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The John Muir Center for Regional Studies

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The
JOHN MUIR
VOLUME 7, NUMBER 4 FALL 1997
NEWSLETTER

INTIMACIES OF A NEW ENGLAND TRIP:

JOHN MUIR'S 1898 EXCURSION BY J. PARKER HUBER

(Editor's note: Parker Huber, a regular contributor to these pages, here excerpts and discusses a few days of John Muir's life from the pages of Muir's journal of 1898 and from his letters.)



John Muir's extensive travels included five trips to New England, which occurred in 1893, 1896, 1898, 1903 and 1911. His longest exposure to New England came in late summer and autumn of 1898. This visit had three phases: first an overnight on Cape Cod, which is considered here, followed by a tour of the South; next a week's train crossing of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine followed by a stay in New York; and closing with a weekend in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts before starting home to Martinez, California.

Boston

John Muir arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, at ten a.m. on Saturday 17 September 1898, completing a ten-day transcontinental trip. He had taken the northern route from San Francisco to Portland, Oregon, to Spokane, Washington. East from there over the Rocky Mountains via the Great Northern Railway. Across the Great Plains where one of the train's engines was replaced by another and another and another. From St. Paul, Minnesota, he caught a night train to Duluth in time for "the last steamer of the season,, through three of the Great Lakes – Superior, Huron, Erie – arriving after three nights in Buffalo, New York, where he boarded the 7:10 p.m. train for New England, emerging at daylight from Hoosac Mountain tunnel in northwestern Massachusetts. Fifty-four years earlier, July 1844, Thoreau had walked over Hoosac Mountain in the opposite direction on his way west to ascend Saddleback Mountain (now Greylock), which he saw from the West Summit of Hoosac Mountain (2,018') six miles west. Muir's train continued south through Connecticut and Rhode Island.¹

New landscapes and people engaged him. His eyes absorbed natural wonders. He wrote

*goldenrod all across the continent. great is goldenrod.*²

This image with others appeared ever so briefly in his journal and letters home, despite "the swaying jolting jumbling car.,³ He may have worked more on his essays on animals and birds of

Yose-mite for the Atlantic. He tried to rest. Mostly, he dished out delectable anecdotes: "I have picked up quite a lot of companions to whom I preach daily. some of them preachers.,⁴ Until Buffalo, where he parted, "feeling very weak & sick.,⁵ according to his journal. He added in a letter to his daughter that "The horrible food and eternal jolting and carbonic acid upset my stomach.,⁶ Dyspepsia was his diagnosis. Dining car menus of the era show the influence of the region crossed, and typically included soup, fish or roast beef, lettuce salad, a choice of vegetables and for dessert, ice cream, cake or pies.⁷ At the Spaulding Hotel in Duluth, Muir had a beefsteak breakfast.⁸ Aboard ship, boiled Lake Superior trout, corned beef and cabbage, pork and beans were the fare.⁹ Always, his elixir of life, tea.

From Boston & Providence Railroad Depot on Park Square Muir went directly to the Adams House at 553 Washington Street, four blocks east, presumably by livery. There he took a room for one dollar, bathed, changed clothes and read a message from Charles Sprague Sargent, Director of the Arnold Arboretum.¹⁰ Sargent had invited Muir and William M. Canby of Wilmington, Delaware, to see the southern Appalachian forests. The previous summer the trio had traveled to British Columbia and Alaska to view western trees. The summer of 1896, Sargent and Muir had surveyed forests from Lake Michigan to the Pacific Ocean for the National Forestry Commission, which Sargent headed. Sargent dedicated to Canby his just completed volume 12 of *The Silva of North America* (1891-1902).¹¹ He had bestowed the same honor on Muir in the previous volume, which appeared earlier that year. ". . . it made my heart jump with joy as no other honor I have received ever did., Muir wrote to Sargent. ¹² In response, Sargent wrote Muir, declaring, "For if there is any man who loves and knows trees, and knows how to write about them better than anybody else, you are the Fellow.,¹³

Cape Cod

A weary Muir was moving. The group's destination Sargent had told him: "a spot where you will find a great many things to interest you.,¹⁴ Sargent had enticed Muir to "pass a few days on the end of Cape Cod where my family goes for a few weeks every summer.,, promising seclusion from Boston entertainment as well.¹⁵

(continued on page 3)

NEWS NOTES:

NEW BOOKS FROM THE JOHN MUIR CENTER

The John Muir Center announces the continuation of its series of volumes based on the California History Institute conferences. The Center staff has completed the editing of the most outstanding papers from last year's conference devoted to the work of John Muir. The volume will consist of over one dozen essays, and it will feature an introductory essay written especially for this volume by the well-known Muir scholar, Frank Buske, Professor Emeritus of the University of Alaska. The chapters of the book, tentatively entitled John Muir in Historical Perspective, focus on various aspects of Muir's career. Muir and literature is one example; others are on Muir and various locales, such as Twenty Hill Hollow, the Pacific Northwest, South America and southern Africa and, of course, Yosemite. Other chapters will deal with individuals in Muir's life such as Jeanne Carr, the Strenzels, Josiah Dwight Whitney, Clarence King, C. D. Robinson, and John Swett. A final group of chapters deal with Muir and the environment. A forthcoming issue will provide information on publisher, date of publication and price when these details are set.

