

To the Woods: Henry David Thoreau at Walden Pond

In his 1854 book *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) documents the more than two years he lived in near solitude in the woods by Walden Pond, not far from the village of Concord, Massachusetts. He reflects on the basic needs of a simple life and on becoming attuned with the natural world. Thoreau also recounts weekly travels into the village of Concord, including his imprisonment as a result of refusing to pay what he deems to be an unfair tax. Hikes around the Walden woods, walks to and from Concord, and emersion in the natural world together allow Thoreau to gain a new perspective on familiar things--like a traveler who comes to know his home as a result of leaving it. In order see and understand his community and culture and to determine the kind of life he wanted to live, Thoreau had to find a way to gain that new perspective: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life . . . and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." Throughout his writings—including works about traveling in New England and about walking—Thoreau demonstrated that local journeys, rambles, and walks may be as important and influential as travels far and wide in the world.

Studs and nails from Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond; Henry David Thoreau, manuscripts for the final paragraphs of *Walden* and "Traveling," undated, and *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854; *Map of the Town of Concord, Middlesex County Mass.*, surveyed by authority of the town, H. F. Walling, Civil Engr.; White Pond & Walden Pond from surveys by H.D. Thoreau, Civ. Engr.; Boston : H. F. Walling, 1852 (facsimile)

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Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts,—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this?

Excerpt from the final paragraphs of *Walden*

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Travelling

How little curious is man,
Who hath not searched his mystery a span,
But dreams of mines of treasure
Which he neglects to measure,

For threescore years and ten
Walks to and fro amid his fellow men
O'er this small tract of continental land,

His fancy bearing no divining wand.

Our uninquiring corpses lie more low
Than our life's curiosity doth go;
Our most ambitious steps climb not so high
As in their hourly sport the sparrows fly.

Excerpt, "Travelling"

Objects

Studs and nails from Walden cabin
YCAL MSS 203 ART

DL: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3525027>
<https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3525028>

Traveling -- manuscript

YCAL MSS 202 Box 1 folder 5

DL: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/4742668>

Walden final paragraphs -- manuscript

YCAL MSS 202 Box 1 folder 6

DL: <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3558321>

Walden

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--this copy will be open to title page (only copy w/o foxing)

Walden

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Map of Town of Concord

Roll Map 33

LC Copy: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012593522/>