Gannett's Address at Emerson's Ordination

Guy Litton
Texas Woman's University

With the publication of the *Complete Sermons* and a number of scholarly works which treat Emerson's earlier life, a good deal more is known about his career as a minister than in years past. But an interesting document that seems to have been overlooked throughout much of this renewed interest in Emerson's ministerial career is Ezra Stiles Gannett's address at Emerson's 11 March 1829 ordination. In fact, aside from a fragment of Samuel Ripley's sermon from that occasion, reprinted in George Willis Cooke's 1882 biography, Gannett's address is the only extant document from the day's proceedings. Though Rusk briefly mentions the address, its importance as the only remaining text from the service merits its full publication if for no other reason than that it offers our imaginations a glimpse of what that important occasion offered to the auditor.

But the address is not merely a curious artifact. Since its author eventually became one of Transcendentalism's most ardent Unitarian critics, the work stands as an ironic foreshadowing of the difficult issues that Emerson would encounter during and after his years in the pulpit. Gannett, who served for many years as pastor of the Federal Street Church in Boston, had preceded Emerson at the Divinity School by one year and had helped him and others find vacant pulpits. Less than a decade later, however, he would become one of the most vocal proponents of a faculty veto to insure that radicals like Emerson could be prevented from speaking at the school. The faculty "could hardly be expected to allow the wolf to carry off the lambs in their very presence." While some of the text was reused in later ordination services (at Kingston, R.I. and Concord, N.H.), it is clear that much in the piece is specific to the circumstances Emerson faced in filling Henry Ware, Jr.'s position at Boston's Second Church. Though he agreed to accept the position of "colleague pastor," everyone understood that Emerson's ordination meant a transfer of leadership. Gannett's references to the congregation's "pain" and the bitterness of their "disappointment" at the loss of Ware were no doubt accurate. Emerson's own ambivalence in accepting the post may have been based as much on his discomfort at following such a popular minister as upon concerns about his choice of occupation, and this text addresses his dilemma in a surprisingly open manner.

Even those remarks, however, which were intended for more than one audience seem quite prescient, and one wonders whether the more general advice that would again be offered to later audiences was not crafted with at least some knowledge of its first subject's own particular circumstances. Gannett's injunction, for example, that the congregation should speak to Emerson "frankly" should they find his doctrine or manner unendurable, could hardly have been more apropos had he been able to foresee the coming crisis Emerson was to have over the ordinances. Did Gannett have some reason to wonder about Emerson's views? One wonders, also, just how closely Emerson took to heart Gannett's warning that, if the minister "speaks what he conceives to be the truth...he incurs rebuke, his friends are offended, & he is styled impudent." Though the two rarely agreed on much throughout their careers, surely Emerson after his experience as minister at the Second Church would have agreed with Gannett that slavery in Algiers is better than of the "servitude of a clergyman, who dares not speak lest he shd. startle or prejudice."

Address to the <chh. &> Socy. at ordination of Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson over Second Chh. in Boston as colleague pastor with Rev. H Ware jr.
March 11. 1829

Christian Friends
Permit me to address to you, who are members of this chh. & Socy a few words of sympathy & counsel.

The man, whom you have chosen to be yr. relgs. teacher has been charged & encouraged to perform his duties. The relation is reciprocal, & you will not deem it impertinant in me to remind you that as you share the pleasures, so do you also the responsibilities of the day. In the name of those whose presence you have invited, I wd speak to you on these topics. On an occasion more than usually similar, my brother suggested to the people with whom it has been my privilege to be connected, their duties as members of Xtn. Socy. Far was I then from anticipating the sad necessity wh. by removing him fr. this place, has bro't me hither to discharge the like office of friendship to his people. If it were

