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# The John Muir Newsletter, Winter 2006/2007

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# THE JOHN MUIR NEWSLETTER

UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC, STOCKTON, CA

VOLUME 17, NUMBER 1

WINTER 2006/2007

## TWO CALIFORNIA LIONS: JOHN MUIR & LUTHER BURBANK

by Roberta M. McDow, Stockton, CA

I have long wanted to know you," John Muir wrote from his home in Martinez, California on January 6, 1910. "Strange how people so near are so long kept apart."<sup>1</sup> His message accompanied a receipt dated December 29, 1909 for five dollars, about one hundred in today's currency, contributed to the Society for the Preservation of National Parks.<sup>2</sup>

A day later, Muir's letter arrived at its destination in Santa Rosa. The recipient was Luther Burbank. Burbank had lived in the area since 1875 when, as a young man of twenty-six, he left Massachusetts to join his brother Alfred.<sup>3</sup> He thought his brother had settled on "the *chosen* spot of *all this earth* as far as *Nature* is concerned...."<sup>4</sup> Here he put down his roots and began his life's work in horticulture.

Two decades earlier and less than forty miles away, John Strentzel had purchased land near Martinez where he grew a variety of fruit trees in search of the most suitable for the region. But all experimentation ceased when Strentzel's son-in-law, John Muir, became the manager of the Alhambra Valley property.<sup>5</sup> Muir's goals were to provide for his family, finance his own scientific inquiries and have

the time to pursue them. To him, plants were objects of beauty and love in the wild, but breeding them to produce more and better food was not his vocation.

Yet Muir and Burbank had interests in common and in some ways their lives almost mirrored each other. Muir, born in Dunbar, Scotland on April 21, 1838, was about eleven years older than Burbank.<sup>6</sup> The latter was born at Lancaster, Massachusetts on March 7, 1849, the same year the Muir family immigrated to America.<sup>7</sup> Through his mother, Burbank was also of Scottish ancestry.<sup>8</sup> Both men lived about seventy-seven years, Muir shy of that number by four months, Burbank over it by one.<sup>9</sup>

By 1910, Burbank had resided in Sonoma County for thirty-five years. Muir had lived in neighboring Contra Costa County for thirty. Both married relatively late in life: Muir to Louie Strentzel in 1880, when he was forty-two,<sup>10</sup> Burbank to his first wife Helen Coleman in 1890 when he was forty-one.<sup>11</sup>

The formal education of both men ended before they received degrees. Muir studied at the University

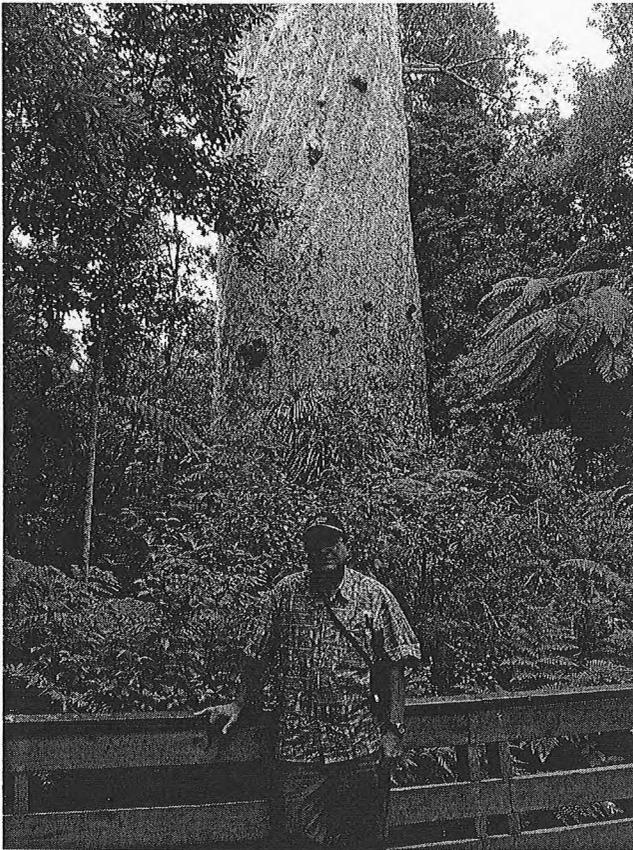
(continued on page 5)

## NEWS & NOTES

### MUIR CENTER DIRECTOR SWAGERTY FOLLOWS MUIR'S FOOTSTEPS "DOWN UNDER"

From March 19 to April 29, Bill Swagerty followed John Muir's 1903-04 trek to New Zealand and Australia. Awarded a Fulbright Senior Specialist grant, Swagerty lectured at University of Waikato in Hamilton and at Victoria University, both on the North Island. Three of his talks focused on Muir: "Origins of John Muir's Environmentalism;" "John Muir's Life and Legacy;" and "John Muir in New Zealand."

The trip began and ended in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city and a place Muir entered by steamer in January, 1904, returning after an extensive tour overland of both north and south islands by rail, stage, boat, and on foot.



Bill Swagerty with the largest tree in New Zealand, the Kuari named "Tane Mahuta" meaning "God of the Forest." Muir did not see this tree, but was in the general area within the Waipoua Forest.

