Emerson Land Gifted to West Wisconsin Land Trust

JACK AND COLLEEN HOLMBECK
Rockford, Illinois

Land previously owned by Ralph Waldo Emerson on the shore of Bass Lake in northwestern Wisconsin was given to the West Wisconsin Land Trust of Menomonie by Colleen and Jack Holmbeck of Rockford, Illinois, on 26 November 2005.

The Holmbecks had purchased Government Lot 5 in 1996 in order to prevent the planned development of over 1,400 front feet of shore on the small lake that Jack had fished for more than sixty years. This 43-acre lake still has only two permanent residences and no summer cottages. The Emerson land will now be protected in perpetuity by a conservation easement prohibiting any development even if the land is subsequently sold by the land trust.

On 31 May 1856, Emerson purchased a total of 129.12 acres of U.S. Government land near the town of Trade Lake, Burnett County, Wisconsin. For full payment he used Bounty Land Warrant 58140 issued under an act of Congress approved 3 March 1855. He had previously acquired this warrant from Elias Plimpton, who was granted the warrant for his service in the War of 1812. Although the price paid by Emerson is not known, it is likely that $500 cash paid “for investment” to Emerson’s friend and attorney Horatio Woodman on 9 May 1856 was ultimately used to pay for the warrant. Both the warrant and the land purchase were recorded 10 September 1859. (On approximately the same dates, Woodman purchased an adjacent 160 acres also using a Bounty Land Warrant from the act of 1855. Woodman was a founder of both the Saturday Club and the Adirondac Club, whose members included Emerson, James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and other prominent business, government, and literary figures.)

Emerson continued to own this property until 9 March 1882, when he sold Lot 5 to Olof Johnson Ortendahl for $100. After Emerson’s death on 27 April 1882, the heirs named in his will sold Lots 3 and 4 to Gustaf Hultquist on 8 November 1883 for $254.36. The remaining southwest quarter of the northeast quarter was also sold to Hultquist on 8 May 1892 for $100.

Why did Emerson invest in Wisconsin? Perhaps the most likely reason is the reason for most investments—the hope of making a profit. Throughout the early 1800s “western land” was pretty much considered to be anything west of the Appalachian Mountains, and speculation was rampant. For example, it was estimated that “29,000,000 acres” in Wisconsin were “taken by speculators out of a total 38,000,000 sold from the entire public domain during the boom years 1835-37.”

A further indication of land frenzy was the interest in Bounty Land Warrants that were used by Emerson, Woodman, and others to pay for their land purchases. The Land Warrants (or land gifts) were originally issued to veterans of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and other conflicts as partial compensation for service since the government lacked funds to adequately pay its military personnel. The acreage granted varied with the rank and length of service (minimum fourteen days) of the individual. Warrant holders could choose specific acreage from the vast eligible U.S. holdings and pay for it with the warrants, or they could sell the warrants to someone else who could do likewise. During the first half of the nineteenth century, these negotiable warrants were traded rather fiercely, and some were traded fraudulently.

Wisconsin had been a state for only eight years at the time of Emerson’s purchase, and it was sparsely settled, particularly in the north. There were few or no roads in that area, and travel was mainly by boat, canoe, or horse. The railroads and logging companies were on their way, however, buying land and looking toward the riches to be had from the great Wisconsin pine forests. It was in this atmosphere that Horatio Woodman encouraged Emerson to “invest in the west.” Horatio’s brother Cyrus was also in the thick of the action in Wisconsin representing canal, railroad, logging, mining, and banking interests. Cyrus and his law partner C. C. Washburn had personally accumulated more than 130,000 acres to become among the largest landholders in Wisconsin.

(Continued on page 11)
**EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS**

The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

www.emersonsociety.org

Editor: Wesley T. Mott
Book Review Editor: Jennifer Gurley
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**PROSPECTS**

**American Literature Association Conference**

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will present two panels in San Francisco, Calif., during the seventh annual conference of the American Literature Association, which will be held 25-26 May 2006. Both sessions will be on Friday, 26 May, and our annual business meeting will follow the same day at 3:30 p.m.

