Readers of Henry Nash Smith's classic essay "Emerson's Problem of Vocation" may be misled concerning Emerson's attitude toward one of the most famous experiments in Utopian living of his age, Brook Farm. Emersonians may recall that in his essay Smith asserts that Emerson, after leaving the ministry, concluded that the lecture platform was "the new pulpit of the age," and dedicated himself to the vocation of the lecturer as the best means of serving his fellow man. Smith goes on to suggest that the contemplation necessary for such a vocation "seemed possible only through a complete withdrawal from the busy life of the community." He then points to Emerson's rejection of George Ripley's invitation to join the transcendental Brook Farm enterprise in 1840 as evidence of his now firm preference for the "cult of solitude and contemplation." Smith thereby creates the impression that henceforth Emerson would approach the question of social reform only through the abstracted role of scholar and that he would consciously avoid the "strenuous role of a reformer." The historical record, however, here made more complete by the addition of a letter from Emerson's brother William, indicates that the bard's attitude toward Brook Farm, and social reform generally, was much more complex than Smith would have us believe, and that his consideration of Ripley's offer was serious and extensive.

Emerson apparently began actively considering Brook Farm in mid-November of 1840. At this time he wrote to Lidian, who was visiting with her brother in Boston, that "the 'Community' question is in full agitation betwixt Mr. Ripley, Mr. Alcott & me & if you wish to have a voice in it & not to find your house sold over your head or perhaps a troop of new tenants suddenly into it you must come & counsel your dangerous husband." He then points to Emerson's rejection of George Ripley's invitation to join the transcendental Brook Farm enterprise in 1840 as evidence of his now firm preference for the "cult of solitude and contemplation." Smith thereby creates the impression that henceforth Emerson would approach the question of social reform only through the abstracted role of scholar and that he would consciously avoid the "strenuous role of a reformer." The historical record, however, here made more complete by the addition of a letter from Emerson's brother William, indicates that the bard's attitude toward Brook Farm, and social reform generally, was much more complex than Smith would have us believe, and that his consideration of Ripley's offer was serious and extensive.

Emerson's final decision was, as we know, not to join the community. In the draft of his letter to Ripley he states that "The design appears to me so noble & humane, proceeding, as I plainly see, from a manly & expanding heart & mind that it makes me & all men its friends & debtors. It becomes a matter of conscience to entertain it friendly & examine what it has for us," something which Emerson most certainly did (Letters 2:368-69).

(continued on page 2)
Readers of Henry Nash Smith's classic essay "Emerson's Problem of Vocation" may be misled concerning Emerson's attitude toward one of the most famous experiments in Utopian living of his age, Brook Farm. Emersonians may recall that in his essay Smith asserts that Emerson, after leaving the ministry, concluded that the lecture platform was "the new pulpit of the age," and dedicated himself to the vocation of the lecturer as the best means of serving his fellow man. Smith goes on to suggest that the contemplation necessary for such a vocation "seemed possible only through a complete withdrawal from the busy life of the community." He then points to Emerson's rejection of George Ripley's invitation to join the transcendental Brook Farm enterprise in 1840 as evidence of his now firm preference for the "cult of solitude and contemplation." Smith thereby creates the impression that henceforth Emerson would approach the question of social reform only through the abstracted role of scholar and that he would consciously avoid the "strenuous role of a reformer." The historical record, however, here made more complete by the addition of a letter from Emerson's brother William, indicates that the bard's attitude toward Brook Farm, and social reform generally, was much more complex than Smith would have us believe, and that his consideration of Ripley's offer was serious and extensive.

Emerson apparently began actively considering Brook Farm in mid-November of 1840. At this time he wrote to Lidian, who was visiting with her brother in Boston, that "the 'Community' question is in full agitation betwixt Mr. Ripley, Mr. Alcott & me & if you wish to have a voice in it & not to find your house sold over your head or perhaps a troop of new tenants suddenly into it you must come & counsel your dangerous husband." Emerson's final decision was, as we know, not to join the community. In the draft of his letter to Ripley he states that "The design appears to me so noble & humane, proceeding, as I plainly see, from a manly & expanding heart & mind that it makes me & all men its friends & debtors It becomes a matter of conscience to entertain it friendly & examine what it has for us," something which Emerson most certainly did.