The John Muir Center is very pleased to announce that later this year a volume containing some of the best presentations made to the 1995 History Institute on the topic of California and the Pacific Rim will be published in England by Routledge Press. Studies in the Economic History of the Pacific Rim contains fourteen chapters, an introductory essay, and has been edited by Professors Sally M. Miller and Dennis O. Flynn of the University of the Pacific and Professor John Latham of the University of Swansea in Wales. As soon as the date of publication is announced, readers of this newsletter will be informed of the price and how to order their copies.

JOHN MUIR EDUCATION DISCUSSION MAILING LIST

The John Muir Education Discussion List is sponsored by the Environmental Education Committee of the Sierra Club to host discussions about the life and contributions of the Sierra Club's founder, John Muir. The purpose of the list is to aid Muir researchers, teachers, and enthusiasts. The list is quite new, but you can read the past postings to the Discussion List at: http://www.sierraclub.org/education/john_muir_education/1997/.

New subscribers are welcome. Participants may discuss anything about John Muir. The list covers projects relating to the Sierra Club's John Muir Education Project – the John Muir Day Study Guide, the John Muir Youth Award program, and the John Muir Exhibit World Wide Web site, http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit. Teachers in K-12 or college teaching are especially invited to participate. Anyone, whether or not a Sierra Club member, may subscribe.


Here is the basic information about the new list: 1. List Name/Address: CE-EE-JOHN-MUIR-EDUCATION; 2. List Owner's Name: Harold Wood; 3. List Owner's E-mail Address: hwood@lightspeed.net; 4. Sierra Club Sponsoring Entity: Environmental Education Committee; 5. Unmoderated; 6. Archives: Weekly; 7. Review of Archives: Public. More information and discussion list archives will be posted to the Sierra Club's World Wide Web site: http://www.sierraclub.org/education/john_muir_education/; 8. List Subscription Address: LISTSERV@LISTS.SIERRACLUB.ORG;

9. List Subscription Instructions: Send an e-mail message to [cut and paste into your e-mail]: LISTSERV@LISTS.SIERRACLUB.ORG with a one-line command in the message body saying [substitute your first and last name where indicated]: SUBSCRIBE CE-EE-JOHN-MUIR-EDUCATION Yourfirstname Yourlastname. The subject line is irrelevant. We look forward to your participation!

For questions, contact: Harold Wood, John Muir Education Project Coordinator, Sierra Club Environmental Education Committee, hwood@lightspeed.net.

BACKPACKING FOR ACADEMIC CREDIT

Newsletter readers will be interested to learn of the exciting program of wilderness field studies sponsored by the Sierra Institute and scheduled for fall, 1997. As part of the Extension Division of the University of California of Santa Cruz, a two-week backpacking session has been scheduled for September 2-October 17 to explore the ecology of the Sierra. A second session on California wilderness, or nature, philosophy and religion, has been scheduled for September 10 to November 5. Each earns 15 units for enrollees. For detailed information, contact the Sierra Institute, University of California Extension, 740 Front St., Suite 155, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. The Institute has also scheduled a number of field trips for the summer. They include one on the mountain ecology of the High Sierra (June 26-July 16) and another on nature philosophy and California's wilderness (July 15-August 18). These may be fully enrolled by now, but contact the Sierra Institute about its waiting list.



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INTIMACIES OF A NEW ENGLAND TRIP *(continued...)*

Their means of transportation, though undisclosed, was assuredly a train. Their route was from Boston south to New Bedford, then east to Buzzards Bay, crossing Monument River (now Cape Cod Canal), and south along Cape Cod's west coast, a sandy moraine of pitch pines and scrub oaks, cranberry bogs and strawberries, and small villages with glimpses of water. A stretch of the last four miles from Falmouth ran between the ocean with cormorants and eiders and ponds with cattails and reeds, saltspray rose and bittersweet.

*Fine woods all the way perhaps 90 m[ile]s.
Many fine residences of rich people seeking
summer coolness.
Magnificent Asters & goldenrods
deep glacial bays. heavy drift
Extreme end of Cape sandy*

Two and a half hours and 72 miles later, they arrived in Woods Hole. The depot is now displaced by a ferry terminal for transportation to the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Sargent's home was not far: a mile east past the north end of Little Harbor, then south three-quarters mile down Church Street (which passes over the railroad, now a bicycle path, from Falmouth). While it could be a pleasant stroll, the two men laden with baggage likely came by carriage, though Muir had lightened his load in New York.

*Lost small grip by mistake of a gentleman who
left his in exchange.*

From Church Street a long drive descended to the back of a gracious home that incorporated the oldest dwelling in the village, once an inn.¹⁶ A veranda extended across the south and west faces of the house. The south side door opened into a reception area with a dining room to the right and parlor to the left, both with shallow brick fireplaces. Beyond the dining room were a commodious kitchen and pantry; beyond the parlor, another entry way, this one with stairs to the second-floor bedrooms. They arrived in time for tea.

