The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

The Thoreau Society, Inc. is an informal gathering of students and followers of Henry David Thoreau. Frederic T. McGill, Jr., Short Hills, N.J., President; Mrs. Charles MacPherson, Acton, Mass., Vice-President; and Walter Harding, State Univ., Geneseo, N.Y., 14454, Secretary-Treasurer. Annual membership $2.00; life membership, $50.00. Address communications to the secretary.

BULLETIN ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-TWO WINTER 1973

WALDEN (ONE) AND WALDEN TWO by B. F. Skinner

/Read at the 1972 annual meeting./

First, my credentials. I am not a Thoreau scholar, but I claim to be an amateur in the original sense of a lover. It was not love at first sight. I read excerpts from Walden in a course in American Literature at Hamilton College, but they were not "relevant." In those days we joined fraternities and played golf, we could not have cared less how the country was run, and as for the rest of the world we learned about that from the National Geographic.

When I came to Harvard for graduate study, I became interested in New England and its history, and I discovered Walden Pond. I had a bicycle and would ride out to the pond to swim, not where the bathing houses are now, but in the cove near the site of Thoreau's hut. The bottom was muddy in those days, and as I walked about in shallow water, I knew what Thoreau meant by his riparian or alluvial walks. I began to read Thoreau. I took an interest in the site; I used to go out in the late autumn to clean up after the picnickers.

Hawthorne said that Thoreau made people feel guilty about their possessions, and I know what he meant. When I got my doctor's degree, my family gave me a car, but I felt guilty about it and bought a copy of Walden to keep in the car to take the curse off. I made good use of it. I am almost always on time for appointments, and as Oscar Wilde once pointed out, "Promptness is the thief of time." Walden is an excellent book to pick up for occasional reading; even if you have time for only a few sentences, they are wonderful sentences. It does not much matter what preceded or will follow.

When I met the girl I was to marry, I took her on our first date to Walden. We had just bought a chess set in one of the shops on Beacon Hill, and on the shores of the Pond she taught me to play chess.

I moved on to the other works of Thoreau when I bought a leather-bound eleven-volume Riverside Edition. It was not complete, of course, and for many years I turned to Odell Shepard's The Heart of Thoreau's Journals for additional reading. I analyzed a rather long quotation from that collection in my book Verbal Behavior. I also bought Thoreau's translation of The Transmigration of the Seven Brahmins. And, oh yes, I own a Thoreau pencil -- not made by Thoreau himself, I am sure, but by his family. I bought it at Goodspeed's and assume it is genuine, though I can imagine that before long someone will begin to manufacture Thoreau pencils again.

I hope this is enough to establish my status as an amateur. It may not, however, quiet the emotion some of you may have felt at my outrageous title. How could I have the nerve to put a One after Walden, even in parentheses, and set it alongside my own Utopian novel, Walden Two? If you found that disturbing, you were in good company. When the book appeared in 1948, Life magazine published a bitter editorial, denouncing it on just those grounds. Walden Two was called "an entirely presumptuous title." "In spirit Walden Two is as much like Thoreau's original Walden as a Quonset hut is like a comfortable and properly proportioned Cape Cod house." Further along, my book was described as "such a triumph of mortmain, or the dead hand...as has not been envisioned since the days of Sparta...If Dr. Skinner wants to imagine such a utopia, that is his privilege. But what should really be held against him is the egregious liberty he has taken with the title of Henry David Thoreau's original Walden. For the truth of the matter is that Thoreau's book is profoundly anti-utopian; it does not belong in the long line of antiseptic literature that began with Plato's Republic. Far from trying to escape into a 'brave new world,' Thoreau, the cosmic bum, set out resolutely to make the best of what he could find right around home. Where Samuel Butler traveled to Nowhere for his Erewhon, where Edward Bellamy marched ahead to the year 20000 A.D. for his Looking Backward, Thoreau set up housekeeping by the edge of a duck pond outside of his native village. As Elliot Paul has said, he 'got away from it all' by moving just a little farther from town than a good golfer could drive a ball. The lumber for Thoreau's cabin was taken from a shanty that had belonged to James Collins, an Irishman who had worked on the Fitchburg Railroad; the beans that Thoreau hoed and ate were Yankee beans, grown in recalcitrant New England soil." Life's complaint was summarized in this way: "Books like Walden Two, then, are a slur upon a name, a corruption of an impulse. All Thoreauists will properly resent them, and if Dr. Skinner comes around with any of his advice the good Thoreauist will, like Diogenes when confronted with the proffered largesse of the Macedonian king, tell the author of Walden Two to stand from between him and the free rays of the sun."