(Continued on page 8)
1998 ANNUAL MEETING
President David Robinson presided over the 1998 annual meeting of the Emerson Society in San Diego, Calif., on 30 May. Robin Sandra Grey and Len Gougeon were elected to the Advisory Board; Douglas Emory Wilson was reelected editor of ESP, and Phyllis Cole was elected Program Chair for 1999-2001. Ron Bosco and Joel Myerson gave an update on plans for the 2003 Emerson Bicentennial. Doug Wilson reported on progress with The Collected Works and also presented Wes Mot’s Secretary’s and Treasurer’s Reports: At the end of 1997, the Society’s savings account had a balance of $9,820.21, including $3,750 earmarked for the Bicentennial; a CD opened in 1996, with an anonymous $5,000 gift toward the Bicentennial, had a balance of $5,539.95. Secretary’s and Treasurer’s Reports for 1997 may be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Professor Mot, Mot, Dept. of Humanities & Arts, WPI, Worcester, MA 01609-2208.

EMERSON SOCIETY PATRONS
Emerson Society members have responded generously to the appeal by Past President Ronald A. Bosco to join at new levels of membership. All donations above the $10 annual regular membership go to support the “Emerson in 2003” Bicentennial celebration now being organized. Dues categories are Life ($500), Sustaining ($200), Contributing ($25), and Regular ($10). Please send check payable to The Emerson Society (U.S. dollars only) to Wesley T. Mott, Secretary/Treasurer, Dept. of Humanities & Arts, WPI, Worcester, MA 01609-2208.

Prospects
Call for Papers
Anyone interested in presenting a paper on any aspect of Emerson’s life, thought, career, etc. at the American Literature Association annual conference in Baltimore, Md. (27-30 May, 1999), or the Thoreau Society Annual Gathering in Concord, Mass. (second week of July 1999), should forward the paper or detailed proposal to Prof. Len Granger, Department of English, University of Scranton, Scranton, PA 18510. The deadline for submission for both venues is 15 December 1998.

Emerson as Wisconsin Land-Owner: Search for a Letter
Emerson Society member John E. Holmebeck seeks help in locating a letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to his attorney and friend Horatio Woodman concerning Emerson’s woodlot near Trade Lake, Burnett County, Wisconsin. The letter is not published in the Bush/Tilton Letters, but the text is printed in a Grolier Society catalog: “I should be better pleased with your kind care of my lot in Trade Lake, Wisconsin, if you would add to the tax the proper fee of the attorney who is kindly attending to it. With my view, I add $2.00 with my thanks. R. W. Emerson.”

The catalog description reads, “Autograph Letter Signed. 1p. 8vo, Concord, 19 February, 1870. To Horatio Woodman. Accompanied by portrait. Together, 2 pieces, neatly matted.” The letter was apparently sold at auction by New York Book & Auction Company on 22 March 1938. If you know the current owner or whereabouts of this letter, please write Jack Holmebeck at 5004 Imperial Oaks Drive, Rockford, IL 61114, or call 815-877-4356.

Kane Receives Fellowships
Paul Kane has received fellowships from the NEH and the Guggenheim Foundation for a study of Emerson’s poetry.

Thanks and Good Luck...
ESP has enjoyed years of dedicated service from two editorial assistants, each a May 1998 college graduate who has moved on to a new venture. Sarah Mot, who has been with ESP since spring 1992, graduated from Boston University and is now employed at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. Jeffrey Rosse, with us since fall 1993, graduated from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and works for General Electric in Schenectady, New York. We wish Sarah and Jeff every success and happiness with their new prospects!

Two Summers in Concord
The Emerson Society has become a fixture at the Annual Gathering of the Thoreau Society each July in Concord, Mass. Our panels and special presentations regularly attract audiences of 50-75. Owing to lack of space, the Fall 1997 issue of ESP did not print our annual photo of Emersonian presenters in Concord. That omission is compensated for below.

1997—Tremendous Women and Biography. On 11 July Dani Shelly (far left) chaired this discussion of three great women—and the art of biography—by their outstanding biographers: from left, Phyllis Cole (on Mary Moody Emerson), Cynthia Burton (on Abigail Alcott), and Bruce Ronds (on Elizabeth Palmer Peabody).