Muir's purpose was fourfold: (1) to locate and compare the world's largest trees; (2) to collect specimens of flowers and plants native only to Australasia; (3) to observe

geothermal activity; (4) to chronicle environmental practices of native and settler colonists. Muir was especially impressed with the the giant Kuari trees north of Auckland, the thermal/geyser basins near Rotorua, the Mt. Cook region in the Southern Alps, and the botanical gardens in Christchurch.

Working with Professor Lex Chalmers of the University of Waikato's Department of Geography, Swagerty is currently preparing for publication in this newsletter "World Tour, Part V," which will focus on Muir's journal from his New Zealand experience. Professor Chalmers has visited the John Muir Papers at Pacific and is currently editing the transcript with annotations on the exact route taken in 1904, a trip that has baffled previous attempts at reconstruction.

Once the entire World Tour has been published by the Center, plans are in the works to put all together in the form of a booklet for broader distribution. This publication will also contain Muir's post-trip notes on the implications of his year-long circumnavigation that took him from California to the east coast, to Europe, Russia, Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and many island communities of the Pacific. The ultimate goal is to have a new, accurate map of his trip, a tidy transcript from his journals, and a useable research tool for students of Muir interested in this little known year in his life.

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## John Muir Disrupts A Seance

By Michael Wurtz  
Archivist, Holt-Atherton Special Collections  
University of the Pacific Library

It appears that John Muir admits to only a few “supernatural” experiences in his life. One of them is accounted for in *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Chapter 7, where Muir was “suddenly, and without warning, possessed with the notion that my friend, Professor J. D. Butler, of the State University of Wisconsin, was below me in the valley.” Indeed, Butler was in the valley and Muir found him immediately. Later, Muir continued to wonder about what had happened. “It seems supernatural, but only because it is not understood. Anyhow, it seems silly to make so much of it, while the natural and common is more truly marvelous and mysterious than the so-called supernatural.”

Perhaps supernaturally, I found what appears to be an unpublished account of John Muir ending up unexpectedly at a seance (Microfilm 45 Frame 11201 or Series Three, Box 15, Folder 17c, Part 3, Notebooks – published and precursor works – unpublished works, miscellaneous notes – 1903 to ca. 1910 – Autobiographical sketches: from leaving university to about 1906, c1908, p444):

### MYSTERIOUS THINGS

Notwithstanding the magnificent views opened by science into the universe, everything still ends in mystery and infinity. All that we know, however great the knowledge, in the explanation of natural phenomena the farthest reaching of our knowledge of effects is all necessarily only knowledge of approximate causes, and knowledge of the first one or two or three links in the endless chain stretching out to God himself.

But of what is usually called the mysterious or supernatural, very little of it has come in my way – just enough to convince me that there are forces which produce phenomena which, now called supernatural, are as natural as any other forces with which we are acquainted. Thus I believe that in what is called spiritualism, and what the Scotch call second sight, clairvoyance, telepathy, etcetera – most of it seems to be made a sort of workshop and playground for cranks and fakirs, manifested in spirit rappings, etcetera. There is yet at the bottom of all such humbugs a basis of truth, founded on natural laws, which perhaps some day we may discover.

I never was attracted by what are called spirit rappings; on the contrary was always repelled by what seemed to me manifest humbug. I noticed when I was a boy in Wisconsin that of all our neighbors, only those who had no fixed controlling religious

principles as guides through life were believers and followers of these spirit rappers. I have remarked the same thing in all classes of society wherever I have been in any part of the world – that with exception of a few philosophers who study this mysterious phenomena in search of the basic truth that I have referred to above, all that is real in such humbug must rest on natural laws.

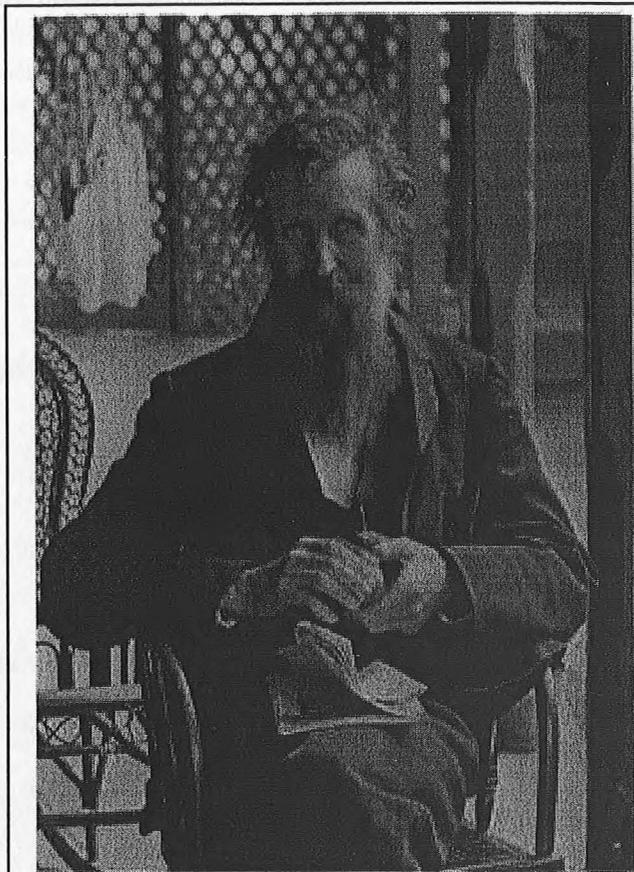
Only once in my life was I ever led to attend what is called a seance. When snow drove me out of the mountains, for several years I spent the winters in writing up my notes in Oakland or San Francisco. On my arrival from my summer's work I usually called on friends who took an interest in my studies. One of these friends, after enquiring about the kind of summer I had had, and what new discoveries I had made, informed me that one of my acquaintances had become very much interested in spiritualism, with its rappings and such-like manifestations. Meeting this acquaintance, he said: “Muir, I wish you would come to my wife's sister's home tonight. There will be quite a little party there of your friends, who will be glad to see you. You will have the advantage of seeing a good many at one time.” I said: “But what are you going to do? I hope you are not going to raise rapping spirits, for that is a kind of phenomena that I am not interested in.” He replied: “Oh! Nothing of that kind. We are just going to meet together in a friendly way. You be sure to come.” I said: “Well, if that is all I shall go gladly, but I assure you beforehand that I wouldn't go the length of my foot to see tables and chairs jumping around. I think that if the so-called spirits were real and they actually were able to make tables dance with a dozen fat men upon them, my opinion is that such spirits must be a bad set and might be in better business. They might be chopping wood, or going to the homes of poor mothers who have sick children and who would give their lives to save those children. Why do these spirits never go to the bedside of those who are sick and afflicted and apparently beyond reach of all that physicians are able to do for them? Assisting the poor and the sick and those who are without comfort would be much better employment for spirits than rapping mysteriously on chairs and walls and making tables jump, and so forth.”

