While major events are scheduled in celebration of the Emerson bicentennial in 2003, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of Emerson in American consciousness in 1903. The signs of this importance were everywhere as the young nation stood on the threshold of what would become known as “The American Century.” Houghton Mifflin was issuing a new, twelve-volume edition of his Complete Works, to be known thereafter as the “Centenary Edition”; the U. S. Postal Service was issuing a commemorative stamp, an honor reserved for only the most historically significant Americans, and three years earlier, Emerson had been inducted into the “Hall of Eame for Great Americans” at New York University, only the eighth so honored, and the first man of letters. (The seven who preceded him were Washington, Lincoln, Webster, Franklin, Grant, Marshall, and Jefferson.) His fame even stretched across the Atlantic. The London Times (25 May 1903) took note of the fact that, in honor of Emerson’s one-hundredth birthday, “there will be observances of one kind or another among every section of the United States. It is a national tribute to an American whom Americans now recognize as a leader of American thought.” After presenting an overview of the many activities and testimonials scheduled for the celebration, the Times writer concludes with the following observation:

It will be seen that his fellow-citizens, while declaring themselves grateful to Emerson for the renown he and, through him, American literature has won abroad, are more grateful still for his Americanism at home. Once denied, it is now regarded as Americanism of the best type, if only because he taught the lesson of true independence in thought and life. That is the note which rings clear through all these centennial essays, speeches, and panegyrics from every source.

The Times correspondent was not exaggerating in noting the breadth of the Emerson Centenary celebrations. A survey of American newspapers publishing in 1903 shows that the event was celebrated in one way or another in virtually every part of the country, from Maine to Texas, Boston to San Francisco. Every major city took note of Emerson’s birthday. There was a grand celebration in New York City, sponsored by the Society of American Authors, in the Authors Gallery of the Waldorf-Astoria on 25 May 1903. A report in the San Francisco Chronicle (26 May 1903) indicates that more than 200 guests attended. In connection with the dinner, there was an exhibit of Emersoniana including “various editions of his books, portraits, busts, correspondence and photographs.” Guests included the presidents of Cornell and New York universities and the U. S. Commissioner of Education. President Roosevelt himself sent a note expressing his regret that he was unable to attend “your dinner in honor of the memory of a man to whom American literature, American philosophy, and American citizenship owe so much.”

Then, like today, Boston/Cambridge/Concord were sites for major events. An article in the Boston Globe (25 May 1903) describes a large gathering at Symphony Hall, sponsored by the American Unitarian Association, as many celebrations were. The event was presided over by Senator George F. Hoar, an illustrious son of Concord, and the featured speaker was Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University. This major event was reported throughout the nation, and Eliot’s address was the subject of numerous articles in major newspapers where it was often reproduced, in whole or in part.

Harvard celebrated the Centennial in a special way. The Houston Post (24 May 1903) reported, as many other newspapers did, on the events in Boston/Cambridge and noted that the celebration there was to be formally opened “by the laying of the cornerstone of Emerson Hall, in Cambridge, destined to be the home of the departments of philosophy and education in Harvard University.” The princely sum of $150,000 had already been raised for the project, and more was expected. The paper also reported (Continued on page 6)
EMERSON SOCIETY PATRONS

Thanks to Emerson Society members who have joined at levels above basic membership. All donations above the $10 annual basic membership go to support the "Emerson in 2003" Bicentennial celebration now under way. Dues categories are Life ($500), Sustaining ($50), Contributing ($25), and Regular ($10). Please send check payable to The Emerson Society (U.S. dollars only) to Robert D. Habich, Secretary/Treasurer, Dept. of English, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306-0460.

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EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society Published at Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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Meet Our Sculptor—Steven H. Maddock

One of the highlights of the Emerson Society’s bicentennial of the birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson is the commissioning of New Mexico artist Steven H. Maddock to create a bust of Emerson. Steve generously sculpted two separate and distinct busts—six-inch and nine-inch versions. Each is still available to members of the Emerson Society at substantial savings while the “Emerson in 2003” celebration lasts.

The work of Steve Maddock has been exhibited throughout Wisconsin and in Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. Steve works in several media, including two-dimensional pencil, charcoal, ink, and watercolor. Though he is best recognized for his bronze figurative sculpture, he also creates art on a larger scale. Recently he installed a life-sized bronze of St. Francis at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin, and he is under consideration to do a bas-relief for a church in Detroit. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, he also earned a Masters in Art Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has taught extensively.