(continued on page 2)
Dues Reminder

Society members who have not yet renewed for 1992 will find a blue membership form included with this issue to-LE. Remember that membership is on a calendar-year basis. Members, however, automatically receive the Spring issue of ESP for the following year, along with a dues reminder.

To renew or begin membership in the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, send a check for $10 (U.S.)—payable to "The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, Dept. of Humanities, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA 01609.

Emerson and the New Bedford Affair in Boston Newspapers

WESLEY T. MOTT
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Emerson's refusal to lecture before the New Bedford Lyceum in 1845 is because it denied membership to blacks was a significant milestone in his career as an abolitionist. That he joined Charles Sumner in this gesture only sharpened public perception that the Concord intellectual was willing to be associated with reformers and firebrands. The controversy ignited by the Scholair's activism was reflected in the variety of opinion in the Boston press.

As might be expected, William Lloyd Garrison's "Liberator was eager to embrace Emerson in its cause. As early as 31 October 1845, it published a letter from [Joseph or Daniel] R[jacketson]" under the title "LYCEUM LECTURES CLODED AGAINST IN NEW BEDFORD." "Will J. O. Choules, R. W. Emerson, and Charles Sumner, come here," Rickeston asked, "and lecture to people who are making color their test of character? I hope not. I hope they will spurn the paltry twenty dollars, and tell them to send South of Mason & Dixon's line after men who are slaveholders, to cater to their tastes?" The letter was followed by an editorial note:

We blush to record this new instance of the vulgar and heathenish procription of a portion of our fellow-citizens, on account of their complexion. It is in the highest degree disgraceful to those who claim to be civilized, much more Christianized. We unite in the hope expressed by our correspondent, that such noble men as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Sumner will, on ascertainment of the facts in the case, decline lecturing before the New Bedford Lyceum, or else improve the occasion to rebuke the foul spirit of complexional caste.

Len Gougeon, in his superb Virtue's Hero: Emerson, Anti-slavery, and Reform, thoroughly explores the importance of what he calls the New Bedford Affair to Emerson's life and career, and documents the Liberator's continuing coverage of the episode. The Liberator reprinted from the New Bedford Register a letter of "PROTEST" signed by the Rickeston's and nine others (26 November); on 5 December it printed an article by "W. P." (likely Wendell Phillips) praising "the generous and noble refusal" of Emerson and Sumner; on the 19th, an article on "THE NEW-BEDFORD LYCEUM" by "[Daniel] R[jacketson];" and on 16 January 1846, the texts of both Emerson's and Sumner's letters of refusal.

But the Boston press was not united in praise of this gesture. The Boston Daily Star, which prided itself on full and accurate reporting of Emerson's "Representative Men" lectures, was now annoyed. On Thursday, 22 January 1846 the Star reported: A Flare Up.

Something of an amusing "flare up" has occurred between the New Bedford Lyceum, and Messrs. R. W. Emerson and Charles Sumner, of this city. These gentlemen had been invited to lecture before that body. The Lyceum, however, changed its position to receive colored folk as members, upon the usual terms, though they prepared a place for them to be present, if they wished, free of charge. Hereupon Messrs. Emerson and Sumner took fire, and declined lecturing before the Lyceum. Mr. Emerson says his duty is to instruct the ignorant; and if any are excluded, it should be the learned. But it seems that the ignorant, as he terms them, had a chance to learn—and therefore his real position is that of dictation. He desires to order the Lyceum as to what its members shall prefer, and what not. Mr. Sumner, however, had a chance to learn, and if any are excluded, it should be the learned. If those who prefer the larger freedom between colors and classes, are permitted to act as they please, then those who chance to think differently should be allowed equal right to do as they prefer—and such acts as Mr. Emerson and Mr. Sumner have done in this case, under the affected love of freedom, are essentially tyrannical and very foolish.

