THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THOREAU'S TRIP TO THE
UPPER MISSISSIPPI IN 1861*

HARRIET M. SWEETLAND
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Exactly one hundred years to the day of the time of the last
Wisconsin Academy meeting—that is, on May 6, 1862—there died
in Concord, Massachusetts, that provocative individualist, Henry
David Thoreau. Now the centennial of a man's birth or death—
especially of a man of such international stature as Thoreau—
often elicits a spate of magazine commentary and academic re-
search. Such seems to be the case in the present instance. However,
since the longest trip this stalwart individualist ever made was that
taken during the last year of his life to our Upper Mississippi
region, and since the general topic of the ninety-second Academy
session was the Upper Mississippi, it seemed appropriate that one
paper of the conference should deal with this last journey of
Thoreau's.

Because contemporary research of that journey had concerned
itself largely with summarizing surveys of the records of the trip
made both by Thoreau1 and by his travelling companion, Horace
Mann, Jr.,2 this writer will not attempt a replowing of that terrain
but instead will analyze the Thoreau-Mann records from a topical
approach, purposing to discuss the significance of the journey from
a three-fold aspect: its interest to today's readers for what Thor-
eau's account reveals of Upper Mississippi cultural and natural
history; the probable importance of that trip to seventeen year old
Horace Mann, Jr., Thoreau's travelling companion on the two-
month Western jaunt; and the significance of that journey to
Thoreau himself.

Although Thoreau had originally intended a three-month trip for
his health,3 in actuality he was away from home only two months—

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* Paper read at the 92nd annual meeting of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences,
Arts, and Letters.
1 The first contemporary research in the field was John Flanagan's "Thoreau in
Minnesota," Minnesota History, XVI (1935), 35–46. This study is based on the San-
born edition of Thoreau's record, however.
(September 1941), 549–55. This article, based on Mann's letters to his mother, presents
the trip as viewed by Thoreau's companion, Walter Harding, ed., "Thoreau and Mann
on the Minnesota River, June 1861," Minnesota History, 27:225–8, supplements the
Straker study by giving one more, although uncompleted, letter of Horace Mann's.
3 See Thoreau's letter to H.G.O. Blake of May 3, 1861, in Walter Harding and Carl
leaving his native Concord on May 11, 1861 and returning on July 10—just in time to spend his forty-fourth (and last) birthday with his family. But since part of this two months was used in botanizing in the East (at Niagara Falls on the way out and at Mackinac Island on the return trip), only about five weeks were actually devoted to the Mississippi region—from May 23—when the pair boarded the Itasca at Dunleith (now East Dubuque) for the up-river trip to the St. Paul area, to June 27 (when they left the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien to entrain for Milwaukee and thence to sail to Mackinac). Of these five weeks, most of their time—about three weeks—was spent in the then-frontier St. Anthony-Minneapolis-St. Paul section, with the most interesting part of their sojourn (from June 5–June 14) at the private boarding home of a Mrs. Hamilton on Lake Calhoun, exploring what was at that time comparatively wild terrain about Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet. Since boats were the major means of early public transport in Minnesota before the first ten miles of railroad were laid in 1862, about one week of Thoreau’s Minnesota visit was spent aboard the excursion boat, The Franklin Steele, with some hundred other passengers, making a winding trip up the Minnesota River to Redwood—there to observe the Sioux Indians receiving their annual payment from the government at the Indian agency; and three days and four nights were similarly spent on the Mississippi boats en route to and from St. Paul. A three-day sojourn in Red Wing, exploring the river bluffs of that region, accounted for the travellers’ last time-allotment in Minnesota.

Unfortunately Thoreau had neither the health nor the energy after his return to Concord to organize the jottings of his observations made on this last journey into his usual readable Journal form; so his record remains only in fragmentary jottings. The original copy of these jottings is now on deposit in the Huntington Library, California. The only published record of these notes was

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4 After research through old records and journals in the Minnesota State Historical Society Library, this writer believes evidence points to the location of widow Hamilton’s home at the southern tip of Lake Calhoun: Emma Grimes, compiler of Biographical and Genealogical Data of Some Pioneer Families of School District No. 18, Hennepin County, Minnesota, (1938 typed memoir now in the Minnesota State Historical Society Library) states on p. 3 of the section titled “Mr. and Mrs. Grimes in Minnesota”: “One summer Mr. Henry D. Thoreau came to Minnesota to try and regain his health. He boarded with a Mrs. Hamilton who had an exclusive boarding house on the shore of Lake Calhoun, where the residence of the late Judge Ueland now stands.” This site is now right near Berry and Lyndale parks, on the strip of land lying between Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet.

5 One year later this area along the Minnesota was the site of the bloody Sioux massacre of 1862.

I am deeply indebted to the Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota for graciously allowing me access to their photostatic copy of this manuscript for careful study. Throughout this paper, allusion to this document will be symbolized by TM (Thoreau Manuscript), followed by the paging.
made by Franklin Sanborn, Thoreau’s editor, in 1905; but this publication was in a limited, private edition, not readily available today; and, even if available, it is likely to be more puzzling than helpful to the modern reader because of Sanborn’s usual free editing, haphazard arrangement, and misinterpretation of Thoreau’s notations. Since the published Mann letters and the Flanagan study, previously cited, constitute the only accessible printed material on Thoreau’s trip but tend toward chronological summary in their treatment, it would seem that a topical presentation, highlighting some of the significant aspects of the trip, is justifiable.

To the contemporary reader interested in the cultural history of the Upper Mississippi area, that aspect of Thoreau’s account which undoubtedly would prove most fascinating is the glimpse he gives of life along the Great River in the early 1860’s. It was, according to one authority, the heyday of Upper Mississippi boat trade. Immigrants were pouring westward by train as far as the River and then journeying up it to settle in western Wisconsin and Minnesota. The region was also becoming noted for its therapeutic, health-giving qualities—Thoreau’s reason for going there. Magazine articles of the 1850’s and that popular art creation—the travelling panorama—had done much to acquaint Easterners with the region.

