Birthday Party at Bush

A season of bicentennial celebrations of the birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson culminated on 25 May when the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association (RWEMA) invited the public to share in the “official” birthday event—a Garden Tea Party at “Bush,” the Emerson House on Cambridge Turnpike in Concord, Massachusetts (see page 12 for more photos). Ominous clouds failed to dampen the spirits of scores of visitors, who shared good food and conversation and a moving ceremony on the lawn and under sheltering tents. ESP is honored to present the welcoming remarks of Margaret Emerson “Bay” Bancroft, president of RWEMA and great-great-granddaughter of R. W. Emerson.

Welcoming Remarks
MARGARET EMERSON BANCROFT

We are so pleased you have come to this house in Concord to celebrate the birthday of Ralph Waldo Emerson (known as Waldo), who was born in a house on Chauncy Street in Boston on May 25, 1803, 200 years ago today. We like to think a child is being born in a house or a hospital somewhere in the world today—or maybe yesterday or tomorrow—who will bring the same degree of pleasure and inspiration to a future generation of thinking people. We look around us now, and hope to see such a face in this crowd, or some other crowd. Someone who will take us to task and cause us to strive to be the best we can be, in our own day, with its own set of circumstances—who will help us to see ourselves and our world clearly, and to figure out our highest course of action and thought, on our contemporary planet, where every day is as new, and as fresh, and as full of beauty, and as weighted with history, and as fraught with troubles as any other day since the beginning of time. We know there have been hundreds of thousands of springs before this. But doesn’t it seem amazing about this spring—somehow almost surreal this year—that it actually has come again: a whole new world of green leaves and lilac blossoms and gosling families and junior proms...

Anyway, on this green afternoon, we are delighted to have you all here at Bush (as this house is known), where Waldo Emerson lived for most of his life, and where, sitting in a rocking chair in his study with a writing book in his lap, he wrote most of the essays and lectures and poems and journals for which he is known.

Kimberly Thibeault’s reading of her poem “The Elm Tree” was a highlight of the party at Bush. Now a fifth grader at the Thoreau School in Concord, Kim enjoys reading and began writing poetry in the first grade. She lives in Concord with her parents, a younger brother, two dogs, two cats, and two guinea pigs.
EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

Emerson Society Papers is published twice a year. Subscriptions, which include membership in the Society, are $10 a year (students $5). Send checks for membership (calendar year) and back issues ($5 each) to Robert D. Habich, Department of English, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306-0460.

Review copies of books on Emerson should be sent to book review editor T. Gregory Garvey, Department of English, SUNY-Brockport, Brockport, NY 14420-2968.

Prospects.

RWEMA Booklet Available

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association (RWEMA) has published a special commemorative 8-page booklet—"Ralph Waldo Emerson"—for sale at the Emerson House. Written by RWEMA president Margaret Emerson Bancroft and artistically designed by her daughter Eliza, the booklet is an excellent introduction to Emerson to the thinker. The booklet, handsomely illustrated with historic photos, can now be obtained by mail. Send a check for $5 plus $1 postage for each copy—payable to the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association—to Barbara Morgan, The Emerson House, 28 Cambridge Turnpike, Concord, MA 01742.

Bicentennial Blast Offer Extended

Because so many new members joined the Emerson Society during this bicentennial year, we are extending the deadline for special orders of our Emerson bust. Until 31 December 2003, members receive discounts of about 50 percent and have their “Bronze Waldo” (as they are popularly called) individually numbered with a bicentennial inscription. For a profile of our sculpture, see ESP Spring 2003, p. 3. Write him at Aplishpa Studio, 9 Holiday Drive, Tijeras, NM 87059, e-mail sawe21@hotmail.com, or call 505-286-9763. For a flyer, e-mail emersonso@bellsouth.net, Wmott@wpil.edu.

"RWE in 2003" T-shirts

A few official Emerson Society bicentennial T-shirts are still in stock. Because of the limited number (one Medium and about a dozen Extra Large), please e-mail Wes Mott (wmo@wpil.edu) to check on availability. Each shirt is blue tie-dye, with "RWE in 2003" on the front, "The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society" on the back, and "R.W.E." on the left sleeve. Discounted price to members is $12, which includes shipping.

Invitation: If you have photos of "Emerson in 2003" events—especially of Emerson Society members not pictured in this gallery—please send them to Wes Mott, Dept. of Humanities & Arts, WPI, 100 Institute Road, Worcester, MA 01609-2280. ESP will publish bicentennial photos in future issues as space permits.

Conduct of Life Eorthcoming

Harvard University Press has announced for Fall 2003 publication The Conduct of Life, Volume Six in The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The historical introduction is by Professor Barbara L. Packer of UCLA; the informational notes are by the late Professor Joseph Slater of Colgate University; and the text was established, and the textual introduction, apparatus, and annexes prepared, by Douglas Emory Wilson, the general and textual editor of the edition. The price will be $20.