*Met Mrs. Sargent & the fine girls & manly boys
just getting ready for Harvard.*

Twenty-five years earlier at Emmanuel Church in Boston on 26 November 1873, Charles Sargent, then thirty-two, had married Mary Allen Robeson, twenty, a woman of refinement, wealth and, like Muir, of Scottish background. Asa Gray of Harvard, who the previous summer had been botanizing in Yosemite Valley with John Muir, attended their wedding. Surely he told them about Muir.¹⁷

The Sargents had five children, three daughters and two sons. The oldest, Henrietta, twenty-four, was not present, having married Guy Lowell earlier that year. Muir greeted Molly (Mary) and Alice, twenty and sixteen, respectively. On 25 January 1908, Molly would marry Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch Potter of Columbia University and reside in New York. Alice remained single and lived at home in Brookline. Andrew Robeson, twenty-two that December, and Charles, four years younger, would graduate from Harvard in 1900 and 1902 (as their father had in 1862), and pursue careers in landscape architecture and finance, respectively.¹⁸

After graduation, Andrew or "Bobo,, as he was called, worked in the Boston office of his brother-in-law, Guy Lowell. Muir came to know Andrew best of the family. Five years later, Muir and Andrew and Sargent traveled around the world. From

May to December 1903, from Boston to Shanghai, they explored gardens and forests, collecting a trove of seeds, before going their separate ways. The Sargents returned home, where Andrew reported to the press the "incalculable value,, of their study.¹⁹ In his short life, Andrew designed superb gardens on Cape Cod, the North Shore, Islesboro (Maine), and Long Island. He died of pneumonia in 1918 at age forty-two.²⁰

*Still sick and unable to eat the fine dinner
prepared for me – a miserable trip,*

Muir closed his diary for this day. His ill health precluded any leisurely feast enlivened by story telling, any strolls along the shore, any engagement with the environment, spirited or otherwise.

The next day, Sunday 18 September 1898, Muir was still healing. His diary contained only twenty words. As there is nothing about Cape Cod, Muir must have stayed put. At least he could absorb the view of Little Harbor, of sprintsails and ferries crossing Vineyard Sound, of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands, the closest being Nonamesset, two miles distant, and almost touching it, the largest in the chain, Naushon.

On one of those Elizabeth Islands, Penikese – which Muir could not see – a co-educational summer school of natural history had been created in 1873 by Harvard professor Louis Agassiz, whose glacial theories informed Muir's.²¹ In August 1872, ill-health had prevented Agassiz from meeting John Muir in California and seeing the Sierra Nevada. Later, in 1893, Muir made a pilgrimage to Agassiz's homeland. In Neuchâtel, Switzerland, at whose university Agassiz was professor of natural history from 1832 until his coming to the United States in 1846, Muir observed: "another beautiful & quaint old town on the shore of a lovely lake more than 20 miles long.,,"²² Here Agassiz, in a stone shelter dubbed "Hotel des Neuchâtelois,, on the great medial moraine of Aar glacier, monitored the motion of the ice.

But now a late afternoon train carried Muir and Sargent back to Boston. The family stayed in Woods Hole. The boys did not have to be at Harvard until later in September, and the girls were not in school.

In fact, Molly was bound for Europe to join her older sister, Henrietta, in Paris.²³ On October 26, Sargent and Muir escorted her to New York where they stayed at the Albermarle Hotel, on Madison Square West,

a small but expensive & convenient house,
was how Muir described it, where they had a "fine champagne supper" with her suitor, Mr. Jay, with whom they relaxed the next day

*Sargent teases him by inviting me to ship to see Molly
off taking his place in carriage. Amusing half earnest
talk with Jay advising him to run away & leave all –
ropes would not hold me I said.*

Meanwhile, back in Boston from Cape Cod on 18 September, Muir had a

fine drive in Sargent's cab thru park to Brookline

Their route – four westward miles – to Holm Lea, Sargent's home, probably followed the Back Bay Fens and Muddy River greenway created by Frederick Law Olmsted. Since 1883 Olmsted had lived across Warren Street from Sargent at #99. Though Muir and Olmsted had much in common, and it would have been convenient for them to meet here, they never did. Failing memory

ITIMACIES OF A NEW ENGLAND TRIP (continued...)

forced Olmsted's retirement in 1895, at age 73. He was secluded on Deer Island, Maine, until September 1898, when his wife Mary committed him to McLean Asylum in nearby Waverly (Belmont), Massachusetts, where he died 28 August 1903.²⁴

Upon arrival, Muir noted

Eat toast & to bed

The next day, Muir recuperated at Sargent's.

sleeping sauntering reading still sick.

Their only visitor was Walter H. Page, whom they telegraphed to come for lunch. Page, 43, had just assumed the editorship of *The Atlantic* in August. Three years previously, he had come to the magazine as an assistant to the editor, Horace E. Scudder. Serendipity brought Page and Sargent together in February 1897. The editor wanted articles on forests and Sargent knew the perfect person. They both wrote John Muir asking for his blessing.²⁵ Muir agreed to write an article but not immediately. He had a commitment to *Harper's* for "The National Parks and Forest Reservations," which appeared in June. August's *Atlantic* carried Muir's "The American Forests,"²⁶ From then on, Muir's work was welcome at *The Atlantic*. His "Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West," followed in January 1898, and "Yellowstone National Park," in April.