But even before his actual start up the Mississippi, Thoreau had been impressed by the prairie wheat country in Western Illinois—farm land so very different from that of New England! As he described it—

Distances on prairie deceptive—A stack of wheat straw looks like a hill in the horizon, 1/4 or 1/2 mile off—it stands out so bold & high... Small houses—without barns surrounded & overshadowed by great stacks of wheat straw—it being threshed on the ground... The inhabitants remind you of mice nesting in a wheat stack midst their wealth. Women working in fields quite commonly. Fences of narrow boards. Towns are as it were stations on a R.R.

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7 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, ed., First and Last Journeys of Thoreau, II (Boston, Bibliophile Society, 1906). This volume will hereafter be cited in this paper as Journeys. I am grateful to the Newberry Library for allowing me access to their copy, one of the 492 copies that were printed.
8 Evadene B. Swanson, “Manuscript Journal of Thoreau’s Last Journey,” Minnesota History 20 (June 1939), 169–73. indicates some of the more obvious errors made by Sanborn.
9 Mildred Hartshough, From Canoe to Steel Barge on the Upper Mississippi (University of Minnesota press, 1934), pp. 41–108. This author includes, too, interesting historical detail about the three boats on which Thoreau journeyed: The Itasca, pp. 152–4; The War Eagle, pp. 132 and 140–1; and The Franklin Steele, p. 168.
11 Catherine Sedgwick’s “Great Excursion to the Falls of St. Anthony,” Putnam’s 4 (September 1854), 320–5, describing the famed trip of excursionists to celebrate the completion of the railroads to the Mississippi, had doubtless been read by Thoreau, since he published in the same periodical.
12 Thoreau’s essay, “Walking,” in The Writings of Henry David Thoreau (Boston, 1906), V: 224, gives his impressions of one of the Mississippi panoramas.
13 TM, 4.
Later, when actually aboard *The Itasca* headed up the Mississippi for St. Paul, Thoreau gives an impression of the isolation along the great waterway—with the little river towns lining its banks appearing as rather lonely outposts of civilization, tucked in wherever a level resting spot could be found between tall river bluffs. Occasionally, he notes

a little lonely house on a flat or slope—often deserted—banks in a primitive condition bet. the towns which is almost everywhere—

However, when the daily boats arrived in one of these isolated towns, then the little lonely outpost woke up. Thoreau’s description of this awakening is somewhat reminiscent of that famed passage in Mark Twain’s *Life on the Mississippi*, describing the steamboat’s arrival in the more southerly Hannibal,16 yet Thoreau’s notation was written over twenty years before. It does, however, record the same sudden revival to life of a town when the steamboat approaches:

Every town a wharf with a storage building or several & as many hotels as anything—& commission merchants. “Storage, Forwarding, & Commission” one or all these words on the most prominent new building close to the waterside—Perhaps a heap of sacks filled with wheat on the natural quay or levee close by—or about Dubuque and Dunleith a blue stacks of pig lead—which is in no danger of being washed away . . . The steamer whistles—Then strikes its bell about 6 times funerally, with a pause after the 3ª—You see the whole village making haste to the landing—commonly the raw stony or sandy shore—the postmaster with his bag—the passenger—& almost every dog and pig in the town—of commonly one narrow street under the bluff—& back yards at angles of about 45° with the horizon.34

If the river towns were sleepy and somewhat isolated, the river itself presented much life: Besides the passenger boats which made connections with the railroads on the eastern banks of the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien, Dunleith, La Crosse, etc., there were various lumber rafts floating southward, which Thoreau described in a later letter to Sanborn:

The lumber, as you know, is sawed chiefly at the Falls of St. Anthony (what is not rafted in the log to ports far below) having given rise to the towns of St. Anthony, Minneapolis &c &c In coming up the river from Dunleith you meet with great rafts of sawed timber and of logs—20 rods or more in length, by 5 or 6 wide, floating down, all from the pine region above the Falls.37

The “wooding up process”—so important in those days before coal, oil, or atomic energy were being utilized for boat power—is alluded to in several places. At Fountain City, for instance, they

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14 Ibid., 5.
15 See second paragraph of Chapter IV, of *Life on the Mississippi*.
took a wood boat along with them and they “wooded up again before reaching L Pepin taking the boat along with us—now on this side then on that.” The actual wood-loading was speeded up by labor co-operation, it seems, for he speaks of twenty men loading “some 9—10 cords of wood in 10 minutes” at one landing.

In regard to the river towns which they passed, Thoreau has a personal notation about almost every one: At Prairie du Chien “the smartest town on the river,” exporting the “most wheat of any town bet. St. Pauls and St. Louis”, he noted great sacks of this wheat piled up, “covered at night—& all over the ground & the only bread wheat.” At Cassville he observed “holes in the side of the hills” where lead had been dug, as he had similarly seen the bluffs mutilated for the same purpose near Galena. Winona, “a pretty place” was the spot to which they “towed a flat boat load of stoneware pots from Dubuque.” His only comment about La Crosse was that the white pines started half a dozen miles above it; but, knowing Thoreau’s love of the white pine, perhaps La Crosse residents can be proud of this memorable association. Below Wabasha he noted an Indian encampment “with Dacotah-shaped wigwams”. Here too he saw a loon on the lake and fish leaping.