A few corrections, please. I submit that Thoreau would have settled for a Quonset hut. He discussed the "necessaries" of habitation (we should call them the necessities), and he designed his living quarters to satisfy them. The well-proportioned Cape Cod house is far from what he wanted. It is much more like the kind of house which, Thoreau pointed out contemptuously, cost the Concord farmer fifteen years of his life. If James Collins had left behind a small Quonset hut, I'm sure Thoreau would have been glad to move it into the woods near Walden Pond.

Nor is the community described in Walden Two "getting away from it all." It is one point of the book that you can have a better life here and now. You

don't need to go to a Shangri-La behind high mountains, or to a new Atlantis on some hitherto undiscovered island, or move about in time to a distant past or future. You can have the kind of life you want in the present setting.

Life also called Thoreau perhaps the greatest exponent of the Yankee virtue of "use it up and make it do," and that is another point in Walden Two. As Thoreau said, you don't own things; things own you. In Walden Two every effort is made to reduce the things needed for "the good life." I didn't realize it at the time, but there is a bonus. Walden Two is not only minimally consuming, it is minimally polluting.

There is no gadgetry in Walden Two -- no computers, no tricky technical equipment. It's a simple life, rather reminiscent of an English country house in the nineteenth century, but without the servant problem. There is technology in Walden Two, but it is concerned with human behavior, with producing pleasant, effective personal relations -- in daily life, in education, and in the production of goods.

I submit that Thoreau was a utopist in a basic sense. If you do not life the way of life that is offered you, simply build a better one. The difference is that Walden (One) -- if you will permit me to call it that for clarity's sake -- was a utopia for one. Thoreau was no hermit (he could walk into Concord -- to the post office or the lyceum -- whenever he felt like it), but he never came to grips with the problems which arise when people must interact with each other. Walden Two is an experiment in the design of a social environment.

And that brings me to the issue of freedom. The editorial in Life was contemptuous of "'conditioning' for a freedom planned long in advance according to the rigid specifications of a gang of hierarchs. In the argot of 1948, in Walden (One), there was simply freedom, period." But what made it possible for Thoreau to be free? Only an extraordinary set of circumstances. In the world in which he lived he was not compelled to do much of anything. He was free to do the things he wanted to do -- to be a "self-appointed spectator at a snow storm", to anticipate nature, to begin an adventure in life starting with a vacation from toil. He could do these things by walking away from Concord and squatting on the shores of Walden Pond. But how many people can do that today?

It is easy to contrast a world in which people are controlled by other people with a world in which they seem free. Freedom from control was the dream of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, nearly a hundred years before Thoreau. By Thoreau's time the dream had seemed to come true in a successful struggle for political and religious freedom. Thoreau was opposed to political and religious despots, to armies, and to punitive education. We was opposed to punitive labor -- not just slavery (to which, of course, he was actively opposed) but the slavery of the worker who commits himself to a trade or a way of life. Like Marx, who made the point at about the same time, Thoreau was opposed to wage slavery as well as the slavery which depended upon physical force. The person who works for wages is avoiding, not a flogging, but the loss of a standard of living. That is easy to demonstrate in a factory, and Marx blamed wage slavery on capital, but the principle holds for the personal entrepreneur -- say, a farmer. A man may own his farm and still be a slave to it. He must plant at a certain season, and if the weather is bad within a very short season. There is no way out; he will lose the whole thing if he doesn't plant. If he has cows, there are certain times of day when they must be milked. His day is paced; he cannot do as he pleases, he must do things when he doesn't feel like doing them. As a result, Thoreau said, the farmer plows the better part of himself into the soil as compost. Any possession exacts its toil. Luxuries are a hindrance to the good life. Only leisure will show what a man is really like.

For Thoreau the alternative to the punitive sanctions of daily life seemed to be personal freedom. The feeling of freedom is associated with doing the things a person wants to do. But why does he want to do them? Thoreau never had to ask. He could also neglect other requirements of the good life. How many people today have the ethical training which gave Thoreau an interest in doing things? His fellows thought him lazy, but he knew that you "could not kill time without damaging eternity." He employed himself, but he did it because of his education and the ethic he had received from his culture.

