

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE MANUSCRIPT JOURNAL OF THOREAU'S LAST JOURNEY

WHEN HENRY DAVID THOREAU traveled in Minnesota in 1861 he continued his customary practice of recording his daily observations in a journal. These notes were edited by his friend, F. B. Sanborn, and published in 1905 in a limited edition of 495 copies.¹ Those who have perused the volume on the Minnesota journey have doubtless been tantalized by the editor's disregard of chronological order. Sanborn quotes entries for May 28 and 29, two days when Thoreau was collecting plants in the Minnehaha region. Then a letter is inserted which Thoreau wrote to the editor from Red Wing four weeks later describing his trip on the Minnesota River. More notes on the Twin City area appear, and then the portion of the actual diary which covers the Minnesota River trip, June 17 to 22. The notes made in the few days spent at Red Wing and on the homeward journey are included next. When Sanborn's transcription reaches the point where Thoreau is at Mackinaw the editor states, "This then will be a convenient halting-place to take up the work which he did in reading and botanizing from his long halting-place at St. Anthony and St. Paul."² From this point forward, the text reproduces Thoreau's notes for the early part of June and the order between pages 73 and 105 runs in the following fashion—June 5, 13, 14, 15, 16, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14.

The disconcerting arrangement of notes will make many readers in the Northwest wish that they might see Thoreau's own notes and this desire may in a sense be gratified, for a photostatic copy of the original manuscript is now available

¹ Franklin B. Sanborn, ed., *The First and Last Journeys of Thoreau*, vol. 2 (Boston, 1905).

² *Journeys*, 2:66.

in the Museum of Natural History of the University of Minnesota.³ It is easy to understand Sanborn's chronological difficulties when the book is compared with this copy for, although the order in the two is not the same, Thoreau himself, who is credited with numbering the pages, has placed the notes on the journey up the Mississippi before those on the beginning of the trip with details on stops at Schenectady and Niagara.⁴ Many of the observations on natural history are inserted with entire disregard of the date of the major part of the entry.

The notes, it is to be remembered, were kept as a field journal to aid the author in reconstructing the scene later, and were not intended for publication in the incomplete form in which they were jotted down. Thoreau's death the following year, however, meant that the journal was left in this chaotic state. An example of the type of note which was clear to the observer but puzzling to the modern reader may be found in a record for an afternoon on Nicollet Island which reads briefly: "A deer on Nicollet—quite red-tawny with black ends of ears—& narrow hoofs the 2 toes concurring."⁵ Since deer were probably very rare if still occurring in nature on Nicollet Island in 1861, it is probable that this animal, if alive, was a captive.

The penmanship employed in making the notes created another problem for Sanborn as the editor, and for modern students of the manuscript. An interesting example of the difficulties involved may be selected from one of the items on a botanical list which Sanborn has transcribed: "Common Pigweed (*Chenopodium album*) or crow-wings? (in groves)." This seems quite clearly a misinterpretation on the part of the editor, for the entry actually reads "Com-

³This copy has been purchased by Dr. Thomas S. Roberts, director of the museum. The original manuscript is in the possession of the Henry E. Huntington Library at San Marino, California. The photostatic copy used by the present writer will be cited as Thoreau's Journal.

⁴*Journeys*, 2:110.

⁵Journal, 85.

mon pigweed on Crow Wing's?? grave." ⁶ Since Thoreau had seen Chief Little Crow at an Indian council at the Redwood agency before stopping at Red Wing, it seems quite possible that he had confused the Indian names. Evidence in a letter of Horace Mann, Jr., his companion, points to this interpretation. Mann wrote from Red Wing on June 23, 1861: "The bluff and town are both named for the old Sioux Chief Red Wing who was buried on this bluff about ten years ago, and I have marked the situation of his grave. . . . We [*probably Thoreau and Mann*] found a strawberry and a pigweed upon it besides other plants." ⁷ If the question marks in the Thoreau manuscript were inserted by the author, they may indicate his own recognition of this error in names in a later reading of the notes.