After leaving the steamer at St. Paul, Thoreau next recorded brief hints of what other frontier communities of the region were like in 1861. Of St. Paul itself he commented that the residents “dig their building stone out of the cellar—but of poor stuff.” Although Minneapolis boasted five drug stores, its main streets were “the unaltered prairie with burr and other oaks left;” while of its road over the prairie to Ft. Snelling, he commented that it was “a mere trail more or less broad and distinct.” The now-fashionable residential sector of the Lake Harriet-Lake Calhoun area was, in the days that Thoreau and Mann lived at Mrs. Hamilton’s, wild enough to reveal passenger pigeons. The fledgling University of Minnesota, for which ground had recently been set aside in St. Anthony, Thoreau felt looked quite “artificial” in its burr oak setting. Ft. Snelling apparently proved more interesting to Thoreau for the wealth of nature offerings in its vicinity than for its history; but he was fascinated by the mechanical technique by
which its ferry utilized the river current to make its crossing and even drew a picture of the ferry's working principle. Yet he devoted a mere two lines to the item that there were 600 volunteers in training at the Fort at the time, with 300 leaving for duty the morning of his visit. 28

As for the Minnesota river towns which they passed on their three-hundred mile jaunt upstream to Redwood on the Franklin Steele, he gives similar brief glimpses: New Ulm consisted "wholly of Germans. We left them 100 barrels of salt, which will be worth something more when the water is lowest, than at present." 29 Near Mankato, the boat "pushed over a tree and disturbed the bats," a fog delayed them for several hours, and the captain ran the boat on a rock 30 Redwood itself, their destination, was apparently more significant to Thoreau because it gave him a glimpse of the open prairie than it was for its Sioux natives on annual display for tourist benefit:

We were now fairly on the great plains, and looking south, and after walking that way 3 miles, could see no tree in that horizon. The buffalo was said to be feeding within 25 or 30 miles. 26

But they did not hike toward the buffalo. Nor did they explore Redwood itself—"a mere locality, scarcely an Indian village—where there is a store & some houses . . . built for them." Instead, the travellers made good use of their one-day sojourn at Redwood to investigate prairie botanical offerings.

Red Wing, the pair's last stopping-point in Minnesota, seems to have entranced the two naturalists most. Thoreau had noticed jutting Barn Bluff as an outstanding feature of the community on his way up-river to St. Paul; now on their stay in Red Wing on their return trip they delighted in exploring that bluff for its botanical offerings and Indian artifacts, 31 and in swimming in the Mississippi. 32 In fact, though the community now claims renown for its ceramic offerings, it might also lure travellers by advertising "Thoreau slept here the last three nights he was in Minnesota!"

Modern boat owners of small pleasure craft might find interesting reading in two portions of Thoreau's record for experiencing vicariously, or actually, water journeyings of their own: In one part of his Journal, he gives a detailed listing of the tables of distances between every hamlet along the Mississippi from La Crosse to St. Paul—probably a copy of some steamboat table, such as that

28 Ibid., 16.
29 Letter to Sanborn, June 25, 1861, in Harding and Bode, 621.
30 Journeys, 58; TM, 66-7.
31 Letter to Sanborn, June 25, 1861, in Harding and Bode, 621.
33 Straker, 554.
of The Ihasca or The Franklin Steele. The second is the graphic description he gives of the 160 foot Franklin Steele being maneuvered up the winding Minnesota—sometimes running squarely into the bank, sometimes breaking down trees, sometimes getting "grounded" so that a windlass and cable were necessary to free the boat. Some river bends were so pronounced that passengers even got off the boat and walked across the isthmus to rejoin the slower-moving boat-crowd later.

Although those portions dealing with local river history are perhaps the most readable parts of Thoreau's record, Thoreau himself seems to have been mainly concerned with botanical observations; certainly from the time of his arrival in the St. Anthony area on, he devoted more and more space to these observations—making the account a treasure-trove for botanists but offering, it must be admitted, certain hazards for the lay reader. In fact, one of the difficulties the average reader encounters in examining either the Thoreau manuscript or the Sanborn edition of that manuscript is the constant interruption of Thoreau's daily account by his detailed annotations of flowers observed in different areas, as well as by several summarizing lists he includes, which occupy several pages. One of these lists records plants which Thoreau had known in Concord but which he had also observed in the St. Anthony-Minneapolis area. Another list, consisting of some 113 flower annotations, notes the dates of bloom of various species from the time he began his observations at Niagara up through his sojourn at Mackinac Island. This latter list, which he has labeled "Notes on the Journey West", he may have intended to use later for purposes of comparison with his Concord Calendar, which he had kept for a period of years in recording similar data.

Perhaps someday when the record of Thoreau's last trip becomes more accessible to the general public, naturalists in the Twin Cities' area, the Redwood area and the Red Wing locale will give themselves a "botanists' holiday" by making parallel trips and comparing their present-day findings with those made by Thoreau in 1861. Space limitations, however, will necessitate touching on only a few high points of his findings here:

Thoreau's first botanical observations, on the trip up the Mississippi, had been generalized ones, concerned with comments about the trees that lined the river banks as compared to those that grew

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27 TM, 94–7. Note also another list, TM, 40–45.
28 Ibid., 93–94A.
29 The Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in Minneapolis, devoted mainly to plants native to Minnesota, has a list of its plantings compiled by Martha E. Crone, curator of the garden in 1951. The author of this paper, as a hobby, has been checking Thoreau's listings with the Crone list and finds a high parallelism.
on the tops of bluffs and on the bluff slopes; but afterwards, in the Twin Cities' area, he became more and more committed to detailed observations about flowering plants, although he was still making tree and shrub observations (noting among his findings: the butternut and hickory; American, cork-barked and slippery elm; scarlet, red, white and burr oak; the hop horn beam; white and sugar maple and box elder; various species of poplar, willow and birch; hazel bushes as well as two species of elder; sand-, pin- and choke-cherry; hawthorne; “tree cranberry”, hackberry and waahoo).  

On the first day of the Mississippi river trip, he had noted at Prairie du Chien particularly the pasque flower (which he termed “Pulsatilla Nutalliana”), the bird-foot violet (Viola pedata), and the hoary puccoon (Lithospermum canescens)—commenting on the root-use of the latter for dye by the Indians. Later, apparently using Gray, Parry, and Wood for sources of reference and comparison in his botanical researchings, he proceeded (with the same zeal he had exhibited in his New England study) to acquaint himself intimately with every living plant he found in each patch of ground he traversed in the St. Anthony-Minneapolis region. While here he recorded many of the flowers that he had known in Concord previously before sighting them in their Minnesota locale, perhaps now recorded as “friends from home” to the nostalgic Thoreau: the marsh marigold (Caltha palustris), blood-root (Sanguinaria canadensis), dutchman’s breeches (Dicentra cucullaria), columbine (Aquilegia canadensis), baneberry (Actaea), four species of violet, meadow parsnip (Thaspium aureum), Jack-in-the-pulpit, painted cup (Castilleja coccinea), wood betony (Pedicularis canadensis), blue flag (Iris versicolor), star-grass (Hypoxis hirsuta), bunchberry (Cornus canadensis), wild ginger (Asarum canadense)—to mention but a few of those he had located.