Seabiscuit and Emerson

Red Pollard, the jockey who rode the racehorse Seabiscuit to fame, turned to “Old Waldo’s” essay “Compensation” during times of personal despair. When in 1938—emaciated and with his leg smashed—he was hospitalized in Boston, he fell in love with his nurse, Agnes Conlon, and “woodered with quotes from Old Waldo while she tended to his leg.” He was successful. “Old Waldo,” Pollard told his friends, “had been right after all.” Thanks to Clarence Burley for sending us the passages from Laura Hillenbrand’s, Seabiscuit: An American Legend (New York: Random House, 2001), chapter 18.

No Emerson Stamp

The sole disappointment during the bicentennial year was the lack of a stamp to commemorate Emerson’s birth. Following strict guidelines, the Emerson Society more than three years ago submitted a formal proposal to the U.S. Postal Service to issue such a stamp. We have found recent special stamps celebrating “Night Friends: American Bats.” In its wisdom, however, the Postal Service seems satisfied that the rather feeble image of Emerson that graced a 3-cent stamp in 1940—part of a series of stamps honoring ten different American authors—was sufficient tribute to the most important figure in the nation’s cultural history.

ALA 2004

Mark your calendar now: The American Literature Association’s 2004 conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco, 27-30 May. For details see www.americanliterature.org. For information about the Emerson Society panels, contact our program chair, Professor Elizabeth Addison, at addison@wcu.edu.
Note of Thanks— The wonderful Emerson bicentennial events highlighted in the “Gallery” were made possible by the generosity and hard work of many organizations and individuals. Several institutions dedicated to preserving, understanding, and celebrating Emerson’s writings and vision are identified below. Special thanks go to the scores of Emersonians—those acknowledged in our regular list of patrons as well as anonymous donors—whose financial support was essential to the “Emerson in 2003” activities presented by the Emerson Society.

Emerson in 2003: A Gallery of Photographs

Celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson took many forms: conferences, publications, readings, radio interviews, receptions, parties. These events occurred over many months and around the world. The Emerson Society’s official bicentennial effort— “Emerson in 2003”—was co-chaired by Ron Bosco and Joel Myerson. The photographs in the following pages include events officially presented by the society, and those in which our members took a prominent part.

7 March— UUA Exhibit and Ceremony, Boston
More than 200 people filled the sanctuary of First and Second Church in Boston for the opening celebration of the Unitarian Universalist Association’s observance of the Emerson bicentennial (Emerson was minister of Second Church in Boston from 1829 to 1832).

The program included the opening of an Emerson exhibit by Bonnie Hurd Smith (assisted by Robert Richardson, Jr., and J. Frank Schulman), welcoming remarks from Stephen Kendrick, minister of First and Second Church, addresses by Wesley Mott and David Robinson, the debut of a newly commissioned anthem in Emerson’s honor by composer William Bolcom as performed by the Emerson Choir under the direction of Beth Norton, and songs from “An Emerson Garland: Poems and Hymns of Ralph Waldo Emerson,” edited by Leo Collins.

24 April— Robert Pinsky Reading and Reception at Harvard

2003 the Emerson Society presented its Distinguished Achievement Award to four institutions for their long commitment to preserving and interpreting the legacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and for extraordinary service over many years to Emerson editors and other scholars. Honored were the Concord Free Public Library, the Houghton Library of Harvard University, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association. Photos of presentations may be found throughout the “Emerson in 2003” coverage in this issue.

2 April— “Emerson in the Twenty-First Century”
This “Bicentennial Forum” at Sackler Lecture Hall at Harvard University featured Lawrence Buell (below), Stanley Cavell, Wai Chee Dimock, and Michael Sandel.

Distinguished Achievement Awards

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Emerson Society Papers

Fall 2003
25-26 April—"Spires of Form: The Emerson Bicentennial Conference"

The centerpiece of the Emerson Society's "Emerson in 2003" was a major scholarly conference hosted by the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) in Boston. The 107 pre-registrants—who were joined by many late arrivals—came from as far away as Melbourne, Australia (Robyn Emerson-Gullifer), Dusseldorf, Germany (Herwig Friedl), Tubingen, Germany (Juliane Haag and Jan Steiermann), Osaka, Japan (Yoshiko Fujita), Nagano, Japan (Yoshio Takanashi), and Tokyo, Japan (Shoji Goto). The MHS unveiled a splendid exhibit of Emerson materials, hosted a reception, and arranged a bus trip to Concord. Thirty-one speakers were featured in seven panels, and a book of conference papers is being published by the MHS.
22-24 May—ALA: Panels, Annual Meeting, Bicentennial Dinner

The Emerson Society annually holds its board meeting and business meeting during the American Literature Association conference, where the society also presents two panels. This year the fourteenth annual ALA conference met at the Hyatt Regency in Cambridge, Mass. Following are abstracts from panels presented by The Emerson Society on 23 and 24 May.