A question of interest to naturalists which the Sanborn edition provoked has now been answered by the use of this manuscript. Thoreau's description of a passenger pigeon's nest as quoted in Sanborn reads "Built of slender hard twigs only, so open that I could see the eggs from the ground." The fact that the usual pigeon's clutch was only one egg led to the assumption that Thoreau had confused a passenger pigeon with the mourning dove, which normally lays two eggs. The document clearly shows the singular form of the word, and further evidence of pigeon nesting near Lake Calhoun is given in a summary on page 80: "4 pig. nests 2 in bass—1 in oak—& 1 in hop horn beam—in 2 1 egg each in others 1 young—1 egg far advanced." Again a letter which Horace Mann, Jr., wrote to his mother supplies additional evidence of the fact that there was only one egg in one of the nests which Thoreau described, for Mann collected the egg. ⁸ A second error appears in Sanborn's

⁶ *Journeys*, 2:88; *Journal*, 80.

⁷ A number of letters written by Horace Mann, Jr., to his mother are in the possession of Mr. Robert L. Straker of New York, who has permitted the writer to quote from them.

⁸ *Journeys*, 2:96; *Journal*, 48; Horace Mann to Mary Mann, June 7, 1861.

edition in a description of a pigeon's nest with "another young bird" feigning injury to protect the first young. This appears quite distinctly in the manuscript as "old bird," thus clearing Thoreau's ornithological reputation!⁹

Sanborn refers to "a slight sketch of the branching bass-wood" in which the first pigeon's nest was found, and to another drawing illustrating the method by which a ferry was drawn across the Mississippi, but the manuscript shows that these "sketches" were so rudimentary that they scarcely can be counted as illustrations in the true sense. A pressed specimen of the floating duckweed is inserted in the journal with an entry indicating that Thoreau found it in pools at Mendota.¹⁰

Personal notations showing Thoreau's systematic care of his possessions are illustrated in his laundry lists, in one of which occurs the item "3 bosoms," indicative of a prevailing fashion. His expense account lists one dollar invested in a map of Minnesota noted after a breakfast at Detroit. Expenses in St. Anthony include an item of five cents "cheated," and a precaution against larger losses is suggested by the notations:

Left pocket	78.10
Right	60
Bosom	40
	<hr/>
	178.10 ¹¹

Thoreau's search for historical information about his new surroundings is indicated in his abstracts from the accounts of explorers in Minnesota.¹² These notes are intermingled with his scientific data.

⁹ *Journeys*, 2: 101; *Journal*, 52.

¹⁰ *Journeys*, 2: 38, 96; *Journal*, 16, 48, 70. The correct name for the plant mentioned is *Lemna minor*, not *Lemna trisulca* as Thoreau has labeled it; the latter name is that of a water plant which grows entirely submerged, and is very different from the one preserved in the *Journal*.

¹¹ *Journal*, preliminary pages.

¹² An interesting article by John T. Flanagan on Thoreau's route and activities in Minnesota appears in the issue of this magazine for March, 1935, *ante*, 16: 35-46.

The pages of the journal are numbered from 1 to 97, and most of the entries are dated. A letter from Mary Mann, the mother of Thoreau's companion, appears opposite page 37. Some notes on the Minnesota River boat schedule and a laundry list made while at Lake Calhoun are scribbled along the border of a letter dated January 23, 1860, at Boston from Chauncey Smith to Thoreau.

Individuals interested in the manuscript may examine the photostatic copy and a typewritten transcript prepared by Miss Mabel Densmore at the University of Minnesota Museum of Natural History.

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PETER RINDISBACHER: A COMMUNICATION ¹

YOUR ARTICLE in the March issue of MINNESOTA HISTORY on Peter Rindisbacher's Minnesota water colors at West Point reminds me that for some time I have had several notes on Rindisbacher and his work. He was, as you know, an early artist of Wisconsin as well as of Minnesota.

During the first months of Lyman C. Draper's superintendency of the Wisconsin Historical Society he wrote to many men of prominence in the United States, inviting them to join the society and to contribute to its collections. In response to one such request Caleb Atwater of Circleville, Ohio, wrote to Draper on July 24, 1854, stating that he was presenting a copy of his *Tour to Prairie du Chien . . . in 1829* and "4 drawings of my favorites, natives of your region of country." He continues:

Winneshiek was my pet, and so was the Prairie Wolf. The latter I carried with me, as far as Edwardsville, where I left him, as I feared that the travelling any further with me, would kill him. My likenesses of Indians are in the Patent Office, at Washington City.

¹ This letter from Miss Alice Smith, curator of manuscripts for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, was addressed on May 2 to Miss Nute, whose description of "Rindisbacher's Minnesota Water Colors" appears *ante*, p. 54-57. *Ed.*



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