1998—Emerson: Influences and Resonances This wide-ranging panel on 10 July, chaired by Len Granger, featured, from left, Phyllis Cole (“Emersonian Individualism as a Two-Person Project”), Joan Goodwin (“Sarah Ripley’s Effect on Emerson”), and Sallee Engstrom (“Emerson and Charles Fanny”).

Fall 1998
Emerson's Political Spirit and the Problem of Language

Emerson, Slavery, and the Evolution of the Principle of Self-Reliance

Michael Strusin

Emerson believed that we were each confirmed in far deeper, metaphorical prisons which in turn informed the conspiring structures within society. However, slavery presented Emerson with a visible form of literal enslavement. In short, when he appreciated the importance of the future of slavery, he felt compelled to pursue the inextricable connection between self-reliance and duty and companion and guiding principles on the path to finding oneself—and helping others find themselves, too.

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The Thoreau Institute: Emersonian Horizons

New Home for Emerson Society Archives: Thoreau Institute Dedicated

Spectacular late-spring weather marked the 5 June 1998 Grand Opening of the Thoreau Institute in Lincoln, Mass. Featured speakers at the gala event included President Bill Clinton, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, U. S. Senators Edward M. Kennedy and John F. Kerry, Institute executive director Kathi Anderson, founder Don Henley, and other leaders in education, civil rights, science, literary scholarship, and the arts.

The Thoreau Institute is the culmination of an eight-year campaign led by Grammy Award-winning musician Henley and the Walden Woods Project (WWP) to save traumatically threatened with commercial development. A joint endeavor of WWP and the Thoreau Society, the Institute is a comprehensive educational center for the study of Thoreau and other Concord writers, with special focus on ecology, human rights, and other issues of importance to Thoreau. The Institute comprises a research library boasting the world’s leading collection of materials by and about Thoreau; an electronically accessible media center; and programs for students of all ages, teachers, scholars, and the public.

The Institute now also houses the Collection of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, which includes monographs, offprints, maps, and Society business records, as well as handbooks, notes, and other items used by scholars in preparing various editions of writings by Emerson. This collection, started with gifts of books by renowned Emerson scholars Ralph H. Orth and Merton M. Seals, Jr., has recently been augmented with 1.15 more books from Professor Seals.

Emersonians present at the opening festivities included Emersonian Electronic Bancroft and Roger L. Gregg of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association; Dave Gane, a volunteer for the opening; and scholars Larry Buell and John McAleer, as well as Ron Bosco, Bob Galvin, Wes Mott, and Joel Myerson, who are also members of the Thoreau Society Board of Directors.

When Gene was first introduced to what computers could generate—he was several years into his project—he was dissatisfied. Computer concordances typically include a fixed amount of text around each word, or the sentence or line in which the word appears, not always sufficient to identify clearly how the word is used or, more important to Gene, what idea is expressed in its context. Gene also wanted to assign the part of speech to every word, a difficult task for a computer.

The Center for Computer Research in the Humanities (CCRHi) at the University of Colorado—CCRHi was abolished in 1990—developed software to help Gene make the concordance but leave him in editorial control. This software interactively displayed each word in the text, with a substantial amount of context. Gene edited the context and assigned the part of speech to each word. The computer then sorted and formatted the concordance. Gene articulated his editorial practices in his “preface” to A Concordance to Five Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Nature,” “The American Scholar,” “The Divinity School Address,” “Self-Reliance,” “Fate” (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981).

In working with Emerson’s essays, Gene discovered that, when he edited one context of a word early in the essays and then, years later, edited another context of another occurrence of the same word near the end of the essays, he had not always been consistent. At the end of his life he was making corrections in his editing. He was also proofreading for typographical errors, etc. All of Gene’s work must therefore be considered work-in-progress. His concordance to Emerson’s essays, formatted for printing on paper, may be found at http://www.colorado.edu/ArtsSciences/CCRHi/. This is virtually unsearchable by computer because it is “typed.”