The Liberator derivatively reprinted some of the antiabolition letters and articles, but it was not united in praise of the Boston press feature titled "Refuge of Oppression"; the entire Star article (with a typo, three punctuation changes, and omission of the next-to-last word) found its way into this column of infamy on 30 January.

On the same day the Boston Daily Times echoed the reverberations of the New Bedford Affair at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. The three-paragraph report begins:

MASS. ANTI SLAVERY SOCIETY.—The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society continued its session yesterday morning and afternoon at the Tremont Temple. There was a tolerably full attendance, and considerable excitement. The morning was principally consumed by several speakers in leading Rev. Ralph W. Emerson and Charles Sumner, Esq. for their refusing to lecture before the New Bedford Lyceum, on account of its excluding colored people, and in insulting the citizens of New Bedford, for their invertebrate prejudices against color. A rather objective account of a controversial episode, considering that the "Times" was for Thoreau a byword for journalistic cowardice and irrelevancy.

(continued on page 4)
New Bedford Affair

(continued from page 3)

Daniel Ricketson presented the following, which was discussed by W. L. Garrison, C. C. Burleigh, P. Pillsbury, Rev. Mr. Russell of Hingham, Charles L. Reymond, Ricketson, J. B. Sanderson of Lynn, and adopted:

Resolved, That Charles Sumner and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who have refused to lecture before the New Bedford Lyceum, on account of the exclusion of colored persons, deserve the warmest thanks of every friend of justice and humanity; and we rejoice that this testimony from such a quarter, which must strike a strong blow against the prejudice of color, and carry home a severe rebuke to those who, by their acts, have yielded to the base and wicked spirit of the South, and violated the boasted principles of Northern liberty.

Notes

1 John O. Choules, pastor of the First Baptist Church in New Bedford from 1833 to 1838, went on to serve churches in Buffalo and Newport, Rhode Island. He died in New York on 5 January 1856 at the age of 55. (Worcester Palladium, 16 January 1856).


3 The author is preparing a critical study of the Star’s accounts of the “Representative Men” lectures.

4 The Society’s formal resolution at this 29 January session is included in the Liberator’s extensive coverage of the annual meeting in the 6 February issue.

Status Report on Emerson Editions

Volume 2 of The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Ronald A. Bosco, Editor; Ralph H. Orth, General Editor) is expected to be published by the University of Missouri Press later this year. The edition will print (mostly for the first time) 330 of the 890 manuscript letters that survive in eight volumes.

Volume 4 of The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Wesley T. Mott, Editor; Albert J. von Frank, Chief Editor) is also expected to be published by the University of Missouri Press later this year.

Work in Progress

Nancy Craig Simms reports that she has completed her final editing of The Selected Letters of Mary Moody Emerson (1774-1873), to be published by the University of Georgia Press later this year. The edition will print (mostly for the first time) 330 of the 890 manuscript letters that survive in eight volumes. Written to fifty correspondents over a period of seventy years, the letters record the spiritual and intellectual journey of the woman who most significantly influenced the thought and style of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The letters are conservatively edited, to preserve the unique features of Mary Emerson’s style. Extensive biographical and other information—in the form of introductions, notes, calendars of residences, and illustrations—creates a new context for appreciating these texts even beyond their obvious influence on Waldo. For the first time we will be able to see Mary Moody Emerson on her own terms.

American Literature Association Conference

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will present two panels at the third annual conference of the American Literature Association in San Diego, California, on 28-31 May 1992. Both sessions will be held on Thursday, the 28th:

SESSION 1: Rereading Emerson. Chair, David M. Robinson (Oregon State Univ.)