**SESSION 1 (8 a.m.)**

*Emerson and Philosophy: A Roundtable Discussion*

Chair: Todd Richardson (University of Texas-Peoria Basin)

"Emerson, Words, and Things: Personal Language and Impersonal Faith."
Elizabeth Addison (Brooklyn College)

"Shall We Fancy Emerson a Philosopher?"
Jim Bell (Oberlin College)

"Emerson and the Evolution of American Philosophy."
Jennifer Bernstein (The Citadel)

"A Sublime but Modest Empiricist."
Kristin Boudreau (University of Georgia)

"The Availability of Philosophy in Emerson, Cavell, and Feminism."
Susan L. Dunston (New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology)

"Radical Self-Reliance and the Limits of Democratic Faith."
John S. Holzwarth (Lewis & Clark College)

**SESSION II (2 p.m.)**

*Emerson and Later 19th-Century Writers*

Chair: Joseph M. Thomas (Caldwell College)

"Nodding Over Emerson: Kate Chopin and the Relevance of Transcendentalist Tractarianism in a Post-Romantic Age, William Ross (Wake Forest University)

"Emerson and the Gilded Age Utopia.
Sophia Forster (SUNY-Buffalo)

"Emerson Iconography and the Free Religious Index, Todd Richardson (University of Texas-Peoria Basin)

"Emerson and Recovery: Post-Civil War Intellectual Culture, Jean Darcy (Queen's University--Belfast, Northern Ireland)

The ALA conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco, in an Embarcadero Center. The conference fee for those who pre-register before 15 April is $75 ($25 for graduate students, independent scholars, and full-time faculty) that date the conference costs $80 for each category. For more information about the conference, check the ALA Web site: www.americallit.org.

**Should Emerson Have Been Executed?**

In an article about the Haymarket affair of 1886 entitled "The Terror Last Time?" (The New Yorker, 13 March 2006, Caleb Crain notes that a lawyer defending the eight accused anarchists "argued that if the anarchists deserved to hang for their violent acts, then abolitionists like Emerson and Thoreau should have been executed in the eighteen-sixties." - Joel Bratton

Spring 2006

Sophia Forster Wins Graduate Student Award

The Emerson Society is pleased to announce that this year's graduate student paper award goes to Sophia Forster, a graduate student in English at SUNY-Buffalo, for her essay on Emerson and late-nineteenth-century utopian thought.

Concord 2006: "Emerson and Wildness"

The Emerson Society will present a panel on "Emerson and Wildness" at the Thoreau Society Annual Gathering, reports our program chair, Joel Bratton. Thoreau Society scholars include Dan Brown ("Wildness and the Ecology of Transcendentalism"), Gayle L. Smith ("Emerson and Wildness: in Nature, in Mind, and in Writing"), and Robert Buschardt ("W.M.S. Jackson and Emersonian Wildness"). The panel is in the keeping with the conference theme, "Mountains, Seashores, and Moonlight: Thoreau's Exploration of Wildness." The Gathering will be held 6-8 July.

Emerson Concordance on CPFL Web Site

Eugene Irey's useful concordance to Emerson's essays is now available on the Web site of the Concord Free Public Library, Leslie Pittin Wilson. The Concord Free Public Library at 16 Concord Street in Concord, MA, will provide an electronic concordance to the essays, and the Concord Free Public Library will work to support special programs of the Society. Dues categories are Life ($500), Sustaining ($50), Contributing ($25), and Regular ($10). Please send a 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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**2005 EMERSON SOCIETY PATRONS**

Emerson Society members continue generously to join at various "patron" levels of membership. All donations above the $10 annual regular membership go to support special programs of the Society. Dan categories are Life ($500), Sustaining ($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.
Community Project Winner Update

Our 2005 Community Project Award Winner, Steve Wilson, has recently been made into a popular film that is entertaining audiences throughout this country and elsewhere. It is interesting to note that this magnificently creative writer and thinker found an early source of inspiration in another magnificently creative writer and thinker, Ralph Waldo Emerson. I am glad to see that you are more cheerful in your last letter. I don’t know why you object to his style—it seems to me admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admirable. Quel dommage that such a man should be an admire
Bibliography