But I was assured that there would be nothing of that kind; so I went to this home and there I found about a dozen, with most of whom I had some acquaintance. After the common greetings were over there came an awkward hush, and I instinctively felt that the company had been called together for what they called a seance; nor was I mistaken, for in a few minutes one of them arose, rubbed his hands as if he was eagerly awaiting some interesting performance to begin, and said: “Well, shall we go into the other room?” And all with one accord got up and passed into another room, where they invited me to follow, which I did. In that room there was a large round table. All took their places, with one chair

left for me. They said: "Sit down, Mr. Muir." I said: "What are you going to do?" They said: "Well, there will be a seance. We expect some friendly spirits will play on a violin for us while that violin is under the table, without any human hand touching it. Now, we are very glad to have you present, because we wish you, as a person interested in science, to study this wonderful phenomena and see if you can explain it to us." I informed them that that was completely

outside of my studies; that I knew nothing about phenomena of that nature; that I had been assured that nothing of the kind was to take place here tonight – otherwise I would not naturally go the length of my foot to witness the playing of a violin under a table by unseen hands; but that nevertheless I did not wish to interfere with the researches or the enjoyment of others. I said: "I wish you would go on with your seance just as if I were not present, and now that I am here, if you will tell your spirits that you are ready and tell them to start the music, although it is out of my line, I will try to watch the violin and see if I can find out anything about it." So I stood off to one side and looked

under the table to watch that instrument. I was requested to sit down – "Sit down, Mr. Muir." I said: "What? Do you expect me to study the playing of that violin under the table and to watch it looking down through the boards? I am not used to studying nature in that way – I wish to watch the instrument." I was then told that the spirits would resent my looking at the instrument while they were playing it, and they wouldn't play. I said: "Why, what harm can I do to you or to the spirits by simply standing by as a spectator to watch the playing. I will make no noise – I will not disturb you – I will simply look on." They said: "But can you not, Mr. Muir, as a scientist, understand (speaking in a tone of voice as if they were amazed at my obtuseness) – can you not understand that there may be forces in nature so delicate and refined that even the glimpse of an eye



John Muir was unwittingly invited to a séance. He wondered why the spirits would do parlor tricks at such gatherings instead of going to "the bedside of those who are sick and afflicted and apparently beyond reach of all that physicians are able to do for them?" (Photo from the Muiriana Collection MSS 307, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific Library)

would at once spoil the whole phenomena connected with it?" I said: "No, I cannot understand the action of a force so delicate that it would be injured by casting light upon it – by letting the light in upon it; I have always been praying with the psalmist while pursuing my studies: "open thou mine eyes." Now you request me to close my eyes – to hold them above a board table beneath which the object to study is hidden; moreover, you propose to put

out the lights. This appears to me purely and literally a work of darkness in which you are engaged." Then one of my friends said in an agonized tone of voice to "Sit down, Mr. Muir, sit down. It can do no harm." I replied: "No, I will not sit down. Should I make such a fool of myself I never afterwards would be able to look a pine tree in the face; but," I said, "I wish you well. If my presence is an offense to that precious spirit I will withdraw into the other room; then you can go on with this dark work as if I was not in the house." Accordingly I took a seat in the other room. Presently I heard a sharp, clear rapping on the wall, which I answered with my foot, rapping against the mopboard the same number of times. Then after a few minutes' silence the whole party broke up and joined me in the parlor, angry, confused, and out of sorts. I enquired why they had not gone on with their studies. They replied that the spirits notified them that they were offended at the presence in the house of an unbeliever, and they refused to make any manifestations that evening.

This was my first and last seance. Very different in character, it seems to me, were the few mysterious experiences which I shall here briefly describe.

At this point in the manuscript, Muir relates his story about Professor Butler in Yosemite.

In addition to the Butler story, Muir has also confessed that he had had premonitions about each of his parents' deaths. In each case, he rushed home to visit them – his father died within a couple of months of his visit and his mother died a few weeks after his visit. As he said about the Butler visit, "It seems supernatural, but only because it is not understood."