*had good chat.
Smart fellow*

They conversed for two hours. They probably outlined their upcoming southern trip for Page who was a North Carolinian. Their main topic was literature. Page liked Muir's "bird and beast articles," which he published in November and December.²⁷ In 1899, he published another Muir park piece; two more the next year and the next. These ten essays became, *Our National Parks*, published by Houghton Mifflin and Company of Boston in 1901. "To you and Sargent," Muir thanked Page, "it owes its existence; for before I got your urgent and encouraging letters I never dreamed of writing such a book,"²⁸

Muir would be at Page's home - 9 Riedesel Avenue, Cambridge - on October 25th. There he met Page's wife, Willia Alice Wilson, "Allie," Married since 15 November 1880, they had four children, three boys and a girl. In the afternoon, Muir

and Allie called on Jane Loring Gray, at 79 Garden Street, a few blocks north, whom he had met with her husband in California in 1877. Jane had been married to Asa almost forty years before he died (1848-1888). Apparently, Muir spent the night with the Pages.²⁹ Seven years later, in spring of 1905, the Pages would be guests of the Muirs in Martinez, California.³⁰

On Tuesday 20 September, Muir and Sargent went South through mid-October. This New England time had renewed Muir's friendship with Sargent, as well as acquainting him with Walter Page and also Cape Cod. More memories of New Englanders and their landscape awaited him.

*Extreme end of Cape Sandy.
Met Mrs Sargent & the family
gardens & many boys just getting
ready for Harvard.
Still sick unable to eat the fine
dinner prepared for me - a
marvelous trip
18 Return to Boston arrive at
8 P.M. from dinner in Sargent's
Cab thro park to Brookline -
Eat toast & to bed.
19 Spend the day at Sargent's
'sleeping sauntering reading
still sick. Met Walter H. Page
had good chat - smart fellow
20. Got out for N.Y. & South
beautiful groves of oak elm
etc. walk in Virginia
21. Charming view scenery
* fields of corn cabbages, some
green. at 8 P.M. Arrive at
Cranbury Inn. from place
lonely leafy basket place
Amelanchier 30 ft high ground
Juniperus. Viper. Magnolia
Gum. Oxydendron Chestnut
Siberian oak
22 Rem all day pouring.*

A page from John Muir's *New England Journal*

(Author's note: All quotations from unpublished material in the John Muir Papers are by permission of the Holt Atherton Library, copyright 1984 Muir-Hanna Trust. My gratitude to Daryl Morrison and Janane Ford of the Holt Atherton for their help).

Notes

1. Letter, John Muir to Louie Muir, 13 September 1898, Duluth, Minnesota, John Muir Papers, Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections, University of the Pacific, (hereafter, JMP) The Hoosac Tunnel, 4 3/4 miles, was completed in 1875.
2. John Muir Journal, (hereafter, JMJ) 12 September 1898, (JMP).
3. Letter, John Muir to Helen Muir, 10 September 1898, Montana, (JMP).
4. Letter, to John Muir to Louie Muir, 13 September 1898, Duluth, Minnesota, (JMP).
5. JMJ, 16 September 1898, (JMP).
6. Letter, John Muir to Wanda Muir, 20 September 1898, Boston, Massachusetts, (JMP).
7. See William A. McKenzie, *Dining Car Line to the Pacific: An Illustrated History of the NP Railway's "Famously Good" Food, with 150 Authentic Recipes* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1990); *Great Northern Secrets* (no publisher, no date). Connie Hoffman, Secretary of the Great Northern Railway Historical Society, Berkley, Michigan, dates this booklet of dining car recipes to 1932. She has no menus before 1920 in her collection. James E. Vance, Jr., *The North American Railroad: Its Origin, Evolution and Geography* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995).
8. Letter, John Muir to Louie Muir, 13 September 1898, Duluth, Minnesota, (JMP).
9. Though Muir does not identify his steamer, it was most likely one of three iron ones - *India, China, Japan* - of the Anchor Line of the Erie & Western Transportation Company. Its 1896 brochure gives a flavor of what Muir experienced: "Running water, electric lights and the best beds in each room. . . Wide promenade decks extend entirely around the steamer. . . The Excellence of the Table is an especial feature of this line. . . And later under "Of Interest to Tourists," "The epicurean who enjoys a fish diet will appreciate the delicious Lake Trout and Whitefish always included in the menu on the steamers of this line. . . My gratitude to C. Patrick Labadie, Director, Canal Park Marine Museum, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Duluth, Minnesota. The menus consulted of the period show little change.

10. For a photograph of Boston and Providence Railroad Station in Park Square and for construction of South Station see Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History* (1959; Harvard University Press, 1975), 102 and 189, respectively. Until South Station was completed in 1900, railroads had various terminals.