He also had the benefit of the perfectionistic spirit which was blowing across the land in those days. The founding of America was a unique event in the history of the world. Here was a nation which seemed to be explicitly designed in advance. Its success induced Americans to set up smaller versions of designed ways of life. More than two hundred intentional communities were founded in the United States in the nineteenth century. Perfectionistic activities declined at the turn of the century, but they are beginning to return, and the change is reflected in the publishing history of Walden Two. In the first fourteen years, the book sold only ten thousand copies; last year it sold a quarter of a million. Something had happened in the interim. The world has come round to the necessity of doing something about the ways in which people live, and the initiative is being taken by young people. They understand what Thoreau meant when he said, "I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors," (Unfortunately for Thoreau, he was over thirty when he said it.)

Like Thoreau, young people today are much less concerned with the purely physical conditions under which they live. Like him they avoid aversive labor, in part by cutting down on what they consume. They refuse to work hard for things which are not essential -- clothing, for example. What Thoreau called the necessaries of clothing are conspicuous in Harvard Square today. Thoreau pointed out that a citizen of Concord -- Emerson, say -- would rather walk down the street with a broken leg than with a broken pant leg. Young people today do not mind wearing patches -- they even sew patches on where there are no holes, just to prove their point. Like Thoreau, they are arguing that "Life is an experiment largely untried." Their communes are a step in the direction of new social structures. I have just read the manuscript of a charming book describing an experimental community in Virginia that is patterned after Walden Two. It is perhaps even closer to Walden (One.)

Thoreau clearly stated what must become the dominant principle in the immediate future of the world: we must cut down on the consumption of resources. It is quite impossible for our level of affluence to prevail in all parts of the world. Imagine a billion Chinese scooting around in a third of a billion cars on hundred of millions of miles of super-highways. If I may use a horrible neologism, the rich

nations must "deaffluentize". We must learn how this can be done, but Thoreau's advice is still sound: the good life is to be reached by deliberate planning.

In my contract with the publishers of Walden Two, the book was called The Sun is a Morning Star. The publishers rejected that title because another "star" book had recently been published. The phrase is from Walden, of course, and I worked it into the book after the title was changed. When the narrator makes his decision to go back and join Walden Two, he buys a copy of Walden, and as he starts his long walk back, he reads that wonderful final paragraph: "I do not say that John or Jonathan will realize all this; but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning-star."

ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTION . . . .

The 1973 annual meeting of the Thoreau Society will be held on Saturday, July 14, in Concord. Frederic T. McGill will give the presidential address and Loren Eiseley will be speaker of the day. Further details will be given in the spring bulletin.

The nominating committee (Lewis Leary, Robert Needham, and Marilyn Nicoson, chairman) has submitted the following slate of officers to be voted on at the annual meeting: President, H. H. Uhlig; president-elect, William Howarth; vice-president, Patience Hosmer MacPherson; secretary-treasurer, Walter Harding--all for terms of one year; and Kenneth Harris and Mary Fenn for members of the executive committee for three years. Further nominations may be submitted to the chairman (1714 Wedgewood Common, Concord) or presented from the floor at the annual meeting.

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REPORT OF THE WALKING SOCIETY: WHERE IS TALL'S IS.
by Mary Fenn

Every so often, and for no reason at all, a place name will stick in the mind above all others. In spite of the fact that the forthcoming map of the rivers will have almost two hundred sites on it, some easy to locate and many others very difficult, the name Tall's Island stood out from all the rest. From Thoreau's reference to it, we knew the island was above Sherman's Bridge on the Sudbury River, and below the Old Causeway Bridge in what is now the town of Wayland, but that is all we did know. To make matters worse, it is in the area known as the Sudbury Meadows - a large tract which in spring is inundated to form a great inland sea, but in summer is a vast marshy place with the smallish stream flowing gently through it.

Long ago we discovered that fire stations with their detailed maps are a great source of information, so we visited the fire station in Wayland. After a great deal of head scratching, consulting their map, and even calling in the chief (who scratched his head as well), the firemen admitted they had never heard of Tall's Island.

Well, since Wayland was once part of Sudbury, Esther Anderson consulted her History of Sudbury and learned that there was indeed a man named Toll, who lived near the Causeway Bridge. That was a real clue - at least we knew that there was a man named Toll (or Tall) and hopefully he had an island.