“Emerson’s ‘Woman’: Another View of Self-Reliance,” Irene Williams (Univ. of San Diego)

“The Anarchy of Material Culture: An Unspoken Side of Emerson’s Nationalism,” Ronald A. Bosco (Univ. at Albany, State Univ. of New York)

“Dogmatism and the Spirit of Innovation: Emerson and the Christian Examiner,” Guy Litton (Univ. of South Carolina)

SESSION 2: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism: A Sesquicentennial Celebration. Chair, Wesley T. Mott (Worcester Polytechnic Inst.)

“Theodore Parker’s Transcendentalism,” Dean Grodzins (Harvard Univ.)

“Parker and Emerson After 1842,” Gary Collison (Penn State—York)

“Caroline Dall on Theodore Parker,” Helen R. Deese (Texas Christian University)

The ALA conference will be held at the Bahia Resort Hotel on Mission Bay. Preregistration conference fees will be $25 (with a special rate of $10 for independent scholars, retired individuals, and students). The hotel is offering a conference rate of $74 a night (single) or $80 a night (double). To register or obtain housing information, write to Professor Alfred Bendixen, English Dept., California State University, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8110.

Status Report on Emerson Editions

Volume 2 of The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Ronald A. Bosco, Editor; Ralph H. Orth, General Editor) is expected to be published by the University of Missouri Press later this year.

Volume 4 of The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Wesley T. Mott, Editor; Albert J. von Frank, Chief Editor) is also expected to be published by the University of Missouri Press later this year.

Work in Progress

Nancy Craig Simms reports that she has completed her final editing of The Selected Letters of Mary Moody Emerson (1774-1873), to be published by the University of Georgia Press later this year. The edition will print (mostly for the first time) 330 of the 890 manuscript letters that survive in eight volumes. Written to fifty correspondents over a period of seventy years, the letters record the spiritual and intellectual journey of the woman who most significantly influenced the thought and style of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The letters are conservatively edited, to preserve the unique features of Mary Emerson’s style. Extensive biographical and other information—in the form of introductions, notes, calendars of residences, and illustrations—creates a new context for appreciating these texts even beyond their obvious influence on Waldo. For the first time we will be able to see Mary Moody Emerson on her own terms.

American Literature Association Conference

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will present two panels at the third annual conference of the American Literature Association in San Diego, California, on 28-31 May 1992. Both sessions will be held on Thursday, the 28th:

SESSION 1: Rereading Emerson. Chair, David M. Robinson (Oregon State Univ.)

“Emerson’s ‘Woman’: Another View of Self-Reliance,” Irene Williams (Univ. of San Diego)

“The Anarchy of Material Culture: An Unspoken Side of Emerson’s Nationalism,” Ronald A. Bosco (Univ. at Albany, State Univ. of New York)

“Dogmatism and the Spirit of Innovation: Emerson and the Christian Examiner,” Guy Litton (Univ. of South Carolina)

SESSION 2: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism: A Sesquicentennial Celebration. Chair, Wesley T. Mott (Worcester Polytechnic Inst.)

“Theodore Parker’s Transcendentalism,” Dean Grodzins (Harvard Univ.)

“Parker and Emerson After 1842,” Gary Collison (Penn State—York)

“Caroline Dall on Theodore Parker,” Helen R. Deese (Texas Christian University)

The American Literature Association conference will be held at the Bahia Resort Hotel on Mission Bay. Pre-registration conference fees will be $25 (with a special rate of $10 for independent scholars, retired individuals, and students). The hotel is offering a conference rate of $74 a night (single) or $80 a night (double). To register or obtain housing information, write to Professor Alfred Bendixen, English Dept., California State University, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8110.

Special Concord Session: “Emerson and Concord: A Sense of Place”

The Emerson Society will present a special session on “Emerson and Concord: A Sense of Place” in Concord, Mass., on Sunday, 12 July 1992. Like the successful session on “Emerson & Thoreau” presented last year, the 1992 program will be offered the day after The Thoreau Society’s annual meeting.