SESSION I: Emerson’s New Publication: The Later Lectures

Chair, Sarah Ann Wider (Columbia University)

NEW PROSPECTS: Obligations to the Rhetorical ME-STEM

ROGER THOMPSON, Virginia Military Institute

Using the Later Lectures as a starting point, this paper maps Emerson’s conception of rhetoric and eloquence. Rhetoric and eloquence are central to Emerson’s conception of language, and the Later Lectures provide some of Emerson’s most extended discussions of how rhetoric functions in a civil society. To understand Emerson as rhetorician, however, we must use new heuristics for uncovering Emerson’s vision of eloquence.

First, we must examine Emerson in terms of rhetorical history. While literary and philosophical history provide a rich background for Emerson’s language theory, Emerson’s rhetorical theory is marked by dialogue with a long, Platonic rhetorical tradition and a confrontation with eighteenth-century bellumism that has as yet received little critical attention. Second, we must have a clear understanding of Emerson’s audiences. Recent critical work has already resulted in contested versions of who Emerson’s audiences were and how they received Emerson’s lectures.

These versions could be greatly revised with a clear sense of the rhetorical expectations of his audiences: what were the standards of rhetoric that audiences were educated in and what were the rhetorical customs of the locations of Emerson’s speeches. No matter where Emerson lectured, his goal remained the same: to communicate the divine through a hope for “ecstasy and eloquence.” This hope for ecstasy and eloquence is at the heart of Emerson’s vision of rhetoric, indeed his vision of language, and it is through the later lectures that we see how Emerson attempts to realize that hope. The impact of this hope, however, requires a reconfiguration of critical study to include a clear sense of rhetorical education in nineteenth-century America.

‘The Rule of Life’: Emerson’s Summing Up

ELIZABETH ADDISON, Western Carolina University

In Ron Bosco and Joel Myerson’s newly published two-volume edition of Emerson’s later lectures, the last lecture included is “The Rule of Life.” In this lecture, recovered from a bewildering manuscript, Emerson sums up two threads in his thought that, though disparate, he always considered together. These are nature and spirit—the unity of nature’s laws and the spiritual primacy of individual perception and humility—and he had sounded them as keynotes in a famous letter he wrote to Benjamin Peter Hunt in 1835 and in his little book Nature, published in 1836. “The Rule of Life” sounds them again in 1867, couching them here as science and religion; the laws of one could be objectively demonstrated, Emerson says, but the laws of the other could be apprehended only in a perception of “the Divine Presence which rushes through all his pragmatic strivings.” The process of Quaker waiting is one of Emerson’s primary models for spiritual perception, and in this lecture he gathers references to Quaker words and perceptions he had recorded in his journal over many years. A comparison of this newly recovered text of the lecture given in 1867 with the letter and book of the mid-1830s shows that his emphasis on natural history and on reformation—the subjects of many scholarly studies in recent years—are embraced at each end of his active writing career by these twin enthusiasms for what he considered necessary truths, irrefutable laws. The lecture, which had never before been published, confirms that Quaker ideas were not casual for Emerson, but causal: that the model he drew from Quakers in the early 1830s was a durable model, one that could and did run from the beginning of his writing and speaking career to the end.
In "Power of the Mind" he also creates a casual, free-flowing voice that reflects his insistence on attending to the irregular experiences that affect him most intensely rather than those that tend to support any given theory of mind. Here he also uses images that portray the true metaphysician as a necessary guide through the wilderness of thought, variously depicted as a forbidding mountain and a dangerous lake. These metaphors not only help him to appeal to skeptics; they also reinforce the idea of a deep connection between nature and mind. Lastly, his personal experience, his intimacy with his audience, and his spontaneous sounding syntactic structures convey his readiness to guide others on this ecstatic quest.

**SESSION II: EMERSONIAN PROSPECTS: THE THIRD CENTURY.**

**CHAIR, ELIZABETH ADDISON (WERNER CAROLINA UNIV.)**

Contemporary Intersections: Emerson & Feminism

**SUSAN FIELD, NEW MEXICO TECH**

Emerson has much to teach us about receptivity, patience, desire, relational difference, and the "true romance" between us and the world. These ideas are particularly accessible through the account of relational difference and desire provided by contemporary feminism. Emerson conceived knowledge as "original relation" with the universe in terms of "the intersubjective view" suggested by Jessica Benjamin. He took the "keeping, precious thoughts" described by Helene Cixous to pursue a "new love" that "dares for the other" and shared Adrienne Rich's view that staying "spontaneous" requires having "some part of us always out beyond ourselves."