Although today congested Nicollet Island in downtown Minneapolis might appear more fruitful for sociological study, as an extension of certain “Skid Row elements” from the nearby depot area across the river, in Thoreau’s time it offered more for the naturalist than the sociologist. In fact, it was wilderness enough so that Thoreau sighted a deer there—whether a wild one or one tamed, he does not say. And as for flowers, he spent the first day of his botanical investigations in the St. Anthony area here. On it, and later on nearby Hennepin Island, we find him recording such species as blue phlox (Phlox divaricata), prickly ash (Xanthoxylum

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30 TM, 5, 6.
31 Ibid., 10, 12–17, 49–50 and 95–7.
41 Ibid., 6, 94–7.
americanaum), spiderwort (Tradescantia virginiana), wild balsam apple (Echinocystis lobata) and the frost grape (Vitis riparia).

On his second day of botanical investigation in the St. Anthony area, made on a ride to the Lake Calhoun-Lake Harriet region with his new, naturalist-friend Dr. Anderson, Thoreau seems to have been particularly impressed with the shrubbery; for he mentions noticing the June berry (Amelanchier), the snowberry (Symphoricarpos occidentalis), the wild plum (Prunus americana), and the honey-suckle (Lonicera parviflora); but on closer woodland investigation, they also found such flowering plants as the bell wort (Uvularia grandiflora), the wild crane’s bill (Geranium maculatum), and the showy orchis (Orchis spectabilis).

Thoreau’s journey to Minnehaha and explorations there and about Fort Snelling the following day revealed to him, among other species: the horse gentian (Triosteum perfoliatum), the blue cohosh (Caulophyllum thalictroides), the common trillium, wahoo, the prickly gooseberry (Ribes Cynosbati), the skunk cabbage (Symplocarpus), and the giant reed (“Arundo Phragmites ten feet high” he records).

Thoreau’s ten-day sojourn at Mrs. Hamilton’s on the shore of Lake Calhoun, gave him opportunity to observe plants of the lakeshore, woodland, and open prairie—depending on which direction he went for his daily botanical investigations. For the dates from June 5–14, therefore, there are to be found noted among his various plant observations: wild artichokes, the yellow and showy lady slipper (Cypripedium pubescens and C. spectabile), the ground cherry (Physalis viscosa), the prairie phlox (Phlox pilosa), the prairie rose (Rosa blanda), the wild hyssop (Lophanthus anisatus) —which led him on a tantalizing nose-tingling hunt until he had identified it, the ground plum (Astragalus caryocarpus), and—most note-worthy—the wild apple.

This last discovery, that of the wild apple, was to him the most exciting of Thoreau’s botanical findings in the Lake Calhoun region—a discovery which he alludes to later in one of his last, before-death essays: “Wild Apples”. Thoreau’s botanical “sleuthing” in regard to its discovery reminds one of his parallel excitement in 1853, in tracking down the only pink azalea which grew in the Concord area.

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42 Ibid., 82, 9, 13, 36, 37, 85.
43 Ibid., 12–13, 36, 36A.
44 Ibid., 15, 17, 18, 36A.
The first clue that there might be wild apples in the region had come to him on the train through Illinois, where he had noted "flowered, apple-like trees...which may be the Pyrus Coronaria." Later, at Lake Calhoun, his landlady—Mrs. Hamilton—informed him that there had been wild apples on her premises, transplanted from the wood by her husband but that they had all died. Thoreau went in search of them in the locale where she affirmed that they had grown natively but found only the June berry and wild thorn. Then a neighbor directed him to the home of a Mr. Grimes—then absent, but whose boy showed me some of the trees he had set out this spring but they had all died—having a long tap root and being taken up too late, but then I was convinced by the sight of a just expanding though withered leaf—and plucked a solitary withered flower best to analyze. Finally stayed and went in search of it with the father in his pasture—when I found it first myself—quite a cluster of them.

On the road between St. Anthony and St. Paul, just previous to taking the boat-trip up the Minnesota River, Thoreau had been impressed by the profusion of large-flowered beard-tongue (Penstemon grandiflorus) and blue harebell (Campanula rotundifolia); while on the trip on the river he noted "acres of roses in the intervals" between the trees, "grape in bloom on a cottonwood," the prairie larkspur (Delphinium azureum), and the great ragweed (Ambrosia trifida), in particular. At Redwood, prairie plants proved an exciting discovery. In fact, he devotes more space to his listings of them than he does his notations about the Indian ritual, although observation of the Indian seems to have been the original intent of the Minnesota River trip.

The traveller’s last sojourn in Minnesota—their three-day stay at Red Wing, offered them interesting contrast in plant study between those growing on the river bluff tops and sides and those in swampy areas near the river. Listed among the plants which they observed here were the pale spiked lobelia (Lobelia spicata), another painted cup (Castilleja sessiliflora), the hornless and green milkweed (Aceratus viridiflora and Aceratus monocephala), hairy pucoon (Lithospermum hirtum), black-eyed Susan (Rudbeckia hirta), bladder fern (Cystopteris), the ox-eye (Heliopsis laevis),

48 TM, 3-4.
49 Mr. Grimes owned the Edina Mills in the region and later ran a nursery on the Calhoun road, winning fame both in Minnesota and nationally as a horticulturist. (Eight pages of memoirs of J. T. Grimes in Biographical and Genealogical Data of Some Pioneer Families of School District No. 18, Hennepin County, Minnesota, previously cited.)
50 TM, 54-5.
51 Ibid., 58, 62, 63, 33.
52 Ibid., 65, 66, 34, 71. Among plants at Redwood he notes Geum onosmodium, a saincle, Heliopsis laevis, a Zygadene, and Coreopsis palmata.
porcupine grass, bishop’s cap (*Mitella diphylla*), dragon-head mint (*Draecocephalum parviflorum*), and *Lepidium*.53