"Being a visual artist," says Maddock, "I try to put a face on important and meaningful writings, to see a face and make that connection." He describes his work as "contemporary western." "Subject matter is primarily the human figure. A love of history, classical study, and a sense of humor direct my work." Emerson is not his first project with literary and historical associations. "I have done Mark Twain and Abraham Lincoln busts, trying to impart their lives and philosophies in their faces. R. W. Emerson offered a similar challenge. I tried to visualize his written words and impart them to his image. " The two Emerson busts, he explains, are very different. "It is not often that an artist has the opportunity to do two portraits of the same individual. I tried to capture two different expressions of the man. I hope people see some element of Emerson’s personality in the portraits."

NOTE OF THANKS

The Emerson Society is grateful for institutional support throughout the year that enables us to conduct our business and provide important member services.

Worcester Polytechnic Institute has been home to Emerson Society Papers since its inception in 1990. Wesley Mott expresses thanks to Provost John F. Carney III, whose continued support for the past seven years has covered many of our publishing costs and enabled Mott, as an officer and managing editor, to attend our annual board and business meetings.
Emerson at 100
(Continued from page 1)
that "within the hall will stand a bronze statue of Emerson by Frank Duveneck of Cincinnati; all projects were completed in a timely fashion, and the results can still be seen at Harvard today.)

As might be expected, readers then, like today, interpreted Emerson according to their own lights, and, as a result, often found themselves in disagreement. In a number of articles, Emerson is described as a spiritual guide and seer, an American prophet. Thus, an article in the San Francisco Chronicle (24 May 1903) states that "Foremost of all Emerson's great qualities ... [is] his fine spirituality that lifts him completely out of the reach of everyday life and sets him among the prophets and the seers. Similarly, an article in the [Knoxville, Tenn.] Daily Journal and Tribune (24 May 1903) holds that Emerson's "message was prophetic," and that "Of all the spiritual voices of the last century, none have [sic] a greater claim for recognition with so true and clear a note as that of Ralph Waldo Emerson."

Many other articles strike the same note. In the Emerson is celebrated as a spiritual idealist and secular saint whose message provides a welcome antidote to the growing materialism of the age. Indeed, accounts indicate that Emerson's spirituality was the subject of many sermons in churches throughout America on 24 May, the Sunday before Emerson's birthday. Often ministers, especially Unitarians, depicted Emerson as a Christ-like figure, if not an orthodox Christian. The Kansas City (Mo.) Star (24 May 1903) and Hartford Daily Times (26 May 1903) report such events, the latter noting one preacher's assertion that "Everyone these days quotes Emerson without even knowing it. There is no other man of equal stature as Emerson who left the church."

The writer also notes that "Unitarians refer to Emerson as "our Emerson" although he left the church." This latter point was not lost on the writer of a letter to the editor in the Boston Evening Transcript (25 July 1903). Another speaker, George W. Thayer, a prominent American historian, insisted on the continuing importance and correctness of Emersonian individualism. In a presentation on "Emerson's Gospel of Individualism," he argues that "the champions of collectivism or combination, all agree in looking outside of themselves for strength. Over against them is a band made of the elite of all times and peoples, who hold that strength comes from within. This is the essence of individualism, and Emerson has never been surpassed as its interpreter." For Thayer, "the remedy for our public evils is not socialism, but Emersonian individualism." Finally, Emerson was also remembered for his contributions to the women's movement. In "The American Woman's Debt to Emerson," Anna Garlin Spencer, a suffragist who would become an ordained Unitarian minister, invoked the historic Transcendental partnership between Emerson and Margaret Fuller, while insisting that "the greatest debt of American women to Emerson is due not because of his recognition and aid given to the movement to better their own position, but that he taught the necessity of freedom for the true development of all human nature. ... When Emerson declares 'one mind, one will, in all things, and that will good,' he means that it requires that all personal power, contributed by femininity as well as masculine minds, to reveal the divine unity in human society." (Boston Evening Transcript, 21 July 1903.)

Perhaps the fact that so many men and women have managed to find so much in Emerson, both then and now, testifies more than anything else to his enduring significance as America's greatest "Representative Man."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson came from a long line of churchmen. He entered Harvard at the age of 14, and upon graduation, he, too, became a minister, but soon gave up preaching.

He founded a school at Concord, where together with Thoreau and Alcott, he taught his philosophy of transcendentalism. He traveled all over the eastern states, lecturing and writing essays and beautiful, mystic poems. Few philosophers have done more to help the average man overcome the problems of everyday life.

Emerson, with Hawthorne and others, founded a community at Brook Farm, which became the meeting-place of a company of brilliant men and women, of whom he was the leader. His essays have become classics of English prose.

Born 1803 in Boston, Mass.—died 1882 in Concord, Mass.