This Adams House (1883) closed in 1927 and was demolished in 1931. Calvin Coolidge resided here while serving Massachusetts as lieutenant governor and governor. An earlier Adams House occupied this site from 1846 to 1883, the successor of the Lamb Tavern. See John Harris, *Historic Walks in Old Boston* (1982; The Globe Pequot Press, 1989), 192-193. A closed Paramount Theatre (b. 1932) sits here now in disrepair, two blocks southeast of the Common.

11. William M. Canby (1831-1904) discovered a new species of Hawthorn in Wilmington, Delaware, in October 1898, which Sargent named *Crataegus Canbyi* in his honor. I cannot verify that Muir and Sargent were with him at the time, though it is likely. For description of the plant and a biography of Canby, see Charles S. Sargent *The Silva of North America* (1902; Peter Smith, 1947), 41-42. Drawing of plant by Charles Edward Faxton follows on unnumbered page.
12. Letter, John Muir to Charles S. Sargent, 11 May 1898, Martinez, California, (JMP). No copies of *The Silva of North America* remain in Muir's library at the University of the Pacific.
13. Letter, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 2 June 1898, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, (JMP). Muir reviewed *The Silva of North America* and sent it to Perry Bliss, editor of *The Atlantic*, 4 Park Street, Boston, Massachusetts, 2 March 1903. Bliss replied 19 March that he was pleased. It appeared in *The Atlantic*, July 1903 (9-22), while Muir and Sargent were traveling around the world. See letter, John Muir to Charles S. Sargent, 1 March 1903, Martinez, California, (JMP).
14. Letter, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 13 July 1898, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, (JMP).
15. Letter, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 15 June 1898, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, (JMP).
16. William B. Bacon and Charles S. Sargent – identified incorrectly as G. S. Sargent – came down by buggy from Barnstable “one summer’s day,, – year not given – and bought property jointly; a toss of the coin decided Sargent would have the house, Bacon, the open point to the south. So relates Winslow Carlton in “Bankers’ Row,, in Mary Lou Smith, ed., *Woods Hole Reflections* (Woods Hole Historical Collection, 1983), 144 and 146. On page 13, an undated photograph (probably 1895) shows an earlier form of the Sargent house with carriage house on a treeless lot with stone walls. Today the house cannot be seen from the road. Page 23 offers a view of Little Harbor in 1896. Carlton recounts the same story in “A Stroll Through Woods Hole in the ‘Twenties,, in Mary Lou Smith, ed., *The Book of Falmouth* (Falmouth Historical Commission, 1986), 522. The Sargent House is shown as it appeared in 1895 on page 486 (captioned “Abner Davis’ inn. . .”); a contemporary view is on page 523.

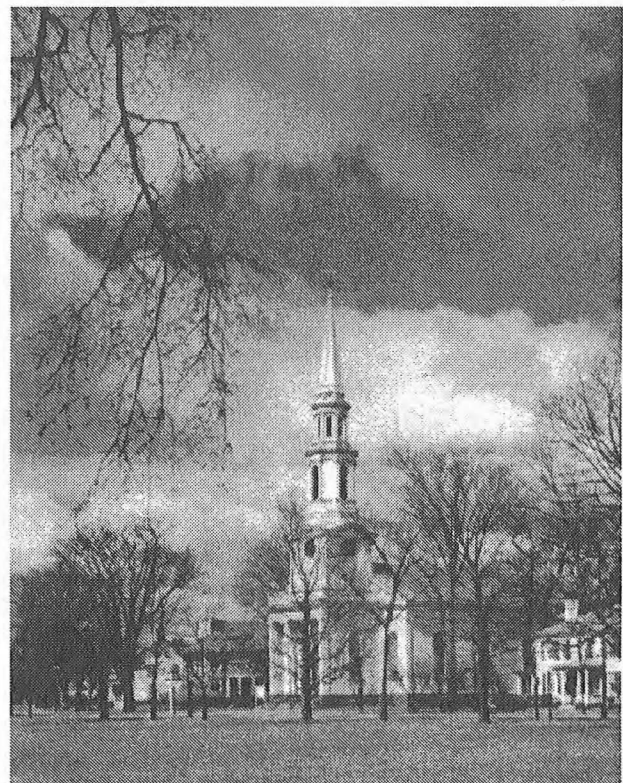
My query to the Woods Hole Historical Commission led to its discovery that the Charles S. Sargent home had been miscited as G. S. Sargent. Letter, J. S. Gaines, Archivist, to J. Parker Huber, 12 January 1995, Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

This house is now known as the Rowe House. The current owner, Mrs. William S. Rowe of Cincinnati, Ohio, has been here virtually every summer since her birth in 1918. Her great-grandfather was William B. Bacon (1823-1906). Her grandfather was Robert Bacon (1860-1919; see *Dictionary of American Biography*, hereafter DAB), a partner of J.P. Morgan and assistant Secretary of State, 1905-1909. Muir and Robert Bacon had Theodore Roosevelt as a mutual friend; Bacon and TR graduated from Harvard in the class of 1880. On 10 October 1883, Bacon married Martha W. Cowdin (1859-1940). Their daughter, Martha B. Bacon (1890-1967), on 2 June 1914 married George Whitney (1885-1963), a banker and a president of J. P. Morgan & Company. Their daughter, Martha Phyllis Whitney, married William S. Rowe (1916-1988), also a banker (President of the Fifth Third Bank, Cincinnati, Ohio) in 1939. After Robert Bacon died, his widow, Mrs. Rowe’s grandmother, bought the Sargent house.