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Find a solution to the problem of the individual's relation to society. Other critics point out, to see Emerson simply as a typical racist of analysis suggested to Quetelet that there was a regularity to human form. The more humans changed, the more they essentially development from simpler forms of life toward humanity, Emerson, and "transmutationists," who saw a proto-Darwinian genealogical lion." The upshot of this approach, as Walls succinctly puts it, is Emerson gleaned the idea of a correspondence between the eye and... flexiable faculty into something akin to the Romantic imagination, the... three. Emerson throughout the 1830s expanded his definition of this... tion for others" (2). This moral sense, in Robinson's words, was not... degree of... frames of nature and the culture of truth in the select American hagiology" (30). Our obsession with... likely "to represent his age and country comprehensively and with... consciousness and culture throughout his writings. Through... personal politics. Emerson has again done a great service. He has once more shown us that Emerson is a vexed, expansive soul trying with all his considerable might to make the two great poles... into action, holistic harmony into particular deeds.

The Political Emerson: Essential Writings on Politics and Social Reform


In his new edition of Emerson's political writings, David Robinson continues his work of illuminating interpretations, which even today surprise the mind. Emerson's use of the central role that science plays throughout his writings. Through his exploration of Emerson's metaphorical science Wells opens a new door into Emerson's thought and development. This book is thoroughly convincing and will prove to be essential reading for any student of Emerson and of the history of science.

—Richard Schneider
Wartburg College

Consciousness and Culture: Emerson and Thoreau


Joel Porte's recent collection of essays, gathered from more than forty years of scholarship and teaching on Emerson and Thoreau, indicates his longstanding and influential position in the field. He provides an other "representative" of his age lead him back to the same generalizing spirit of the Emersonian age, which made his provocative calls for attention to stylistic and connotative elements of Emerson's writing.

In one essay, some might find that Porte gets too familiar with Emerson's mind; in another, he proposes that Emerson's "Hamlet-complex" (64). Emerson and Thoreau's work as cultural—and specifically national—critics is simply too strong to cast aside. Porte's argument, as Larzer Ziff has observed, is that in his Transcendentalists have more in common with the renegade aspects of Byron than they do with the lofty words of Wordsworth. Porte uncovers a gap between the public and the private Emerson, between the lecturer who purs... "universalizing objective" and the journal writer who indulged his "sacred impulse" (76).

Did Emerson feel constrained by his obligations to speak to matters of immediate social or political concern? As a critic of the... to the realm of what he called the "old largeness," an infinite space of speculatory inquiry that escaped particular historical? Porte does not give Emerson this space needed to maneuver within the "unrepresentative" of his age lead him back to the same generalizing spirit of the Emersonian age, which made his provocative calls for attention to stylistic and connotative elements of Emerson's writing.

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—Leslie E. Eckel
Yale University
Bradley P. Dean died of a massive heart attack on 14 January 2006, leaving a son and his wife, the accom-
plished poet Debra Kang Dean. Born 4 February 1954 at the Clarck Force Base in the Philippines, Brad served a stint in the military service and worked in the real world, both of which gave him a sense of responsibility and a true understanding of deadlines, as well as a lack of sympathy for academic silliness. His 1984 master's thesis at Eastern Washington University studied the early "Life without Principle" manuscripts, and assumed legendary status among Thoreauvians and textual editors for its accuracy and brilliant reconstruction of the manuscript. Brad's 1993 dissertation at the University of Connecticut, a textual study of the "Dispersion of Seeds" manuscripts, formed the basis for Faith in a Seed (1993). His other books were editions of Thoreau's Wild Fruits (2000) and Letters to a Spiritual Seeker (2004), Thoreau's corres-
dence with H. G. O. Blake.

Brad's detective work in tracking down Thoreau's sources and other materials about his life and those of his contemporaries made him universally recognized as the person who knew the most about Thoreau's biography, and one of the two or three people best informed about Thoreau's compositional habits. Brad's computer expertise as unsur-
passed by anyone else working on the Concord circle, and all scholars are in his debt for his Dwarfs of the World was the director of the Media Center at the Thoreau Institute for finding, scanning, and mounting thousands of documents relating to Thoreau and Emerson on the Institute's Web site; indeed, I believe it fair to say that all the intellectual content on the Institute's Web site is the result of Brad's work or those of his friends whom he got to contribute to it. Brad was also instrumen-
tial in making Emerson's writings available for sale on CD and printable. The price for the CD is $75, including postage and handling; it can be purchased through the Web site at www.rwe.org. In addition, the ten volumes will be available on

While neither Emerson nor the Woodman had ever seen the Bass Lake Lot, they made vivid dreams of logs being floated on the small creek exiting Bass Lake (or skidded on ice roads) to the nearby Trade River and then on to the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. The white pines on this property today are probably descendants of the earlier pine forests that existed in that area in the 1850s.