(continued from page 1)

of Wisconsin at Madison. Burbank attended the Lancaster Academy in Massachusetts, a school for students preparing to enter Harvard or Yale, but he left after the fourth year of the five-year course of study.<sup>12</sup>

During the years he attended the Academy, Burbank spent his summers working at Ames Plow works in Worcester where his uncle was a foreman.<sup>13</sup> Like Muir, Burbank was mechanically gifted, inventing a device for a lathe that saved labor and increased his income.<sup>14</sup> And reminiscent of the clocks that Muir constructed as a youth on the farm,<sup>15</sup> Burbank built a successful clock that was attached to a beam in the family home.<sup>16</sup>

Burbank's home at Lancaster was, according to his sister Emma, "filled with intellectual activity."<sup>17</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau lived nearby at Concord. Luther's cousin Levi Sumner Burbank was a friend and associate of Louis Agassiz.<sup>18</sup> These men and other respected intellectuals of the day also influenced Muir. But unlike Burbank, Muir was not introduced to them at home. He had to wait until he enrolled at Madison to become acquainted with them.

One of the most important and useful lessons Muir learned at Madison was the practice of keeping detailed notebooks. His recorded observations, thoughts and experiences became the wealth of material he used later to write his articles and books. It was Dr. James Davie Butler who urged Muir and his other students to chronicle their lives, but the idea didn't originate with him. He took it from Ralph Waldo Emerson who kept a "Commonplace Book."<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, Burbank didn't follow this example set by his Concord neighbor. Though a renowned breeder of plants, Burbank kept the parentage of his creations stored mostly in his memory rather than in notes.<sup>20</sup> In 1904 he was awarded a renewable grant for the following year by the Carnegie Institution to further his "experimental investigations in the evolution of plants."<sup>21</sup>

A good memory would no longer suffice. From then on accurate, written records were to be kept and, as much as possible, past work was to be recorded to satisfy the rigorous requirements of the grant and the scientific community. Progress was made but not at the pace that satisfied the Carnegie

Institution. And there was another problem: Burbank had become a celebrity. On the one hand, the press often exaggerated his achievements. On the other, a growing number of professionals in his field were questioning his methods and the accuracy of his claims. Burbank was awarded a grant for the year 1909, but with the warning that it might be the last.<sup>22</sup>

In December 1909, the Carnegie Institution informed Burbank that it had discontinued its financial aid.<sup>23</sup> It is this situation that Muir referred to as he continued his letter:

For many years I have been one of your most ardent admirers & when I have thought of visiting I have always imagined you overwhelmed & inaccessible in a crowd.

I have seen mean envious things in the press---especially since Carnegie help had been given. But of course you will not mind them. Led by your genius you will plod doggedly industriously on your flowery fruitful Godful way with the sincere admiration of every lover of Nature & mankind.

With all good wishes & warm regards I am ever faithfully yours John Muir.<sup>24</sup>

"My dear John Muir," Luther Burbank answered on January 7, 1910:

Your beautiful letter of yesterday received. I cannot possibly tell you how much I prize it.

You have had my unbounded admiration from the first, and I feel almost as well acquainted with you as if I had met you. I have been pained time and again in not seeing you when I thought it probable that I should have met you.

Your beautiful little story 'Stickeen' is a classic! and I never see your name written or hear it mentioned that it does not impress me something like a visit to the Sierras [sic].<sup>25</sup>

Burbank had missed meeting the author of *Stickeen* the preceding summer. In February 1909, the naturalist John Burroughs accompanied by his physician, Clara Barrus, and the wife of another physician, Mrs. Maurice C. Ashley, left the East for the West Coast and the Hawaiian Islands.<sup>26</sup> Theirs was an ambitious itinerary including visits to some of

the West's best scenic wonders and meetings with some of its most accomplished people. From time to time, various old friends and new acquaintances accompanied Burroughs on his travels.

John Muir was the first of them, meeting Burroughs and his party in Arizona and guiding them through the Petrified Forest, the Grand Canyon and, later, Yosemite.<sup>27</sup> But when Burroughs and his two companions went to the Hawaiian Islands, Muir remained at home. His house was quieter now. Louie had died in 1905 and Wanda, their older daughter, had married but she lived nearby. He had work to do: for the Sierra Club, for the preservation of Hetch Hetchy, and for his publishers who expected him to transform his mountain of notebooks into a

was gathering data for an article to be published in *Scribner's Magazine*. He was delighted with the prospect of meeting Muir and Burbank whom he called two "California lions."<sup>29</sup> They would see John Muir first, then Luther Burbank the following day, June 16, 1909.<sup>30</sup>

"Mr. H. H. Hunt, the oil-magnate," Finck wrote, "and his genial wife ... took us into their spacious steam automobile, and thus we descended upon Mr. Muir, at his home in Martinez. As he was living alone, we took along some well-filled lunch baskets, and thus we picnicked on the piazza, the two naturalists [Muir and Burroughs] sitting together in a corner, calling each other John, and indulging in reminiscences of various lands. Then our host took us in-doors and showed us the botanic, mineral, and photographic treasurers he had gathered.