17. S. B. Sutton, *Charles Sprague Sargent and the Arnold Arboretum* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), 20. Sargent’s Cape Cod connection came as news to Sutton when I spoke with her 29 March 1995.
18. DAB, Charles Sprague Sargent; DAB, Guy Lowell, reports marriage in April 1898; thanks to Arnold Arboretum Librarians, Carol David and Rebecca Anderson, my source for dates is Emma Worcester Sargent, arr., *Epes Sargent of Gloucester and his Descendants* (Houghton Mifflin, 1923), 158. For Andrew and Charles see *Epes Sargent*. . . 158-160 and Harvard College Class Reports and Bibliographic Files, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
19. *Boston Evening Record*, 29 December 1903, 6.
20. His brother Charles S. Sargent died 13 February 1959.
21. New York tobacco tycoon, John Anderson, gave the island and \$50,000 for the school. Edward Luire, *Louis Agassiz: A Life in Science* (1960; Baltimore,

Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 380-381. Muir knew of this school. See letter, Kate N. Daggett to John Muir, 19 April 1873, Hot Springs, Arkansas, JMP.

22. Letter, John Muir to Wanda Muir, 25 August 1903, St. Moritz, Switzerland, (JMP).
23. Letter, John Muir to Wanda Muir, 28 October 1898, New York City, (JMP).
24. There is no correspondence between them. No books of Frederick Law Olmsted are in Muir’s library. Mary Olmsted continued to live at 99 Warren Street until her death in 1913. Muir does not mention seeing her. See Elizabeth Stevenson, *Parkmaker: A Life of Frederick Law Olmsted* (McMillan Publishing Co., 1977), 426-427; Laura Wood Roper, *Frederick Law Olmsted* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 474-475, 478.
25. Letters, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 26 February 1897, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts; Walter H. Page to John Muir, 4 March 1897, Boston, Massachusetts, (JMP).
26. Letter, Charles S. Sargent to John Muir, 22 June 1897, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, (JMP).
27. Letter, John Muir to Wanda Muir, 22 September 1898, Cranberry, North Carolina, (JMP).
28. Letter, John Muir to Walter H. Page, 10 January 1902, Martinez, California, in William F. Bade, *Life and Letters of John Muir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), II: 341-343.
29. JMJ; Letter, John Muir to Wanda Muir, 28 October 1898, New York, New York, (JMP).
30. Letters, John Muir to Walter Page, 9 May 1905, Martinez, California; Walter Page to John Muir, 21 December 1905, Englewood, New Jersey, (JMP). In 1899, Page joined the new publishing house of Doubleday, Page & Company in New York. The next year, he founded *The World’s Work* of which he was editor until 1913. (DAB.) B. J. Hendrick, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page* (Doubleday, Page, 1922-1925), 3 volumes. B. J. Hendrick, *The Training of an American: The Earlier Life and Letters of Walter H. Page, 1855-1913* (Houghton Mifflin, 1928) contains four of his letters to Muir, 305-307. Walter H. Page, *A Publisher’s Confession* (Doubleday, Page, 1923) does not mention Muir. Ellen B. Ballou, *The Building of the House: Houghton Mifflin’s Formative Years* (Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 457, views Muir in the *Atlantic* as “One of Page’s singular triumphs. . .”



WAS JOHN MUIR A DEEP ECOLOGIST? BY MANDY DAVIS

(Editor's note: A graduate student in history at University of the Pacific, Mandy Davis presented this paper at the 1996 John Muir Conference).

To answer the question posed by this title, one first has to understand what the term "deep ecology," means. Throughout much of history the pervasive viewpoint has been that humans are at the top of a hierarchy of species and that all of nature exists for human benefit and use. Since the 1960s, this view has been under attack. Radical environmentalists contend that humans are not superior to the rest of nature. According to Arne Naess, who in 1973 coined the term "deep ecology," the idea that humans are superior to nature is in keeping with a tradition of dominance of "humans over nonhuman Nature, masculine over the feminine, wealthy and powerful over the poor, with the dominance of the West over non-Western cultures."¹ Deep ecology claims that there is no separation between any of these and "that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization. . . This basic intuition is that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as parts of the inter-related whole, are equal in intrinsic worth."²

To call John Muir a deep ecologist in a literal sense is of course anachronistic. It presupposes he knew the science of ecology, which was not fully developed in Muir's lifetime. The term ecology, first coined in the 1870s and used to describe the physical environment, expanded in meaning and application only after Muir's death. In 1916 Frederic Clements began to talk of plant formations as systems of organisms which existed independently of humans and human activities. In the 1930s Arthur Tansley claimed that nature was comprised of many interconnected systems made up of both organic and inorganic components.³ Aldo Leopold in that same decade began to develop an "ecological consciousness," adding a moral component later articulated in his *Sand County Almanac*.⁴ Since then the definition has continued to change. By the 1990s most ecologists had radically shifted from the original premise of order and predictability to the theory of a chaotic universe where nature is unpredictable and erratic.⁵

