the Famous Four—John Burroughs and his friends Henry Ford, Thomas Alva Edison, and Harvey Firestone—also known as the Four Cronies.

Buffalo Bill Cody came one season and drove an old stagecoach through a village of "Indian" teepees in the annual Farms pageant. One of the employees remarked in later life that he overheard a group of bankers, politicians, and industrialists planning America's entry into World War I in 1913 in a Yama Farms conference room. A convention of American Telephone and Telegraph Company executives was preceded by sixteen engineers who came and built an experimental plant designed to allow them to send photographs by wire. The Vitaphone or "talking moving picture machine" was first shown to Bell Telephone Company nabobs at Yama Farms.

The buildings, whose designs were credited to Olive Sarre, were considered "the best adaptation of Japanese architectural principles in America," according to Carlyle Ellis in the July 1910 issue of *American Homes and Gardens*. Yet Yama-no-uchi excelled in more than architecture, scenery, and style. Seaman's black minorcas, which produced "the largest hens' eggs known," were considered "the aristocrats of the poultry world." The Jenny Brook Trout Hatchery, there in rough form when Seaman purchased the property, became "the best private hatchery in this country." The Yama Farms pure-bred Jersey herd, which included a \$10,000 bull, won blue ribbons across the state. Their collection of Japanese irises was the best in America. The library consisted of more than 4,000 volumes. Olive Sarre also maintained a world-class English ceramics collection.

"I lost my heart to Jenny Brook," John Burroughs remarked about its trout fishing. "I think she took it with a hook." A John Burroughs Night was a standard feature in which stories were told by the rich and famous around a campfire. Burroughs and his wealthy friends, who often traveled together, were frequently

the subject of local anecdote and story. One day they were motoring in the country near Grahamsville when their Ford suffered a flat tire. A blacksmith grudgingly agreed to change it after negotiating a price. He complained about how shoddy things were these days, the tire and tube in particular.

"It's all his fault," Ford said, pointing to Firestone. "He made that tire and inner tube."

"Hmmpf," said the blacksmith.

Edison piped up by informing the worker that the man who had just spoken had made that automobile.

"Hmmpf," he said again.

"And this fellow here," Firestone chimed in, pointing to Edison, "built the battery and the lights on that machine."

That was enough for the blacksmith. He rose and pointed to the white-bearded man with them and shouted, "And I suppose he is Jesus Christ!"

Another tale of a Yama Farms car involved a wealthy perfume manufacturer who always had his chauffeur stop at the office when arriving. The driver came around to the front of the car, unscrewed the radiator ornament, took it into the office, and waited for it to be stored in the vault for safekeeping. The ornament, made of diamond-incrusted gold, was worth \$35,000.

Poultney Bigelow's eccentricities—walking barefoot on the trails and hooting like an owl, not to mention his two-inch-long toenails, of which he was uncommonly proud—appeared in their best light at Yama Farms. Yet the gregarious (and often obnoxious) world correspondent also was outclassed by his companions. At one point, showing off his pedigree, Bigelow announced that he was "one of the few men still alive" who saw John Wilkes Booth perform.

"Sir," said a man with him, "I was his manager." The speaker was John Burnham, president of the American Protective Association, who managed Sarah Bernhardt and John Drew as well.

Burroughs was not the only distinguished naturalist to frequent Yama Farms. Others included Roy Chapman Andrews, Raymond Ditmars, Carl Akeley, and Carl Lumholtz. Akeley and Andrews, an expert on China's Gobi Desert, helped create the American Museum of Natural History. Ditmars, a reptile and snake expert, was with the Bronx Zoo. Lumholtz was a Norwegian naturalist and ethnographer who studied indigenous societies in Australia and Borneo.

The setting was not only stunning, but convenient. Yama Farms spread from the top of the gorge that carries the Rondout Creek down from the Catskills to its slow, long drawl across the Rondout Valley to Esopus Creek. Route 209 south to New York lay just below. Honk Lake was a mile into the mountain plateau,

where Route 55 followed the upper creek to the new Rondout Reservoir. Today, the hatchery lies in ruins below the plateau, where some of the old buildings, now crowded in by man and forest, are still used. On one side of the Hut, a beautiful stone and wood grouping up a cobblestone drive from the highway, a modern mobile home park, (surprisingly well-kept) sits today. On the other side, the woods have grown to shield almost entirely the view of the valley below.

No matter. Across Route 55 a sanding operation is gouging out a mountainside. The gorge itself was fenced off by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation after it ran out of money in a half-hearted cleanup of a Superfund site created in the dumping of polychlorinated biphenyls by a defunct paper company decades ago. This beautiful natural area is not open to the public anymore.

Yama-no-uchi also is gone. Its short, elaborate life expired with Frank Seaman in 1939, although Olive lived on amid the splendid setting for another 15 years. Its memory is sustained in an Ellenville Public Library display, and its elegance evoked in this touching, intelligent, well-illustrated, and altogether charming record by Harold Harris, based on his own memories and fifty years of notes and memorabilia. Harris, who died in 2003, was a Channel Master executive with a special interest in Japanese culture that drew him to Yama-no-uchi. Dianne Wiebe worked with him throughout the project and after his death. His daughter, Wendy E. Harris, undertook the final editing and rewriting.

Vernon Benjamin

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