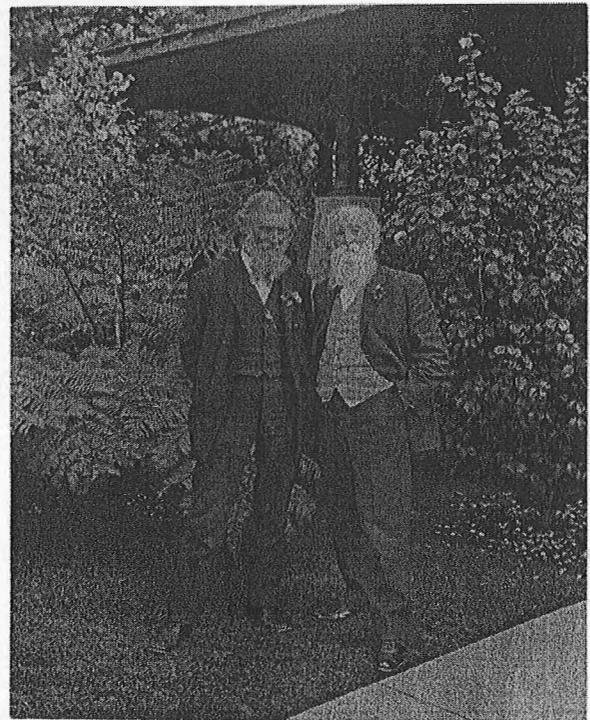
To our great regret, as well as his own, a literary duty which had to be done at once prevented Mr. Muir from joining us, the following morning, in our expedition to the home of Luther Burbank in Santa Rosa....<sup>31</sup>



A photograph of John Burroughs, Charles Keeler, Henry Finck, and Luther Burbank in June 1909. (Photo from the John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific Library. Copyright 1984 Muir-Hanna Trust)

steady stream of salable books.

In mid-June, the Burroughs party was again in California. Charles Keeler, friend and fellow participant with Burroughs and Muir in the Harriman Expedition to Alaska of 1899, was Burroughs' host. Keeler arranged for visits with Muir and with Burbank. He had also invited others to join them: Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Hart from Berkeley and Mr. and Mrs. Henry T. Finck from New York.<sup>28</sup> Henry Finck was the music critic for the *New York Evening Post*. Previously he had written about the West and now he



A photograph of John Burroughs and Muir in March 1909. (Photo from the John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific Library. Copyright 1984 Muir-Hanna Trust)

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Clara Barrus also wrote about this visit to John Muir. "Back to the Coast [from Hawaii] before starting homeward, we spent one day in the Alhambra Valley with Mr. Muir.... The last view of him was as he turned, after saying goodbye, near the home of his daughter Wanda, and walked slowly down the road, with bent head and arms behind him, back to his big, lonely house. We were glad he was going to the High Sierra soon."<sup>32</sup>

Muir was living the busiest years of his life. In July 1911 he wrote to his friend John Burroughs from Garrison, New York:

When I was on the train passing your place I threw you a hearty salute across the river, but I don't suppose that you heard or felt it. I would have been with you long ago if I had not been loaded down with odds and ends of duties, book-making, book-selling at Boston, Yosemite and Park affairs at Washington, and making arrangements for getting off to South America, etc., etc. I have never worked harder in my life, although I have not very much to show for it. I have got a volume of my autobiography finished.... I have been working for the last month or more on the Yosemite book, trying to finish it before leaving for the Amazon.... I do not know what has got into me, making so many books all at once. It is not natural....<sup>33</sup>

The next month, Muir embarked on his trip to South America and Africa. He returned to New York in March 1912. He also returned to the Hetch-Hetchy battle and the tedious task of "book-making."<sup>34</sup>

Burbank, too, was associated with "book-making." In April 1912, the Luther Burbank Society was incorporated to promote and publish a multi-volume account of his work. Membership was to be limited to five hundred people, each expected to contribute the subscription fee of one dollar.<sup>35</sup> Among the members were Thomas Edison, Phoebe A. Hearst, John Burroughs and John Muir.<sup>36</sup>

But Burbank was being exploited. His name and those of his well-known supporters who joined the Society were being used to enrich the perpetrators of the scheme. Engrossed in his work, Burbank appears

to have given little attention to the unliterary activities of the promoters.<sup>37</sup>

One of the plants Burbank created was the peach named "Lemon Muir," announced in 1913 and " 'So named because of the lemon-tinted color.' A seedling of Muir pollinated with New White nectarine. Apparently never offered for sale."<sup>38</sup> Although Burbank admired John Muir, this peach was most probably named for its Muir seedling parentage.<sup>39</sup>

Toward the end of 1914, Burbank hired a new secretary, Elizabeth Jane Waters. They would marry two years later.<sup>40</sup> On Christmas Eve 1914, John Muir died. Pages of his Alaska manuscript, still unfinished, were within reach beside him.<sup>41</sup>

The next year, 1915, Henry Ford and Thomas Edison were among the visitors at Luther Burbank's home in Santa Rosa.<sup>42</sup> But others, particularly scientists, would distance themselves from him, among them John Muir's old friend John Burroughs.<sup>43</sup>

Luther Burbank died on April 11, 1926. His widow, Elizabeth Burbank, was his only heir.<sup>44</sup> On her rested the responsibility of administering his estate and managing its properties. She also kept her husband's memory alive and saw his contributions to horticulture gain recognition. She provided the property for the Luther Burbank Memorial Gardens and, at her death in 1977, added to it the Burbank home. Her husband's papers she willed to the Library of Congress.<sup>45</sup>

Among the Luther Burbank Papers, there is a single ruled sheet on which Burbank's widow wrote the reminiscence below. It has no date, only the printed notation, "In the hand of Elizabeth Burbank - RSW."