Along with changes in definition there have been corresponding changes in the meaning of the human-nature relationship. George P. Marsh, believing in a natural balance between humans and nature, was one of the first to warn that Americans were progressively destroying that balance.⁶ The accelerated pace of industrialization late in the 19th century led to decreasing supplies of natural resources, which in turn led to the conservation movement. However, even as the movement was being formed, it was already splintering into a fight between utilitarian conservationists, who advocated "wise use," of all resources, and preservationists, who wanted to save uniquely beautiful wilderness areas for their "contrast value," and as havens from the stresses of civilization. John Muir's battle to save Hetch Hetchy is the classic example of this conflict.

Deep ecologists have two grounds for adopting Muir as a patron saint. One is his belief in an ethic which "assigns inviolable rights to everything that lived, and at the same time denied that any being was made primarily for the sake of humanity."⁷ The other is his assertion of cosmic unity, incapsulated in his famous aphorism that if ". . . we try to pick out anything in Nature, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."⁸ Both of these views, broadened and integrated into a holistic philosophy, are bedrock principles of deep ecology today.

But were Muir's religious views compatible with modern biocentric thinking? Muir believed in the sacredness, not necessarily the equality, of all life. Though he belonged to no formal church and held no formal creed, he retained a religious intensity in his demeanor, as Edwin Teale described:

The forests and the mountains formed his temple. His approach to all nature was worshipful. He saw everything evolving yet everything the direct handiwork of God. A spiritual and religious exaltation enveloped his experiences with nature. And he came down from the mountains like some bearded prophet to preach of the beauty and healing he had found in this natural temple where he worshipped.⁹

Nature for Muir was a Divine gift, with humans the beneficiary. As R. H. Limbaugh has written, "To him, pristine wilderness, the sublime expression of the ultimate good, restored the human spirit and stimulated man's creative powers. . . thus Muir found intellectual and spiritual reasons for saving wild nature: it benefitted man in nonmaterial ways."¹⁰ This viewpoint is essentially anthropocentric. Even while defending the ethic that all life forms have inherent worth, Muir did not claim that preservation was essential for biotic diversity, or the health of the land, or "any other reason that could be considered part of the basic arsenal of modern ecological science."¹¹ Even his concern for the watersheds in the Sierra was basically a concern for the agricultural interests in the valley.

Muir believed that nature and Christian scripture were complementary. That was not a new idea in Christian history, as Dennis Williams has noted. "Muir was not unique in envisioning a reciprocal relationship between natural revelation and scriptural revelation; in fact it was a concept that ran throughout Old Testament revelation and was a component of Jesus' parabolic sermons and of Paul's Gospel to the Romans found in his epistle to Christians in that city."¹² Medieval Christianity also produced thinkers who held ideas of an "organic wholeness and biocentric equality," to use today's terminology. Lynn White, Jr. described Saint Francis of Assisi as a Christian theologian who "tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures."¹³

Central to Muir's theology was the belief that he experienced God directly, an idea perfectly in tune with traditional Christian dogma. Yet Muir rejected the dogmas of denominational Christianity. He was a reformer, a mystic more comfortable with the spirituality of the early church than with its materialistic later manifestations.¹⁴

Muir also believed in divine purpose. He saw changes in the wilderness as a sign of God's continuous creation, giving these changes purpose and direction. "How lavish is Nature," he wrote, "building, pulling down, creating, destroying, chasing every material particle from form to form, ever changing. . ."¹⁵ His own life was shaped by the same process. After the accident in which he almost lost his eye, Muir made his momentous decision to go south, heading for the woods. He could find no joy apart from wild nature, and being true to himself was following Divine Will. "God has to nearly kill us sometimes to teach us lessons," he wrote.¹⁶ His friend, Mrs. Jeanne Carr, encouraged him in this belief when she wrote:

I have often in my heart wondered what God was training you for. He gave you the eye within the eye, to see in all natural objects the realized ideas of His mind. He gave you pure tastes, and the sturdy preference of whatsoever is most lovely and excellent. He made you a more individualized

existence than is common, and by your very nature, removed you from common temptations. . . He will surely place you where your work is.¹⁷

Transcendentalism played an important role in Muir's view of nature. Emerson claimed that it was possible to become "a transparent eyeball,, where nature and self very nearly became one. By accepting nature as the mirror image of one's soul, it was difficult for one to feel separated from nature. This made it easy to find in nature both aesthetic and moral value. Muir's transcendent view of nature might have been written by Emerson himself:



How infinitely superior to our physical senses are those of the mind! The spiritual eye sees not only rivers of water but of air. It sees the crystals of the rock in rapid sympathetic motion, giving enthusiastic obedience to the sun's rays, then sinking back to rest in the night. . . imagination gives us the sweet music of tiniest insect wings, enables us to hear all around the world, the vibration of every needle, the waving of every bole and branch, the sound of stars in circulation. . . the power of imagination makes us infinite.¹⁸