Thoreau’s only comments on Wisconsin plants—which he sighted merely from the train en route from Prairie du Chien to Milwaukee—are a generalized view that a train-observer would necessarily have:

1st 60 miles up the Valley of the Wisconsin—which looked broad and shallow—bluffs 2 or 3 miles apart—Great abundance of tall spiderwort—also red lilly [sic]—rudbeckia, blue flag—white and yel. lilly [sic] & white water ranunculus—Abundance of mullein in Wisconsin.54

Thoreau’s cataloging of birds in the Mississippi region is not as extensive nor as scientific as his botanical listings. However, he takes time out at Minneapolis to enumerate all the birds he had noticed along the way since leaving Chicago; and throughout his botanical observations there are comments, too, of the birds he noted in the same areas.55 But the two species which seemed most to excite his observation in Minnesota were the wild pigeon and the rose-breasted grosbeak—the first of which is now extinct and the other comparatively rare. Yet at the time of Thoreau’s expedition he noted that the grosbeak was “very abundant in the woods of the Minnehaha—and about the fort—singing robin-like all the while;” while at Mrs. Hamilton’s he found it “common as any bird in the woods.” He even describes the nest of one he had found in a bass wood with its “4 eggs green spotted with brown.”56

Just as minutely he described the wild pigeon’s nest—having located four such nests, all told, in the region near Mrs. Hamilton’s: “2 in bass—1 in oak and 1 in hop horn beam.”57 Although the hop horn beam may still be found in the woodland park between Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet, one will search in vain for the passenger pigeon’s nest! Instead, the contemporary naturalist will have to content himself with experiencing vicariously, with Thoreau, his discovery of one loosely woven nest in a bass tree (a nest which he describes minutely and even illustrates); or watch with

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55 Among birds in Thoreau’s lists were the red-wing black bird (“the prevailing” bird), whip-poor-will, kingfisher, white-bellied swallow, red-headed woodpecker, killdeer, smaller plover, brown thrasher, kingbird, phoebe, “peet-weet,” redstart, hummingbird, cattbird, wood thrush, Wilson’s thrush, goldfinch, yellow-throated and warbling vireo, “cherry bird”, cowbird, chewink, snipe (“boom on prairie at St. Anthony”), loon, “flocks of cranes, bittern or heron flying up Mississippi”, marsh hawk, night hawk, Maryland yellow throat, myrtle warbler, horned lark (“very tame”), bluebird, baywing, white-throated sparrow, tanager, flicker, chestnut-sided warbler, black-and-white creeper, “young eagle eating blue jay in Minnetonka lake”, shrive, cuckoo, passenger pigeon, rose-breasted grosbeak, and meadow lark (*TM*, 5, 6, 10–18, 56, 52–3, 58, 58, 52, 80, 83, 91–2).
56 *TM*, 16 and 50.
him as he peers into another nest and finds therein its young bird "dirty yellowish and leaden with pin feathers"; and, observe, in imagination the distracting antics of the guardian bird as she "slipped to the ground fluttering as if wounded 2 or 3 times as she went off amid the shrubs." But the contemporary naturalist may have twinges of nostalgic regret when he reads that in that long-ago summer of 1861, on the Minnesota River near Shakopee, the "Big Woods" were "alive with pigeons flying across our track."

Besides the wild pigeon and the rose-breasted grosbeak, other birds which engaged Thoreau's special scrutiny were the horned lark, whose song he describes as "a low jingling . . . note—sparrow-like;" the turkey buzzard, which he noted both at Lake Calhoun and along the Minnesota; blue herons and loons. Also, commenting on the difference in song between the Western lark and the common meadow lark, he indicates that the Western lark's note was "very handsome heard at the same time as the common meadow lark—much louder on toodle-em note."

Besides birds, other kinds of wild life that Thoreau included in his annotated comments were bats seen along both the Mississippi and the Minnesota rivers; hyla "cr-a-a-ck" ing in the sloughs of the prairie near St. Anthony; "shad froggs hopping and dripping their water all over;" turtles of various kinds, some of which engaged his attention for that same detailed description that he had recorded in his Concord writing; varieties of snakes, observed on the prairie, at Mrs. Hamilton's and at Red Wing, and which he describes in such generalized terms as "ribbon snakes," "chicken snakes," "striped snakes," and rattle snakes; "great flight of large ephemerae this AM on L Harriet shore & this eve on L. Calhoun;" and, lest Minnesota seem too paradisical in its wild life, tormenting him the first day at Mrs. Hamilton's were "myriads of mosquitoes—wood ticks."

The animal which most intrigued Thoreau, however, was the gopher—presenting a sight novel to his New England eyes. He apparently believed he had noted three different species: the striped gopher, the Missouri gopher, and the Franklin ground squirrel.

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Of these, the striped specimen, "Spermophile Tridecemlineatus erect", most fascinated him. He depicts it as "making a queer note, like a plover over his hole," and graphically describes its stripings as—

6 dirty tawny—clay-colored or very light brown lines—alternating with broad (3 times as broad) dark brown lines striped—the last having an interrupted line of square spots of the same color with the first mentioned—running down their middle—reminding me of the rude pattern of some Indian work—porcupine quills—gopher baskets & pottery—

Before termination of this discussion of the natural and cultural history reflected in Thoreau's jottings, some comment should be made about his notations on the Red Man. When one considers that Thoreau had spent his life studying the Indians, so that at his death he had accumulated eleven volumes of observations for a projected history of this first American, it is disappointing that in his Upper Mississippi record there is a dearth of comment on this native inhabitant. Although when at Mrs. Hamilton's, Thoreau lived in the locale of a former Sioux village on Lake Calhoun, he makes no comment of that fact; however, he does describe the site of the old Pond mission nearby as being then "overgrown with sumac and covered with gopher heaps." True, he had noted the Indian encampment at Wabasha on the way up, and he had discovered some Indian graves—both at Minneapolis and, later, on the top of Red Wing bluff (the chief's grave). But the Redwood trip, probably taken for study of the Sioux first-hand, offers little information except a description of an Indian pipe-lighting ceremony (obtained from the "Illinois Man" on the boat) and some jottings on the Indian dance he had witnessed at the Agency, put on for tourist benefit. In a later commentary to his friends, Sanborn and Ricketson, however, made after the trip was over, Thoreau gave more explicit details about the Sioux gathering in Redwood:

A regular council was held with the Indians, who had come on their ponies, and speeches were made on both sides thro' an interpreter, quite in the described mode; the Indians, as usual having the advantage in point of truth and earnestness and therefore of eloquence. The most prominent chief was named Little Crow. They were quite dissatisfied with the white man's treatment of them and probably have reason to be so. This council was to be continued for 2 or 3 days—the payment to be made the 2d day . . . . In the afternoon the half-naked Indians performed a dance at the request of the governor for our amusement and their own benefit . . . . In the dance were thirty men dancing and twelve musicians

70 TM, 18, 14-15.
72 TM, 91.
73 Ibid., 7, 82, and 71.
74 Ibid., 65-66, 66, 68, and 73.
with drums, while others struck their arrows against their bows. The
dancers blew some flutes and kept good time, moving their feet or their
shoulders—sometimes one, sometimes both. They wore no shirts. Five
bands of Indians came in and were feasted on an ox cut into five parts,
one for each band.\textsuperscript{15}

It is probable that Thoreau, sincere in his own respect for the
Red Man, may have been disgusted with the political tinge of the
trip to Redwood. In fact, he also comments in his letter to San-
born—after first listing the government notables aboard \textit{The
Franklin Steele}:

\textit{also a German band from St. Paul, a small cannon for salutes, & money
for the Indians (aye and the gamblers, it was said, who were to bring it
back in another boat).}\textsuperscript{16}

Although the space devoted to discussion of the social and natural
history of the Upper Mississippi, as reflected in Thoreau’s record,
may seem extensively treated in this paper, the writer feels that
such space-emphasis is justifiable: For, sick though he was, this
New England individualist recorded for future citizenry brief but
revealing glimpses of life along the Mississippi in 1861; and, even
more significant, he included detailed observations of its botany.
There remain, however, the two even more important aspects of
this journey to discuss—the significance of the experience to Hor-
ace Mann, Jr., and its significance to Thoreau himself.

In regard to the trip’s importance to the seventeen year old
Horace Mann, it seems to this writer that this is one aspect of the
journey which has not yet been sufficiently emphasized and ex-
plored. What an experience it must have been for the shy, grave
adolescent that Sanborn describes to have been with Thoreau—
even an ill Thoreau—for two months of botanizing and woodland
exploration! In fact, it is the theory of the present writer that this
experience may possibly have determined Mann’s future vocational
career—that of botanist. To prove this statement, let us briefly
examine certain facts.

Mann, son of the amous educator and Mary Peabody Mann and
nephew of Elizabeth Peabody of kindergarten fame, was the educa-
tor’s first child, born in his father’s forty-eighth year. In fact, so
proudly excited was the father at the birth of this first child that he
put aside those famed journals in which he was wont to record edu-

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Journeys}, II: 55-5. Compare this account to portion from Thoreau’s letter to San-
born, in Harding and Bode, pp. 521-2, noting that Sanborn has added to the original
Thoreau letter his own description of the native dance—probably based on Thoreau’s
manuscript jottings (TM:96) and his own recollection of Thoreau’s oral account to
Ricketson and Sanborn.

\textsuperscript{16} Harding and Bode, 621.
cational philosophizing and recordings and started a new, leather-bound volume whose first page entry bore the news:

February 28, 1844

Yesterday at 1/2 past 10 o’clock P. M. a male child was born to me. Another Spirit was ushered into being. . . . Whether it shall soar or sink, whether it shall rejoice or mourn—or how much of this depends upon the guidance he will receive. . . . What a responsibility.\(^{27}\)

That Mann, his wife, and Aunt Elizabeth took that responsibility seriously there is ample evidence. True, at the age of three the child was disappointing his father because he had not yet learned to write; but then he had “made some progress in reading . . . taught by the phonetic method.”\(^{28}\) Fortunately at five the precocious lad was doing better; for he had begun the study of Latin and soon could tell one of Aesop’s fables—that of the wolf and the lamb—in either English or Latin.\(^{29}\) No wonder that in later years he could handle Latin botanical names with facility!

After the elder Mann’s death at Antioch College in 1859, Mrs. Mann had returned to Massachusetts, bought a home in Concord, and enrolled the three Mann boys in Franklin Sanborn’s school.\(^{30}\) It was at this time that the friendship between Thoreau and the young adolescent had begun.

Now if one examines Thoreau’s Journal entries for 1860 and 1861—the years of their growing acquaintance—a curious fact is revealed: Although Thoreau makes several entries concerning young Horace and the natural history specimens he was bringing in at the time to show the ailing Thoreau, not one entry exhibits any botanical interest on Mann’s part! Instead, the youth was either describing or bringing samples to Thoreau of—”a painted turtle,” mussels, “a skeleton of a blue heron,” “a stake-driver . . . freshly killed,” a crow, a screech owl, the eggs of *Sternotherus odoratus*, a bull frog, hermit thrush, buffle-headed duck, etc.\(^{31}\) And if one examines the contents of Horace Mann’s letters written home to his mother while on the Minnesota trip, the reader will note that many of his early comments concern the collecting of animals: shells, fossils, a prairie gopher and some bird specimens—including a rose-breasted grosbeak. But when the two travellers were at Redwood, it was Mann, not Thoreau, who was bringing in specimens

\(^{27}\) Louise Hall Tharp, *Until Victory: Horace Mann and Mary Peabody* (Boston, 1953), p. 199.

\(^{28}\) *Ibid.*, 212.

\(^{29}\) *Ibid.*, 238.