The size of the concordance to Emerson’s essays is daunting. Even formatted in two columns, the concordance occupies 5,372 pages. A list of the words in the concordance, with their frequencies, formatted in three columns, occupies another 139 pages. The concordance is broken down into letter sections; each letter begins a new page. The letter sections are stored as PostScript files, with the larger letter sections stored in two or three files. The files are compressed and each file sized to fit on a high-density (1.4MB) floppy disk.

In keeping with Gene’s attitude toward academic research, I encourage anyone so inclined to build upon what Gene has done—to correct it, to add to it, to change it in ways that will further the systematic study of the Works of Emerson.

I would like to thank Margaret Bancroft and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association for support in 1989-1990 towards the completion of this version of this concordance which we had intended to see into print. An earlier gift from Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, helped defray the cost of the transition from mainframe computing to a personal computer environment.

—Michael J. Preston
University of Colorado at Boulder

President Clinton gave the following ceremony

Emerson Concordance Now Online

The Thoreau Institute is interested in readying that additional material for Web presentation.

—BRADLEY P. DIAN
Director, Thoreau Institute

Media Center

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Gene Irey and His Concordance

Eugene Floyd Irey (6 August 1912–26 December 1985) was a serious reader of Emerson’s works. “Gene,” as everyone called him, received his B.A., M.Educ., and M.A. from the University of Colorado and his Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota in 1951. His dissertation is entitled “A Social History of Leadville, Colorado, During the Boom Days, 1877–1881.” After his service at the Spartan School of Aeronautics in Tulsa, Oklahoma, during World War II, Gene became a faculty member in the English department at the University of Colorado.

In 1962, shortly after the publication of the first two volumes of The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Gene decided that a concordance to Emerson’s Works would be invaluable to anyone seriously interested in understanding Emerson’s thinking. Although concordances are often understood as “word books,” Gene understood them as bringing together the contexts in which words appear, and for him the contexts in which words were used were far more important than the words themselves. And so Gene bought stacks of slips of paper and set about experimenting with the first sentences of Wide World I to see what would happen. When Gene was first introduced to what computers could do—he was several years into his project—he was dissatisfied. Computer concordances typically include a fixed amount of text around each word, or the sentence or line in which the word appears, not always sufficient to identify clearly how the word is used or, more important to Gene, what idea is expressed in its context. Gene also wanted to assign the part of speech to every word, a difficult task for a computer.

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—Michael J. Preston
University of Colorado at Boulder

President Clinton gave the following ceremony

Fall 1998

Emerson Society Papers
Garnett’s Address

(Continued from page 1)

proper for me to repeat his words, you should hear none else.

for me this day. But it may not be.

Accept these solemn reflections. We offer them in sin-
cerity; and indeed we should be less than this, less than men, if we did not. The men who have received
in these solemnities, are remarkable. It is seldom permitted to us to see more distinctly the hand of Providence in guiding the course of events. This you will gratefully acknowledge. You were not alone in the season of your grief. It was painful to us to
hear that our brother might no longer pursue that path of usefulness
in which we had delighted to mark his steps. How bitter was your disappointment. We needed not that your words should tell us. It was there, with peculiar pleasure that we learnt concerning you, that you
were not as sheep without a shepherd, but had found one whose duty & privilege it was to guide the wandering
and bear the flock into the favours wh. has been rubbed off, but may it continue to direct you in
his steps. May it be your lot to be led into the gate of heaven, as unerringly as the visible sign of Jehovah con-
tinued his chosen people of old & their leader to the land of promise; and whether as seen or as a pillar of fire, may you always behold in it the glory of God—

when studied, cannot do everything at once. It is not unusual for a people to
minister is but a man & subject to like infirmities with other

of duty in a certain time they require of him what no mortal can

of hypocrisy. But through the indulgence of a selfish affection, the

the least sacred place on earth. There, if anywhere shd love be hallowd by devotion.

so truly be a palace of ice, wh. dissolves as soon as heat is introduced within

rarely teach a man to do this. It is little to be a

his work’s sake’.® Let him feel that he has in each of you a true

prejudice, give me the former. The mahometan taskmaster is

the yoimg man’s distinguished ancestors.” He quotes approximately twelve

portions of the work later.