The panel, moderated by Joel Myerson (Univ. of South Carolina), features “The Squire of Coolidge Castle,” Robert Gross (College of William and Mary); “Emerson and Concord History,” Robert B. Bartlebey (Pennsylvania State Univ.); “Emerson as Neighbor,” Daniel Sheady (Univ. of North Carolina); and “Emerson’s Twentieth-Century Visitors,” Jayne K. Gordon (The Concord Museum). Lawrence Buell (Harvard Univ.) will serve as respondent.

The program will be held, once again, in the French Gallery of The Concord Museum, across from the Emerson House, from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. Plenty of time will be allowed for questions and discussion by the audience. The session is in conjunction with “Concord: A Sense of Place,” an NEH grant awarded this year to the newly renovated Museum. Society members are invited to a special, informal tour of the Ralph Waldo Emerson House beginning at 1 p.m.

Emerson House Hours for 1992

The Ralph Waldo Emerson House reopens on 16 April and will close on 31 October, reports Director Nancy S. Shackford. Hours are Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Sunday and Holidays from 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. (4:30 being the time of last entrance).

The Society is grateful to Nancy Shackford for arranging the special tour for members only at 1 p.m. on Sunday, 12 July (see item above). The Emerson House is located at 28 Cambridge Turnpike in Concord, Mass. For more information in season, call 508-369-2236.

Walk for Walden Woods

The Emerson Society joined the Thoreau Society and several environmental and civic organizations in endorsing “The Walk for Walden Woods” in Concord on 12 April 1992. The Walk was a major fund-raising event of The Walden Woods Project.

Spring 1992
The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson.


Like Old Man River, the Emerson volumes just keep rollin' along. Every year produces either one of Emerson's lost volumes of the additional prose published in Emerson's lifetime, including some previously uncollected; selections from the sermons and the early lectures; all the poetry published by Emerson; and much of the unpublished verse. They will not include any prose selections from the journals or any letters (except perhaps a few of a public nature). Publication is planned for the fall of 1994.

The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The Library of America has now added the volumes to its expanding program of publishing the complete works of American authors. The volumes include the sermons Emerson delivered (some of them many times) during the period from 10 October 1826 to 20 November 1828, and react correspondingly. At the end of each volume, as one might expect in a definitive edition, is an extensive section of "Textual and Manuscript Notes," which gives a comprehensive genetic transcription of all alterations in the manuscripts for those who wish to reconstruct how Emerson wrote his sermons and revised them for the different publications. Emerson the pulpit orator would make on me. This was more than a matter of spotting resemblances to ideas and turns of phrase familiar to readers of the essays: the emphasis in Sermon 85 on the liberal and the rigid religious factions in Unitarianism, which recalls the discussion of political parties in "Politics," or the resonant phrase "In this grateful season" in Sermon 39, with its echoes of the Divinity School Address. My interest was more personal, to see whether the personality so familiar to us from the essays existed as early as the ministerial phase of Emerson's career.

My impression of the young Reverend Mr. Emerson is of a student of the sermon genre. Moreover, a number of the passages of high seriousness, determined not only to be intellectually respectable, as his educated parishioners had a right to expect, but also to show his own attempts at spiritual growth with them. These sermons give us the opportunity to see for ourselves the extent to which Emerson was successful in achieving these two goals.

Not having had a religious upbringing, I am not particularly a student of the sermon genre. Moreover, a number of the sermons I have heard through the years have resembled those of the Reverend Barzillai Paine, of whom Emerson said that he thereby imagined ourselves as part of the congregation which heard, say, Sermon 25 at the Second Church in Boston on 2 November 1828, and react correspondingly. At the end of each volume, as one might expect in a definitive edition, is an extensive section of "Textual and Manuscript Notes," which gives a comprehensive genetic transcription of all alterations in the manuscripts for those who wish to reconstruct how Emerson wrote his sermons and revised them for the different publications. Emerson the pulpit orator would make on me. This was more than a matter of spotting resemblances to ideas and turns of phrase familiar to readers of the essays: the emphasis in Sermon 85 on the liberal and the rigid religious factions in Unitarianism, which recalls the discussion of political parties in "Politics," or the resonant phrase "In this grateful season" in Sermon 39, with its echoes of the Divinity School Address. My interest was more personal, to see whether the personality so familiar to us from the essays existed as early as the ministerial phase of Emerson's career.