\(^{31}\) See Thoreau’s *Journal* entries for October 6 and 10, 1860; and January 11 and 14, February 5, April 16, 20, 22, 25 and May 4, 1861 in Henry David Thoreau, *Writings* (Boston, 1906), XIV: 102, 110, 309, 313, 314, 337 and 338.
of prairie plants; and by the time they had arrived at Red Wing, he exhibits a definite interest in plants.52 [An ironic sidelight of this botanical interest at Red Wing deserves notice: According to Mrs. Tharp, biographer of the Mann family, there is now in the possession of the Houghton Library at Harvard the leather-bound volume that Horace Mann Senior had used for recording the birth of his son and which later that son apparently used for a flower-press on the Western trip with Thoreau. One of the pressed flowers therein still bears the label “Pulsatilla Nuttalliana, Redwing Bluff, Redwing, Minn., June 24, 1861 (Journey with Mr. Thoreau)”].53

Whether the Minnesota trip marked the turning point in young Mann’s life from emphasis on animal-study to botany, one can only theorize; but upon his return from the West, he entered Harvard that fall—there later to take botany from Gray, under whom he afterwards served as an assistant in the department. Mann was graduated from Harvard with a Bachelor of Science degree—his Bachelor’s thesis being a study of Hawaiian plants, based on a research expedition to Hawaii one summer even before getting his degree. At the time of his death at twenty-four (from tuberculosis contracted on a botanical trip to Brazil), he had not only served as curator of the Harvard Herbarium for two years and was being groomed for the head of the botany department subsequent to the retirement of Gray, but he also had some noteworthy publications to his credit: two studies of Hawaiian plants, and a botanical catalog describing the ferns, ground pine, and horsetail east of the Mississippi.54 Somewhere along the line, perhaps in Minnesota with Thoreau, Mann’s interest had shifted from a study of bird and animal life to that of botany.

In regard to the third point under consideration in this paper—the significance of the Upper Mississippi journey to Thoreau—it might be pertinent to our analysis to examine the content of his Western record to see what it reveals of the writer as compared to that earlier Thoreau who had penned *Walden* and revealed himself therein as a composite Man—one who was Poet, Naturalist, Humorist, Philosopher, and Practical Economist. In making such a comparison, we discover that the Poet-Naturalist of the *Walden* era has almost disappeared; in his stead the itemizing Naturalist has taken over—one pre-occupied with plant and animal listings.

52 Straker, 552-4, and TM, 86.
53 Tharp, 236.
54 Straker, 555 and Tharp, 317. Mrs. Tharp names *Revision of the genus Schiedea, and of Hawaiian Rubiaceae and Enumeration of Hawaiian Plants* as the product of Mann’s Hawaiian research; and *Catalogue of the phaenogamous plants of the United States east of the Mississippi and of vascular cryptogamous plants of North America, north of Mexico* as the other study.
True, the imagery used in describing some of the animal and river life has, at times, some of the poetic tinge of his earlier period; but, particularly toward the last of his Minnesota jottings, Thoreau seems to be resolving himself from some inner turmoil by a very objective preoccupation with these natural history listings. And the Humorist that is so delightfully reflected from the Walden pages, seems to have vanished almost completely, except for a wry comment or two in regard to the white Man's treatment of the Indian. As for Thoreau, the Philosopher, he too seems to be definitely absent from the pages of the Western Journal. Perhaps had time and energy permitted, however, these jottings, too, might have been reworked into the philosophical vein of his earlier writing.

One will find evidences, however, of that Thoreau the Economist, who delighted many readers in his first chapter of Walden; for several pages of the Minnesota manuscript are devoted to an exact itemization of just how he spent the nearly $180 he had with him on the trip—with listings of each expenditure down to the very last cent used in each locale, whether it be the 50¢ to $1.00 for a night's lodging to the 5¢ he spent for apples on the train. In one place, the ever-honest Thoreau, apparently noting that his accountings for the day didn't total up correctly, even tabulated "cheated 5¢!" Besides this list of expenditures there is an inclusion of just how he was dividing up his travelling money for safe carriage while on the trip: "Left pocket, $78.10; right, $60; bosom, $40"—totaling $178.10.

Now if one considers the purpose for which Thoreau took the Western trip—to recover his health—the manuscript of his upper Mississippi journey becomes highly illuminating: For, although he never mentions his health in it, there is in his itemized list of expenditures and equipment the revealing fact that he spent 50¢ for "trochees" and $1.00 for "pectoral"—both medications for relief of chest congestion. So, indifferent though his Journal appears to make him about health matters, here is a clue that he was willing to spend as much for medicine as for a night's lodging, in the vain hope of relieving his chest congestion.

The manuscript of the journey is also revealing of some definite change in Thoreau's physical and mental state after arriving in the St. Anthony area, for the penmanship becomes more and more irregular—particularly from the recordings of the Minnesota River trip on; and the content of the manuscript also changes, as we have noted, from graphic observations to mere listings of plants, animals and artifacts found in various localities. It is apparent that some-

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65 T.M., pages B and C.
64 Ibid., page A.
67 Ibid., B, C.
thing had happened to Thoreau during the course of the trip—whether it was a worsening of his physical condition because of primitive boat-travel conditions, homesickness (for he was never happy long from his native Concord), or a traumatic experience. Whatever the causative factor, Thoreau decided to curtail his trip at the end of two months instead of the three he had originally planned.

Although we cannot discount completely the several disappointments at the beginning of the trip which together may have had a traumatic effect on Thoreau—the fact that his plans for both Channing and Blake as his travelling companions fell through so that the seventeen year old Mann became their substitute, and the fact that on his arrival in St. Anthony, he found Thatcher, a Maine friend and distant relative, seriously ill from the after-effects of a carriage-accident so that social recourse in that direction was truncated—yet it is more probable that homesickness and physical illness were the prompting factors in his decision to shorten his trip. For, although Horace Mann’s letters to his mother indicate his belief that Thoreau’s health was improving or at least remaining about the same, these are the observations of a seventeen year old; Thoreau himself, in his June 25 letter to Sanborn, admitted that he had “performed this journey in a very dead and alive manner.” Also, there is the evidence that when his friend, Daniel Ricketson, saw Thoreau in late August—a little over a month after the latter’s return from the West, Ricketson was alarmed at his friend’s physical condition.