I would like to thank the Houghton Library at Harvard University for permis-
sion too much. Brethren, the blessing of God be with you—with

and that the union & the joy

embrace too much. Brethren, the blessing of God be with you—with

the esteem of his auditory. Let yr pastor use great plainness of

things that are behind, & pressing after those wh. are before. <Be

it is of the utmost importance that you give a true ijust-l exhibi-

the yoimg man’s distinguished ancestors.” He quotes approximately twelve

I have omitted many topics (the mention of wh) wd have been appropriate to the occa-
sion. Finally brethren ‘esteem’ yr pastor ‘very highly in love for

feelings as well as <blameless> twith

behave like the head of a divine Builder.

Christi.

If you should hear none else fr .

and that you know is present duty.’ Rest not

gion with us is earnest & zealous. It has been asserted & repeated

the yoimg man’s distinguished ancestors.” He quotes approximately twelve

as the wrds of eternal life; or if when here, you divide yr time

people to be cruel even to others’<a tas minister in the early part of his

the yoimg man’s distinguished ancestors.” He quotes approximately twelve

life’s labours. They are anxious to hear & to see him & as if they for-

are cherished. You say that the house was a monstrosity, that a certain aint in a certain time they require of him what no mortal can perform.

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in the yoimg man’s distinguished ancestors.” He quotes approximately twelve

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Christi.
[The history of scholarly work in Europe that uncovered...

Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century."

Margaret Fuller's Summer on the Lakes, in 1843."

Gendered Genealogy of a Critical Discourse."


The metaphysical and political theory informing the ...

The Reaction of Emerson and other New Englanders to ...

The Concept of Self-Construction or Self-Culture in America.

The mushrooms and the 

The growing significance of "Fate" in the Emerson canon.

Chadwick, Edward. Emerson and the Climates of History.

John G. Kronick. "Repetition and Mimesis from Nietzsche to ...


Thoreau's overcom...
Packer, Barbara. “Turning to Emerson.” Common Knowledge 5 [1996]:51-60. [Stanley Cavell’s engagement with Emerson, and the importance of Emerson’s “Fate.”]

Parkes, Graham. "‘Floods of Life’ around ‘Granite of Fate’: Emerson and Nietzsche as Thinkers of Nature." ESQ 43:207-40. [Emerson and Nietzsche’s conceptions of the natural world.]

Patterson, Anita Haya. From Emerson to King: Democracy, Race, and the Politics of Protest. Oxford. [Emerson’s political thought, and its influence on W. E. B. DuBois and Martin Luther King, Jr.]

Richardson, Joan. “Emerson’s Sound Effects.” Raritan 16:83-101. [Emerson’s acute sensitivity to voice and its effect on his work.]


Rowe, John Carlos. At Emerson’s Tomb: The Politics of Classic American Literature. Columbia. [Race, gender, and other social questions in American literature, with a political critique of Emerson.]  

Schulz, Dieter. Amerikanischer Transzendentalismus: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. [The basic metaphoric structure of Transcendentalist thinking, and the relationships among the three major Transcendentalists.]


Stack, George J. “Nietzsche and Emerson: The Return of the Repressed.” ESQ 43:37-68. [Examines the reasons that Emerson’s influence on Nietzsche has been overlooked.]


Wider, Sarah Ann. Anna Tilden, Unitarian Culture, and the Problem of Self-Representation. Georgia. [Tilden’s experience of Unitarian culture as a woman and wife of a Unitarian minister.]


Wright, Conrad. Congregational Polity: A Historical Survey of Unitarian and Universalist Practice. Skinner House. [History of polity within Unitarian and Universalist traditions, with discussions of Theodore Parker, James Freeman Clarke, and others.]