John Muir and Luther Burbank were both to be guests at some sort of State Park Meeting & by accident met at the Ferry Bldg. in S. F. They recognized each other and neither said a word but with their arms around each other's shoulders went on up Market Street to the hotel where the dinner meeting was being held. Later Mr. Muir told Mr. Burbank about the first time he came into S. F. and saw all the "going and coming" and heard all the hack drivers yelling - a cabby asked him if he could take him any place and he said "just show me the shortest way to get out of this damn town."<sup>46</sup>

This reminiscence is the only known detailed account of a meeting between Luther Burbank and John Muir. There are assertions that Muir visited Burbank, but no specific information is provided.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps Mrs. Burbank's recollection of the meeting in San Francisco was incorrectly remembered by someone as a visit of Muir to Burbank in Santa Rosa.

But when did this meeting in San Francisco occur? Muir chronologies show that between January 1910 and December 1914 the naturalist was often away from home, traveling frequently out of the state and also out of the country.<sup>48</sup> When he was home, he was "book-making."

What was the "some sort of State Park Meeting?" It was not a meeting of the Sierra Club and searches of park and botanical organization records have yielded no meeting at which both Muir and Burbank were in attendance.<sup>49</sup>

But the details "Ferry Building," "said not a word," "arms around each other's shoulders," "up Market Street," "to the hotel" all seem too vivid to be the imperfect memory of a story Luther Burbank told his wife.

More intriguing is the story told "later" by John Muir of his arrival in San Francisco. This is not the narrative recounted in Muir literature. As William Frederic Badè noted when he edited *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, John Muir's journal ended with the sentence, "We reached San Francisco about the first of April [1868], and I remained there only one day, before starting for Yosemite Valley."<sup>50</sup>

Muir's letter to his friend and mentor Jeanne C. Carr likewise dismissed his arrival in San Francisco in one sentence: "After a delightful sail among the scenery of the sea I arrived in San Francisco in April and struck out at once into the country."<sup>51</sup>

When Badè compiled *The Life and Letters of John Muir*, he included a more detailed version of the arrival story. He prefaced it with an observation, "To his friends he [John Muir] was accustomed to relate, with touches of humor, how he met on the street, the morning after debarkation, a man with a kit of carpenter's tools on his shoulders. When he inquired of him 'the nearest way out of town to the wild part of the State,' the man set down his tools in evident astonishment and asked, 'Where do you wish to go?' 'Anywhere that's wild,' was Muir's reply, and he was directed to the Oakland Ferry with the

remark that that would be as good a way out of town as any."<sup>52</sup>

Two decades later when Linnie Marsh Wolfe published *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (1945), she also used this narrative. "...Muir saw nothing but the ugliness of commercialism. Stopping a carpenter with a kit of tools, he asked where he could find the quickest way out of the city. 'But where do you want to go?' asked the man. 'Anywhere that is wild,' said Muir. 'He seemed to fear that I might be crazy, and that ... the sooner I got out of town the better, so he directed me to the Oakland ferry.'"<sup>53</sup>

Forty years after Wolfe's book was published, Muir biographer Frederick Turner repeated the account with the carpenter in a footnote and added, "More plausible---and less entertaining---is the version he [Muir] gave to Melville Anderson late in life: that he simply asked the man the nearest way out of the city and had been directed to the Oakland ferry."<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps Muir questioned a carpenter and also a cab driver. Or perhaps he didn't ask anyone for directions out of town. Badè observed that Muir liked to say that he asked a carpenter for directions to "anywhere that's wild." The story Mrs. Burbank recalled her husband repeating is more colorful and, with its touch of profanity, in that era it was more likely to be told to another man or men than to mixed company.

Although John Muir was a gifted storyteller, it cannot be assumed that he told this tale to Luther Burbank. More evidence is required to prove that Muir and Burbank met in San Francisco on their way to the same dinner meeting. Proof may yet be found in the minutes of an organization or in an obscure newspaper item. But it can never be proved that the two California lions did not meet. Only Burbank or Muir could have made that declaration.

Unless or until more evidence is found, Luther Burbank's letter to John Muir has the last words on the matter:

"I hope sometime to meet you personally, but even if I do not, we know each other as it is.