Two years ago Emerson would have liked a "quick turn" on his money, but the financial panic of 1857 hit almost immediately, and extreme real estate pressure existed for about five more years. By that time the excitement about the west had cooled. Although Emerson continued to hold his land for many years thereafter, he was probably disappointed in his investment because he contin-
ued paying real estate taxes, and no significant interest was ever shown in his repeated attempts to sell the property.

In 1876, upon selling his ownership, Emerson suffered from fatigue in 1871 and loss of memory during lectures. He continued to be involved in the handling of his affairs, how-
ever, as witnessed by his account book entry of 19 February 1876, recording the payment of his Wisconsin real estate taxes, and by his cover letter of the same date to his attorney Horatio Woodman: "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 this view, I shall $2.00 with my thanks. R. W. Emerson."

Brad was a guileless enthusiasm for intellectual life and his writings. Brad was also a superb essayist who, at forty-five years of thoughtful and diligent recording and reflections. Brad had a great scholar, whose published writings gave us new texts and new ways of looking at existing texts, as well as a string of interesting shorter pieces on how Thoreau's readings and writings reflected his intellectual life and his writings. Brad was also a superb resource for all scholars, always willing to answer questions. Brad's early death stunned all of us, and I hate to lie about him in the past tense. —Joel Myerson

The Digital Journals are made available through the generousity of supporting members of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute. New York, N.Y., and now join the Centennial Edition of the Complete Works and other Emerson-related materials featured on the Web site.

Important note for the academic community: In the introduction to the Archive, users are reminded that the 1904-14 Journals are not definitive or complete and that the 16-vol-
tume Harvard University Press edition is the authoritative record and should be consulted prior to use in books, articles, dissertations, or formal papers. The present Digital Archive will nonetheless serve as a valuable tool in research and will further our interest in Emerson's life and work among the reading public.

Board of Directors of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute are Joyce Manley, Chairperson; Alexander Forbes Emerson, Vice-Chairman; Susan Imholz, Treasurer; Richard Geldard, Secretary, Archive Editor; Barbara Solowey; David Beardsley.

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute is pleased to announce the completion of a two-year project: the publication of the ten-volume Journals, originally published from 1904 to 1914 and edited by Edward Emerson. The Archive, com-
prising over 5,000 pages of material, has been scanned and indexed by the Institute staff and is being offered for sale on CD in Acrobat Reader PDF files, conveniently searchable and printable. The price for the CD is $75, including postage and handling: it can be purchased through the Web site at www.rwe.org. In addition, the ten volumes will be available in February through online booksellers as eBooks, at a per-vol-
ute price of $7.50.

The Digital Journals are made available through the generosity of supporting members of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute. New York, N.Y., and now join the Centennial Edition

On 9 October 1880, Woodman wrote his friend Wisconsin State Representative H. L. Humphrey in Washington asking him to view over Emerson's property when he returned to Wisconsin and to describe its value and the property in the immediate area. On 2 February 1881, Andrew Ahlstrom, Burnet County Clerk, wrote to the same Humphrey offering to buy Government Lot 5 from Emerson for $2.00 per acre on behalf of C. Meyer— $25.00 down and the balance is in fall. Humphrey forwarded the letter to Woodman, who sent a refusal to Humphrey because he felt the sale of one parcel might detract from the sale of the rest of the Emerson property, and because the price was too low. He also believed the land had to be examined first.

Ahlstrom wrote Humphrey on 15 October 1881, that his client would be willing to buy both Lots 4 and 5, and that he (Ahlstrom) would be willing to examine the land for Woodman for $5.00. On the same date, Woodman again wrote Humphrey for the name of someone to examine the land. On 19 October, Humphrey sent Woodman the Ahlstrom offer, and on 24 Octo-
ber Woodman sent Humphrey his $5.00 and requested to examine the property carefully, not saleable as a whole, and worth only $230-250 for the 129 acres. (In those days lake property commanded no pre-
mium.) Ahlstrom, however, now offered $100 for Lot 5.