One morning early we presented ourselves at the golf course adjoining the Causeway Bridge, and, having their permission, walked all along the course by the river looking for signs of an island that might possibly have been partially filled in to be annexed to the land. Nothing.

We followed the shoreline on each side of the river by car with no success. A boat would have been helpful but it was too far upstream for us to paddle. We know a man who lives near Sherman's Bridge, so called on him. No, he never heard of Tall's Island but we were welcome to walk along his property in our search. Since this resulted in nothing except a pleasant walk in a beautiful estate, we got back in the car and started for home. But there was that little dirt road just above Sherman's Bridge. We had been there before trying to peer between the trees for a view of the shoreline, but we'd try again. Somehow we had overlooked a little cart track going in the direction of the water so left the car and followed it on foot. Parting the bushes at the water's edge, we looked out and there, just off shore, was a beautiful island covered with tall trees and comprising perhaps an acre. It must be Tall's Island for we had found no other, yet could it be so far downstream from Mr. Toll's house?

Shortly after that, we were in the Library, still looking through old books and maps for a reference which would prove our conjecture, when Marcia Moss said, "Come with me." She went to the safe, took out one of Thoreau's own maps, and there it was - Tall's Island! Now we know where it is, and soon you will know too.

NOTES AND QUERIES . . .

Walter Harding has recently resigned as editor-in-chief of the new Princeton edition of Thoreau's writings, but we will remain a member of the board of directors and will edit the Correspondence volume. The new editor-in-chief is William Howarth of Princeton University.

Many of PBS (educational network) TV stations will be airing a half hour show on Thoreau as a naturalist by James Case in March.

Astronauts have named one of the sites on the moon "Walden."

A wild (Mute) swan spent most of December on Walden Pond. And last summer a very tame scarlet tanager often perched fearlessly within a few feet of visitors to the cairn.

ABC-Tv is currently showing a program on "the organic, transcendentalist and revolutionary life and ideas of Thoreau" in its "New Heaven/New Earth" series.

We understand that BBC-TV is currently making a film on Thoreau, and that Orson Welles is at work on a TV film to be entitled "Roll Over, Thoreau."

Concord stores are now selling a key ring with a portrait of Thoreau on one side and one of his hut on the other, designed by Bill Towler.

The newly discovered third copy of the Maxham daguerreotype of Thoreau mentioned in the last bulletin has, appropriately enough, been given to the National Portrait Gallery in Washington where it will soon be put on special exhibition.

A George Price cartoon in the NEW YORKER for Nov. 25, 1972 shows the Mrs. greeting a wild-eyed drum player at the door and saying over her shoulder to her husband, "Erskine, you know that different drummer you're always marching to?"

Richard Welin is working on a doctoral dissertation on "Meaning in Thoreau: A Study in Concrete Imagination" at the Univ. of Calif. at Davis.

A real estate ad in the LOWER CAPE COD CHRONICLE for Dec. 14, 1972 for a $61,000 house in Chatham says, "Thoreau never had it so good. You can look through your own cathedral windows at your own 'Walden Pond..."

The University of Maine library at Orono is establishing a special Thoreau collection.

A group of homosexuals in Brooklyn advertise in the VILLAGE VOICE (Jan. 4, 1972), "We dance to the beat of a different drum."

A Philadelphia War Tax Resistance pamphlet (1307 Sansom St., Phila.) entitled "Don't Pay War Taxes" features a photograph of and quotation from Thoreau on the cover.

According to SPORT for Nov. 1972, Oakland's first baseman Mike Epstein said, "The more I read Thoreau's Walden . . . the more I felt like an outdoorsman."

According to GRIT for Nov. 19, 1972, when plans were made to turn a corner lot into a parking facility on the Univ. of Wisc. campus, ecology-minded co-eds rescued the land and created "Walden Park."

A new murder mystery by Michael Underwood is entitled A TROUT IN THE MILK (Walker), the second whodunit to use that phrase from Thoreau.

Professor Joel Myerson (Univ. of S. C., Columbia) is preparing a primary and secondary bibliography of Margaret Fuller and would appreciate any help, including books for sale.

"We do not wish to know how his (the poet's) imaginary hero, but how he, the actual hero, lived from day to day." Journal 10/21/57