With every kind wish, I remain,

As always,

Faithfully yours, Luther Burbank"<sup>55</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. John Muir letter to Luther Burbank January 6, 1910, Luther Burbank Papers, Library of Congress, copy in John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific Library, Stockton, California henceforth to be cited as JMP, Microfilm edition 1 A/19/10652.
2. Luther Burbank Papers, Library of Congress. Information about the Society for the Preservation of National Parks may be found on the "Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco," [www.sfmuseum.org/john/muir.html](http://www.sfmuseum.org/john/muir.html). According to this site, John Muir was the acting president of the Society.
3. Peter Dreyer, *A Gardener Touched With Genius* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1975) 95, 98.
4. Dreyer, 100.
5. Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945) 230.
6. Wolfe, 11.
7. Dreyer, 60.
8. Dreyer, 67.
9. Dreyer, 276.
10. Wolfe, 214.
11. Dreyer, 126.
12. Dreyer, 75-6.
13. Dreyer, 75.
14. Dreyer, 78.
15. Wolfe, 53-4.
16. Dreyer, 77.
17. Dreyer, 70.
18. Dreyer, 71.
19. Wolfe, 77-8.
20. Dreyer, 165.
21. Dreyer, 180.
22. Dreyer, 224.
23. Dreyer, 232.
24. John Muir letter to Luther Burbank, January 6, 1910.
25. Luther Burbank letter to John Muir, January 7, 1910, JMP, Microfilm Edition 1 A/19/10659, copy in Luther Burbank Papers, Library of Congress.
26. Clara Barrus, *The Life and Letters of John Burroughs*, vol. II, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1925, 1953, reissued 1968 by Houghton Mifflin Company), 118.
27. Accounts of these travels written by Clara Barrus may be found in her book *Our Friend John Burroughs* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), *The Century Magazine*, Vol. 80, No. 4, August 1910, and *The Craftsman*, Vol. 23, No. 3, December 1912. All of these are currently available on the Sierra Club's website, [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org). A photograph of the party in the Grand Canyon may be seen in *The John Muir Newsletter*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Fall 2004, 10. A reprint of Mira Abbott Maclay's article, "A Little Talk with John Burroughs," published in the May 16, 1909 issue of the *San Jose Mercury and Herald* may be read in *The John Muir Newsletter*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Fall 1966, 6-7. The author reported the meeting of Burroughs and William Keith the preceding week in Keith's studio in San Francisco. John Muir and poet/scientist Charles Keeler were among the others in attendance.
28. Guest book at the Luther Burbank Home and Gardens, Santa Rosa, California, courtesy of Rebecca Baker, Archivist/Historian.
29. Henry T. Finck, "The Progressive Pacific Coast," February 1910, *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. XLVII, January-June 1910, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 224-5. The photograph of John Burroughs, Charles Keeler, Henry T. Finck, and Luther Burbank is shown on page 220 of the *Scribner's* article. This same photograph, John Muir Papers, B/29/01612, appears on page 6 of this article. Two others with the same background are also in JMP: Burbank alone B/29/01607, and Burbank with Burroughs and others B/29/01613. It is probable that Finck sent these prints to John Muir since one of them also illustrated his article.
30. Guest Book at the Luther Burbank Home and Gardens.
31. Finck, 225-6.
32. Barrus, 130.
33. William Frederic Badè, *The Life and Letters of John Muir*, Vol. II, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), 366-7.
34. "Chronology of the Life and Legacy of John Muir," [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org).
35. Dreyer, 239.
36. Dreyer, 280.
37. Walter L. Howard, *Luther Burbank: A Victim of Hero Worship* (Waltham, MA, *Chronica Botanica*, Vol. IX), 390.
38. W. L. Howard, *Luther Burbank's Plant Contributions*, (Berkeley, CA: California Experiment Station Bulletin 691, March 1945) reprinted with Peter Dreyer, *A Gardener Touched With Genius*, (Santa Rosa, CA: Burbank Home and Gardens, 1993), 18. Note that the 1975 edition of Dreyer's biography cited previously here does not have the Howard supplement. The Muir peach was not created by Luther Burbank nor named in

honor of John Muir, the naturalist. It “originated as a chance seedling on the place of John Muir, near Silveyville [California], named and first propagated by G. W. Thissell, of Winters.” (Edward J. Wickson, *The California Fruits and How to Grow Them*, tenth edition, San Francisco: Pacific Rural Press, 1926), 250. [The Dave Wilson Nursery at [www.davewilson.com](http://www.davewilson.com) under “Peaches” lists the Muir peach in its catalog and states that it was discovered around 1880]. Burbank worked with the Muir peach earlier, crossing it with a nectarine and in six generations producing the new variety he named Opulent (John Y. Beaty, *Luther Burbank Plant Magician*, New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1943), 166-7. Wickson gives 1901 as the announcement date for the Opulent and refers to its parent as a “Muir-Wager” seedling (18). W. L. Howard in *Luther Burbank’s Plant Contributions* observed that the Muir was “claimed by some to be identical with the Wager” (250). Silveyville is now Dixon, California. Little is known about the John Muir on whose property the Muir peach seedling was found. In answer to an inquiry by Jim Tuck, Park Technician for the John Muir National Historic Site, the Solano County Election Department found a John Muir in the county’s *Great Register of 1866-71*. Register #6983 dated September 4, 1871 shows a “John Muir, age 52, born in Iowa, occupation farmer, residing in Silveyville” (“The Muir Peach” fact sheet by Jim Tuck, July 20, 1976, courtesy of David Blackburn, John Muir National Historic Site). Although they had the same name, it should not be assumed that the Silveyville farmer and the naturalist were closely related, if at all. The word *muir* in English is *moor*, a landform feature common in Scotland. Since the surname is not distinctive in Scotland, the naturalist’s Muir ancestors have not been established beyond his grandfather, also named John Muir. The elder John Muir was a soldier in the British Army. He had only one son, Daniel, born in England in 1804, the father of the naturalist (Wolfe, 4).

39. Dreyer, 261-2.

41. Wolfe, 348.

42. Dreyer, 261.

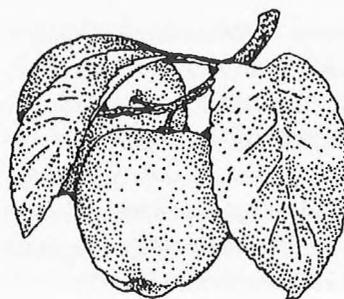
43. Dreyer, 280.