Now if a summation is made of the internal and external evidence revealed in Thoreau’s manuscript—the change in penmanship, the shift to a pre-occupation with objective listings, the nota-

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88 Sanborn's comment in Journeys, II: 8–10.
89 Thoreau’s letter of May 27 to his sister, Sophia, on Thatcher’s illness (TM:1; Harding and Bode, 617) is more revealing for what it does not say than what it does. He asks that letters be continued to be directed to Thatcher’s, “for I cannot see where I may be a fortnight hence.” But Thatcher’s serious illness (“He is much worse in consequence of having been recently thrown from a carriage—so as to have had watchers within a few nights past”) precluded any friendly visiting. Fortunately Thatcher gave Thoreau a letter of introduction to Dr. Anderson, the physician and naturalist, so that Thoreau had other social recourse. Thatcher, a merchant in St. Anthony, died that August. He was the brother of the George Thatcher of Bangor, Maine, at whose home Sophia Thoreau died in 1876. (Ricketson, cited below, pp. 181–2). Both George and Samuel of St. Anthony were sons of the Hon. Samuel Thatcher, who had married Sarah Brown, originally of Concord. (One of their children, Elizabeth, had been born in Concord.) George Thatcher’s wife, Rebecca Jane Billings, was the daughter of Nancy (Thoreau) Billings. (George Thomas Little, Genealogical and Family History of the State of Maine, New York: 1909, III: p. 1498, is the source of this information on the Thatcher family.) Since Thoreau’s several letters to George Thatcher of Bangor were addressed “Dear Cousin” (Harding and Bode, 232–30, 248–1, 321–2, 485–6, 495, 502–3, 555–6, 638), we can assume he also regarded George’s brother, Samuel Thatcher, as his kinsman.
90 Straker, 551, 552, 553.
91 June 25, 1861 letter to Sanborn, in Harding and Bode, 618.
tions of medical purchases for chest trouble, the several allusions to New England people, both in the manuscript and the Sanborn letter (possibly indicating homesickness)—and we add to this evidence Thoreau’s own statement of his “dead and alive” condition on his journeying; together with Ricketson’s impressions of Thoreau after his return, certain conclusions may probably be drawn: Although Thoreau had taken the Western trip for his health, sometime during the Minnesota sojourn he doubtless realized that purpose was in vain; his health was not improving but worsening. Therefore the significance of the Upper Mississippi trip to Thoreau was that it taught him its uselessness as a health-restorative! In fact, he had learned the meaning of the Emersonian statement on travel preached in “Self-Reliance”—that your Giant goes with you on your journeyings. Ill Health was Thoreau’s Giant; and evidently there was to be no release for him from this companion—in Minnesota or on this earth. Instead, Thoreau may even have felt that his time was running out and that Death stood around a near corner.

One can understand, therefore, why the Western trip was truncated at the end of two months. Knowing Thoreau’s philosophy of economy—which meant saving one’s time, money and energies for the great significant experiences—one can guess why he made an earlier return to Concord. What to him were the flowers and fauna of Minnesota when his own time was so limited? He undoubtedly preferred spending what little remained of life in his beloved Concord. And there were so many things to do in that remaining time:

The only man left in the family as provider for his mother and sister, Thoreau may have decided that publication comprised the “nest egg” on which they could depend. Certainly it is significant that an examination of the extant letters of the last year of his life reveals how few of these letters were friendly epistles and, instead, how many were devoted to business matters. Perhaps those critics who have made Thoreau out as lacking in family responsibility may have wronged him! The evidence seems to point otherwise. For, in the limited time and energy that remained to him, we find a man using that time and energy for the future welfare of his family: There were arrangements to be made with Ticknor and Fields concerning the publication of a second edition of Walden and a rebinding, for sale, of some 596 copies of A Week on the Concord and

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83 See Harding and Bode, pp. 618-45.
84 Note Edward Emerson’s comments in his Henry Thoreau As Remembered by a Young Friend (Boston, 1917), pp. 32-8, that it was Thoreau’s research on black-lead manufacture that made the family’s pencil and graphite manufacture more successful. Evidence seems to indicate, too, that after his father’s death in 1853, Thoreau took charge of the family industry. (Note numerous letters for payments on graphite by business firms to Thoreau, in Harding and Bode, 555-5, 570, 576, 586, 595, 602, 605-6, 629, 630, etc.)
Merrimack. There was the feverish readying for publication in *The Atlantic* of several essays enlarged from previous lectures—essays which one critic (Sherman Paul) regards as significant for their revelation of Thoreau's ripening philosophy: "Autumnal Tints," "Walking," "Life Without Principle," "Wild Apples," and "Night and Moonlight." Toward the last, working against time and too ill to hold a pencil, Thoreau was forced to dictate his ideas to his sister, Sophia, who prepared them for *Atlantic* publication.

One other final preparation remained—the readying of that reddish-stained pine chest, built as a repository for his thirty-nine journals and into which they exactly fit—so that the "record of his days and thoughts . . . which cover a quarter of a century" could be preserved for future readers.

From an earlier river trip with his brother John, Thoreau had gathered material for his first book—*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. From his last trip—that to the Upper Mississippi region—there remains no book, only fragmentary jottings. A longer journey lay too close at hand—that universal one which all men must take. Yet, according to all reports from family and friends, his attitude toward this final journey was one of serenity. He had accepted its inevitability earlier, when he wrote in the second chapter of *Walden*:

> Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.

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95 Letters to Ticknor and Fields, in Harding and Bode, 637–38 and 638–9.
99 Sophia's letters to Ricketson of Dec. 19, 1861; April 7, 1862; May 20, 1862 in Ricketson, 137–42. See also Edward Emerson, *op. cit.*, 117–8; and Annie R. Marble, *Thoreau: His Home and Friends* (New York, 1902), p. 177.