Emerson's son-in-law William H. Forbes.)
Emerson Land Gifted
(Continued from page 11)

Is it any wonder that in his letter of 23 May 1882 to “Dr. Emerson [RWE’s son Edward] and Wm. H. Forbes, Executors of the Estate of Ralph Waldo Emerson,” Woodman, no longer actively practicing law, asked “to be excused from further service therein.” He also asked to be excused “from receiving any compensation” for what he had done for Mr. Emerson. Woodman apparently felt it was a privilege to help the prominent but ailing philosopher. Woodman had written Humphrey on 2 May that “Mr. Emerson has left us full of years and honors, and of the admiration of men wherever the English language is spoken.”

One of those admirers was James Elliot Cabot, who commented that even though Emerson’s family faced years of “straitened circumstances,” he still found a way for a “purchase of land to preserve a bit of his favorite woodlands from the otherwise inevitable axe.” Cabot refers, of course, to Emerson’s earlier purchase of another lake property on the northern edge of Walden Pond, where he allowed Henry David Thoreau to build a cabin and conduct his experiment in Transcendental living in 1845-47.

In a letter to his brother William dated 4 October 1844, Emerson wrote,

I have lately added an absurdity or two to my usual ones, which I am impatient to tell you of. In one of my solitary wood-walks by Walden Pond, I met two or three men who told me they had come thither to sell & to buy a field, on which they wished me to bid as purchaser. As it was on the shore of the pond, & now for years I had a sort of daily occupancy in it, I bid on it, & bought it, eleven acres for $8.10 per acre. The next day I carried some of my well beloved gos-sips to the same place & they deciding that the field was not good for anything, if Heartwell Bigelow should cut down his pine-grove, I bought, for 125 dollars more, his pretty wood lot of 3 or 4 acres, and so am landlord & waterlord of 14 acres, more or less, on the shore of Walden, & can raise my own black-berries.

Renowned thinker, philosopher, essayist, and lecturer, Emerson never forgot the importance of nature. “I do not count the hours I spend in the woods,” he wrote in his journal in 1857, “though I forget my affairs there & my books. And, when there, I wander hither & thither; any bird, any plant, any spring, detains me. I do not hurry homewards for I think all affairs may be postponed to this walking. And it is for this idleness that all my businesses exist.”

Could Emerson, who took walks and observed nature at Walden with Thoreau, have done other than love his Wisconsin property? Here he would have seen white pines, oaks, maples, birches, eagles, loons, ducks, owls, pheasants, woodpeckers, swallows, bluebirds, bear, deer, beavers, rabbits, chipmunks, turtles, frogs, northern pike, large-mouthed bass, sunfish, wildflowers, butterflies, and finally zillions of insects (mainly mosquitoes).

If Ralph Waldo Emerson’s spirits had risen in Massachusetts woodlands, they most certainly would have risen also at his unseen property on Bass Lake in Burnett County, Wisconsin!

Notes
3 E. Wade Hone, Land & Property Research in the United States (Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry, 1997), 115-126.
5 Nesbit, Wisconsin: A History, 140.
7 Emerson’s previous attorney, Horatio Woodman, had been under intense financial and other pressures for many years, and in 1879 he was inexplicably lost from a steamboat. The Cyrus Woodman letters cited here and subsequently are found in the Cyrus Woodman Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. The letter of 15 June from Cyrus Woodman to Emerson referred to Emerson’s conversation with Cyrus’s daughter about Western lands under the previous care of Horatio. The 12 July letter refers to land, Horatio, and taxes. The 14 October letter mentions a $10 payment but not specifically what the money was for. Emerson and Cyrus Woodman likely knew each other at this time but were not close friends.

[Editor’s Note: The Holmbecks’ stewardship of Emerson’s Wisconsin land was the subject of a feature newspaper article that enjoyed national syndication: Pat Cunningham, “Beauty unspoiled: Rockford couple make sure developers won’t get near gift,” Rockford (Ill.) Register Star, Sunday, 1 January 2006, B1-2.]