44. Dreyer, 276-7.

45. “Luther Burbank Gardener to the World,” (Santa Rosa, CA: Luther Burbank Museum, 1983).

46. Reminiscence of Elizabeth W. Burbank, n. d., Luther Burbank Papers, Library of Congress, copy in JMP, Microfilm edition V E/51/00404.

47. John Muir’s name is not found in the guest book at the Luther Burbank Home and Gardens in Santa Rosa. But as the Gardens’ archivist/historian has observed, Muir “could have visited without signing the book.” (E-mail to the author from Rebecca Baker October 18, 2006.)
48. In addition to “Chronology of the Life and Legacy of John Muir” already cited, a more detailed “John Muir Chronology” is included in *The Guide and Index to the Microfilm Edition of the John Muir Papers, 1858-1957*, Ronald H. Limbaugh and Kristen E. Lewis, editors (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healy, Inc., 1986), 20-31. This guide is available for use at the Holt-Atherton Collections of the University of the Pacific Library.
49. Between January 1910 and December 1914, John Muir attended only five meetings of the Sierra Club board: January 22 and March 12, 1910; May 4, 1912; March 1 and May 3, 1913. Courtesy of Ellen Byrne, Sierra Club Colby Library, San Francisco, California.
50. John Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1916), 188.
51. John Muir letter to Jeanne C. Carr from Near Snelling, Merced Co., California, July 26, 1868 reprinted in Bonnie Johanna Gisel, ed., *Kindred and Related Spirits* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2001), 71.
52. Badè, 177.
53. Wolfe, 116.
54. Frederick Turner, *Rediscovering America, John Muir in His Time and Ours* (New York: Viking, 1985), 163. Turner cited Melville B. Anderson, “The Conversation of John Muir,” *American Museum Journal*, March 1915 for the “more plausible,” version of Muir’s arrival story.
55. Luther Burbank letter to John Muir, January 7, 1910, JMP, Microfilm Edition 1 A/19/1059, copy in Luther Burbank Papers, Library of Congress.



Drawing taken from:

<http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/NWR/fruit.gif>

**John Muir Center to host symposium on  
*John Sutter & His World, Spring 2008***

On April 25 and 26, 2008, the John Muir Center will host the bi-annual California History Institute. The focus: *John Sutter and His World*. Several scholars have agreed to provide perspectives on Sutter, one of California's most important historic figures. Albert Hurtado of the University of Oklahoma, will keynote the symposium, drawing from his latest book, *John Sutter: A Life on the North American Frontier* (2006). Kenneth Owens of Sacramento State and Iris Engstrand of the University of San Diego have also agreed to attend and to present.

If interested in presenting a paper, please contact W.R. Swagerty through the Center by mail or by e-mail [wswagerty@pacific.edu](mailto:wswagerty@pacific.edu).

We envision an all day field trip on either Thursday, April 24 or Friday, April 25 to Sutter's Old Fort, the California State Library, and to the gold discovery site near Coloma. The symposium itself will be held in Grace Covell Hall on campus at Pacific all day Saturday, April 26, and possibly on Friday, April 25, depending on the number of paper proposals.



***John A. Sutter***

(Picture taken from:

<http://library.thinkquest.org/J001616F/images/John%20A%20Sutter.gif>)

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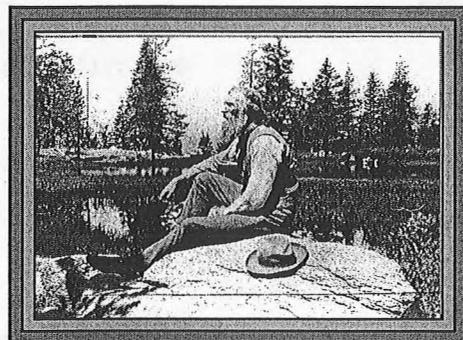
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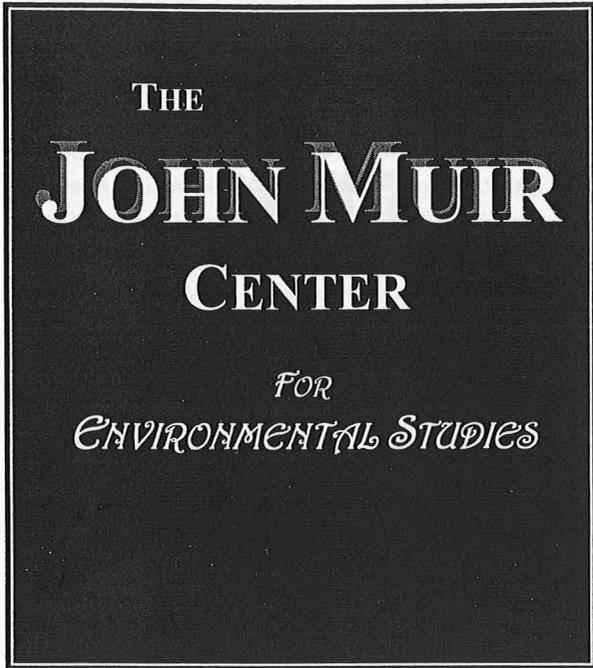
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