This paper examines Emerson's remarks on the loss of his son Waldo and Andre Lorde's remarks about her breast cancer (of which she died in 1992). While profound differences loom between Emerson and Lorde across chasms of race and sex, sexuality and political advocacy, a number of striking similarities can be drawn between them. Emerson's "half-caste" and Lorde's "mixed bogy" share a common "original relation" with the universe as a legacy of the idea of an "unconsummated" race.

* "Waves of Mutation" and the Thoreauvian Plank: Emerson, Poetry, Postmodernity

**SAUNDRA MORRIS, BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY**

I enact ways of reading Emerson's texts sympathetic to cultural and political activism and reflect on the ways in which these authors have been influential in their thinking about the relationship between Emerson's poetry and prose.

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Barry Andrews, Phyllis Cole, Malcolm Ferguson, Helen Deese.

Emerson: The Mjnd on Fire at First Parish

Bob Richardson signs his biography just before the birthday party.

Bob Richardson and Rich Higgins chat.

Barry Andrews, Phyllis Cole, Malcolm Ferguson, Helen Deese.

Partygoers assemble under the tent.

25 May-- Emerson in Japan

The English Literary Society of Japan had a panel discussion, "Nature's (1836) Presence—Celebrating Emerson's Bicentennial," at the society's 75th general meeting (from Thoreau to Dickinson and Beyond). MJR 41:347-60. [Emerson-Thoreau relationship]

Our bibliographer, David Robinson, and friend John Adams at Faneuil Hall, Boston.

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Larson, Kerry. "Justice to Emerson." Raritan 21, iii:46-67. [Emerson on justice]

Laugier, Sandra. "Emerson; Penser L'Ordinaire." RF^A 91:43-60. [Emerson, William James, Stanley Cavell]

Mariani, Giorgio. "The (Mis)Fortune of Emerson in Italy." Anglistica 6:155-70. [Emerson as an example to Henry James]


Murphy, Michael. "We dive & reappear in new places": Emerson, Proust, and the Nature of Memory." EJAC 21,ii:74-85. [Emerson as an influence on Proust]


Parrish, Tim. Walking Blues: Making Americans from Emerson to Elvis. Massachusetts [2001]. [Emerson as cultural catalyst]


Fall 2003

4 June—Emerson Down Under

Emerson Society life member John Ford, left, and Ian M. Johnstone celebrate Emerson’s birthday as well as the publication of Mr. Johnstone’s feature article, “A sage for all ages,” in the Sydney, Australia, Daily Telegraph.

28 June—“Emerson and the Examind Life”

Sponsored by the Philosophy Foundation of Waltham, Mass., in partnership with WGBH Forum Network, this free, public event attracted 500 to Faneuil Hall in Boston. Presently available for viewing on www.wgbh.org/forum, it was also filmed by C-Span 2 and can be seen on www.BookTV.org.

Jene Monksy, webmaster of www.rwe.org, and Barbara Solowey.

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Jim Monksy, webmaster of www.rwe.org, and Barbara Solowey.

Meta Cushing and Edie Murphy, event coordinators.

Presenters at Faneuil Hall: Robert Pinsky, who read from Emerson’s essays, Richard Geldard and David M. Robinson.

Fall 2003

10-13 July—“Thoreau and the Emersonian Influence”

The Emerson Society dedicated its 2003 Annual Gathering in Concord, Mass., to this Emerson-bicentennial theme.

"Emerson in 2003" co-chair Ron Bosco also serves as president of the Thoreau Society. He stands in front of the pulpit of the first Parish Church with his wife, Bernadette, following his presidential address on 12 July.

Emersonians and Thoreauvians gather after the reading: Debra Kang Dean, Suzi Carlisle, Jayne Gildon, Brad Dean, Peggy Bruce, Joel Myerson, Dick Schneider, Len Gougeon, Phyllis Yachinski, Bob Galvin, Laura Dassow Walls.


Help with ESP's Checklist of "Emerson in 2003" Items

Ralph Waldo Emerson is a national icon, and the bicentennial of his birth was observed not only in scholarly conferences and in formal public events but throughout the popular print and electronic media as well. ESP seeks your help in identifying items about the 2003 Emerson celebration in magazines, newspapers, TV, radio, and the Internet for a checklist that will be published in the Spring 2004 issue. This feature will continue to appear in ESP as long as more items are identified.

All contributors will be acknowledged in ESP. Please send items to Wes Mott, Department of Humanities & Arts, WPI, 100 Institute Road, Worcester, MA 01609-2280 (wmott@wpi.edu), taking care to supply such details as section/page numbers, dates, and Web addresses if they are not apparent. We are interested in different versions of syndicated items. Besides publishing the checklist in ESP, originals and copies will be deposited in the Emerson Society Collections at the Thoreau Institute in Lincoln, Mass. Researchers during the tricentennial will be grateful for our efforts!