Muir often talked of the healing power of the wilderness, claiming that "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world – the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness or civilization drops off, and the wounds heal ere we are aware.,"¹⁹

The sense of harmony and unity which one found in nature was for Muir the source of this healing power. He believed that

Our crude civilization engenders a multitude of wants, and law givers are ever at their wits end devising. The hall and the theater and the church have been invented, and compulsory education. Why not add compulsory recreation? Our fore-fathers forged chains of duty and habit, which bind us notwithstanding our boasted freedom, and we ourselves in desperation add link to link, groaning and making medicinal laws for relief. Yet few think of pure rest or of the healing power of Nature.²⁰

Muir's importance rests on both advocacy and action. He was among the "amateur radicals,, as Stephen Fox calls them, who were the first to bring to the public attention fears about the endangerment of ancient forests, or wildlife or rivers. Their motivation was neither economic nor professional. It was often just a love of nature. In essence, Muir became the legend, the mythological figure who could, *and would*, fight nationally for the preservation of American wilderness.

Rather than being described as a "deep ecologist,, Muir is better thought of as a wilderness prophet, a "pilgrim to the wild,, in John P. O'Grady's phrase.²¹ That he developed ideas which could be considered ecological in nature was due to his observations while living, breathing, and immersing himself in the nature he loved so much. And while he was not a deep ecologist, many of his thoughts and ideas made him a forerunner of the biocentric thinking of later ecologists. Through his writings and example, he continues to have a voice in the present day environmental movement. Muir the conservationist, like other "great poets, philosophers, prophets, able men whose thoughts and deeds have moved the world,,²² came down from the mountains to gather together disciples to fight for the protection of his beloved wilderness.

NOTES

1. George Sessions and Bill Devall, "Deep Ecology,, in *American Environmentalism*, ed. Roderick Nash (NY: McGraw Publishing Co., 1990), 310.
2. *Ibid.*, 312.
3. Carolyn Merchant, ed., *Major Problems in American Environmental History* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1993), 444.

4. *Sand County Almanac*, as quoted in Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology – Living As If Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), 86.
5. Merchant, 444.
6. *Ibid.*, 339.
7. Thurman Wilkins, *John Muir – Apostle of Nature* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 270.
8. *Ibid.*, 269.
9. Edwin Way Teale, *The Wilderness World of John Muir* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1954), xiii.
10. Ronald Limbaugh, "Introduction,, in *John Muir, Life and Work*, ed. Sally Miller (Albuquerque, NM: University of Mexico Press, 1993), 9.
11. *Ibid.*, 10.
12. Dennis Williams, "John Muir, Christian Mysticism and the Spiritual Value of Nature,, in *John Muir, Life and Work*, ed. Sally Miller (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 87.
13. Lynn White, Jr., "Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,, in *Science*, Vol. 155, No. 3767, 10 Mar. 1967, p. 1206.
14. Williams, 90.
15. Wilkins, 270.
16. Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *The Life of John Muir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 104.
17. *Ibid.*, 104-105.
18. Teale, 320-21.
19. *Ibid.*, 315.
20. *Ibid.*, 319-320.
21. John P. O'Grady, *Pilgrims to the Wild* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993).
22. Teale, 319-320.

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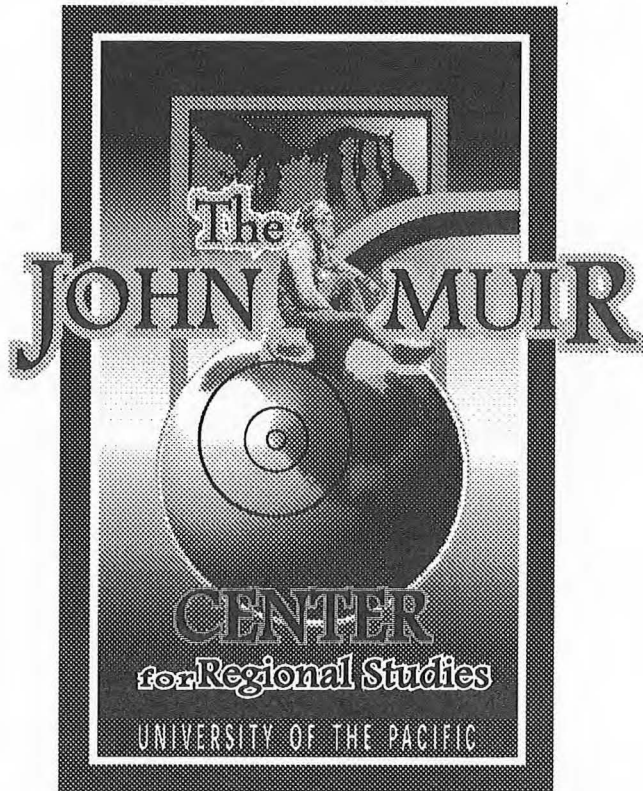
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