My impression of the young Reverend Mr. Emerson is of a student of the sermon genre. Moreover, a number of the passages of high seriousness, determined not only to be intellectually respectable, as his educated parishioners had a right to expect, but also to show his own attempts at spiritual growth with them. These sermons give us the opportunity to see for ourselves the extent to which Emerson was successful in achieving these two goals.

Not having had a religious upbringing, I am not particularly a student of the sermon genre. Moreover, a number of the sermons I have heard through the years have resembled those of the Reverend Barzillai Paine, of whom Emerson said that he

"sorely tempted me to say, I would go to church no more." So I was particularly interested to see what kind of an impression Emerson the pulpit orator would make on me. This was more than a matter of spotting resemblances to ideas and turns of phrase familiar to readers of the essays: the emphasis in Sermon 85 on the liberal and the rigid religious factions in Unitarianism, which recalls the discussion of political parties in "Politics," or the resonant phrase "In this grateful season" in Sermon 39, with its echoes of the Divinity School Address. My interest was more personal, to see whether the personality so familiar to us from the essays existed as early as the ministerial phase of Emerson's career.

My impression of the young Reverend Mr. Emerson is of a student of the sermon genre. Moreover, a number of the passages of high seriousness, determined not only to be intellectually respectable, as his educated parishioners had a right to expect, but also to show his own attempts at spiritual growth with them. These sermons give us the opportunity to see for ourselves the extent to which Emerson was successful in achieving these two goals.

Not having had a religious upbringing, I am not particularly a student of the sermon genre. Moreover, a number of the sermons I have heard through the years have resembled those of the Reverend Barzillai Paine, of whom Emerson said that he...
revise our notions of who Emerson was and how his sense of self affected his message. Some errors fall into the category of oversights or misstatements of fact, such as Barish’s citation of the 18th volume of the Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks (32) or her apparent confusion over the ages of Ruth Emerson and Mary Moody Emerson (on p. 16 Mary is 3 years younger than Ruth, but on p. 40 she is 6 years younger). Other errors are more significant. For example, one of the progressions of development that interests Barish is that which one might call “turning points,” from Emerson’s early acceptance of his Aunt Mary as a mentor to his “conversion experience” on a beach in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1827 to the importance of his experiences in Italy during his first European trip in 1832-33. It is clear that Barish takes considerable pleasure in undoing commonplace notions about Emerson’s development, and sometimes the exuberance of this revisionism and the priority that Barish claims for her “discoveries” results in a failure to acknowledge important prior treatments of several of these turning points that effectively preempt Barish’s implicit or explicit claims of priority. Barish’s insistence that she has located David Hume’s profound and lasting influence on Emerson’s thought does not acknowledge the substantial consideration of that influence in John Michael’s Emerson and Skepticism: The Cipher of the Word (1988). Similarly, in her discussion of Emerson’s experiences in St. Augustine, Barish seems unaware of the prior treatment of those experiences in Robert Milder’s essay, “Emerson’s Two Conversions” (ESQ, 1987).

If these problems are considered with other difficulties in Emerson: The Roots of Prophecy, including categorical assertions sometimes based on precious little evidence, the effect is to undermine the authority that the success of Barish’s revisionist agenda really demands of her. So Barish’s work is an important initial study for understanding how the mature Emerson is a product of his foreground. It is, however, only an initial study; there is within it plenty of room for alternative, even more authoritative, interpretations of that foreground.

Robert E. Burkholder
The Pennsylvania State University