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## Reminiscence of John Muir by Brown, Alfred Bradley

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[Alexandria, So. Dakota, April 9, 1917]

Mr W<sup>m</sup> Frederic Bader,

Boston, Mass.

My Dear Sir,

At your request I will send you as many of the letters of the late John Muir as I shall be able to find, one I received from him while I was in the Army during the Civil War, I will also write a few personal reminiscences of our boy hood days, and later. About the year 1856 the Muir family removed from a farm in one part of the township of Buffalo, Marquette Co, Wis, to another farm in the same township owned by Mr Muir in our locality. This brought them within our school district. The following winter the Muir children including John and his two brothers David and Daniel, and I think two of his sisters Mary and Anna, attended school at a log school house, built by the early settlers of that time, the counterpart of the little "Red school house" in the Eastern States. The teacher who

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taught the school that winter was a Mr George Branch from the state of N.Y. It was at this school that I first became acquainted with John Muir and ever after were life long friends. Upon invitation I visited him at this time at his home, where he showed me many of his mechanical contrivances and inventions as a boy. Among them was a clock, a model for an automatic saw mill, and many other curious things. He had nearly completed a very large clock to be placed upon the barn, and in a very enthusiastic manner assured me that "they could tell the <sup>time</sup> of day from that clock any where on the farm". The plan included that a hole be cut in the roof of the barn and the pendulum to swing inside. To this his father sternly objected and refused to allow him to put up the clock, greatly to the disappointment of the boy. He made another clock however that afterwards became famous. After his twenty first birth day, he

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left home to attend the University at Madison Wis, taking his clock with him, carrying it in a grain sack, exciting the curiosity of many people that he met on the way. He also informed me that during the early part of his attendance at the University, he desired to place his clock in one of the rooms of the building, and asked the President of the College for permission, and also where he should place it. After an examination of the clock the President told him "he could put it in any place that he desired, a boy that could construct a clock like that, had the privilege of placing it in any room in the building that he saw fit." In financing his way through college, he was obliged to earn the money <sup>to do it</sup>. His father having refused to help him, and teaching school was one of the means of doing it. He engaged to teach school one winter south of the City of Madison. His boarding place was a long walk from the school house and the snow was deep, one writer says that "he built a machine which lighted the fire for him every morning."

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Mr Muir told the writer of these lines that he set the clock at night to start the fire at a given hour in the morning by uniting acids, forming a combustion, thus starting the fire. Before leaving the school house at night he made careful preparation for lighting the fire in the morning. He described the first morning that the clock started the fire as follows: "when the time arrived for the fire to be started the whole family when he boarded were out in the door yard watching the school house, soon a little smoke was seen coming out of the chimney, increasing in volume until there was a column of smoke rising gracefully in the frosty air and settled back in the adjacent forest." In the summer of 1867 just before John Muir started on his botanical trip to the Gulf, he made his parents and relatives a visit, also visiting among the old neighbors, when we were favored by a visit from him and his brother David at my home, where after a few hours visit he bade

us adieu. I little realized at the time that it would be forty one years before we would meet again. In the spring of 1908 I visited him at his home near Martinez Calif, where he met me at the train, and was received with a cordial greeting. He was at this time living alone by himself. His youngest daughter who had been ill, was sent to a sanitarium in the south eastern part of the state, a few days previous to my arrival, taking with her a pet dog and pony for companions. I spent nearly a week with him in a delightful visit, was entertained and deeply interested in accounts of his travels, particularly in Alaska, the discovery of the glacier that bears his name, also his travels in Siberia and many other countries.

The room or study containing his desk, which he called his "den" was practically a museum, containing many wonderful collections of souvenirs and curios from nearly every country that he visited, particularly from the Alaskan Indians. Beside specimens of a large

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variety of mineral ores. Many times during my stay he would recall our school days at the "old log academy" as he termed it. Although over half a century had passed since our school days, he still remembered distinctly every student that attended the school. In those days it was a custom to "speak pieces" and read "compositions" every Saturday afternoon, and I was amazed to hear my old friend not only give the name of each student, but would tell what particular piece he recited, and would repeat part of the piece himself, imitating the speaker in voice and gestures. He recalled the names of <sup>all</sup> the larger students, and repeated a part of the piece that each one recited. I was most amused to hear him mimic a little girl who tried to read her composition and nearly broke down. She took her place upon the floor and commenced to read in a low tone of voice. The teacher requested her to read "a little louder". She commenced again, when the teacher

says "a little louder Mary" and she commenced her composition again, but not in a much louder voice, The teacher interrupting her the third time to read louder, when she began to cry and read at the same time until she finished reading, My friend not only repeated part of her composition but mimicked the little girl crying and reading at the same time and in the same tone of voice.

On the second or third day after my arrival at his home, he informed me that he had been invited by the "Sierra Club" (I think he said) to come to San Francisco the following day as one of their guests, and he invited me to accompany him on the trip. They were to take some part in the reception of Admiral Robert Evans and officers of Uncle Sam's fleet of battle ships, which were to visit San Francisco after its noted journey around the world,



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Taking the train the next morning we arrived at Berkeley, and found the boat landing was crowded with people waiting to be ferried across the bay to San Francisco, other train loads of people were arriving, adding vast numbers to the large crowd that were already waiting. The boats were unable to ferry the people across the bay as fast as they arrived. When a boat landed for passengers there was a terrific crush and jam to get aboard.

Fearing we might be separated on going aboard, we each took the other by the collar of his <sup>coat</sup> with one hand and were crowded onto the boat in that manner, but were not separated, for we were as inseparable as the celebrated Siamese twins. The fleet of battle ships passing the "Golden Gate" accompanied by the booming of cannon from the forts, and the response from the battle ships was a wonderful inspiring spectacle, a sight never to be forgotten. Promptly at 4 o'clock we started upon our return to Mr. Minni's home. Two more days soon

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passed and I took my departure, bidding my old friend what proved to be a last farewell. In conclusion I would say that to day Wisconsin feels proud of her worthy son. Having recently placed at the University in Madison to his memory, a statue which was unveiled with elaborate ceremonies in the early part of last summer, a fitting tribute to one of her illustrious sons.

Sincerely Yours

Alfred Bradley Brown

Alexandria, S. Dakota

April 9, 1917.