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THE LIFE OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU THROUGH THE LENS OF HIS REMARKABLE JOURNAL IS THE SUBJECT OF A NEW MORGAN EXHIBITION

This Ever New Self: Thoreau and His Journal
June 2 through September 10, 2017

New York, NY, April 17, 2017 — Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) occupies a lofty place in American cultural history. He spent two years in a cabin by Walden Pond and a single night in jail, and out of those experiences grew two of this country’s most influential works: his book *Walden* and the essay known as “Civil Disobedience.” But his lifelong journal—more voluminous by far than his published writings—reveals a fuller, more intimate picture of a man of wide-ranging interests and a profound commitment to living responsibly and passionately.

Now, in a major new exhibition entitled *This Ever New Self: Thoreau and His Journal* opening June 2 at the Morgan Library & Museum, nearly one hundred items have been brought together in the most comprehensive exhibition ever devoted to the author. Marking the 200th anniversary of his birth and organized in partnership with the Concord Museum in Thoreau’s hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, the show centers on the journal he kept throughout his life and its importance in understanding the essential Thoreau. More than twenty of Thoreau’s journal notebooks are shown along with letters and manuscripts, books from his library, pressed plants from his herbarium, and important personal artifacts. Also featured are the only two photographs for which he sat during his lifetime, shown together for the first time. The exhibition runs through September 10.



Benjamin D. Maxham (1821–1889), *Henry D. Thoreau*,
Daguerreotype, Worcester, Massachusetts, June 18, 1856. Berg
Collection, New York Public Library.

“Henry David Thoreau has variously been cast as naturalist, hermit philosopher, and political activist,” said Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum. “However, none of these labels do justice to the breadth of his interests and his enormous impact on American culture and letters. It is perhaps only in his journal that one finds Thoreau in full voice, commenting thoughtfully on a range of topics, from the seemingly mundane to the historic events of his day. The Morgan is pleased to partner with the Concord Museum in bringing this extraordinary exhibition to the public.”

“For the first time, the surviving personal artifacts—from Thoreau’s simple green desk to his beloved flute— will temporarily be on view outside of his hometown of Concord,” explained Margaret Burke, Executive Director of the Concord Museum. “Two centuries after his birth, we believe that much can be learned from Thoreau and his perception of the world. Throughout 2017, the Concord Museum is celebrating his Bicentennial with programs, events, gallery talks, and special exhibitions. We are particularly proud of our collaboration with the Morgan Library and that the exhibition will also be on view at the Concord Museum beginning September 29.”

THE EXHIBITION

Give me the old familiar walk, post office & all – with this ever new self – with this infinite expectation and faith. . . .
 –Thoreau’s journal, November 1, 1858

Thoreau’s journal

The Morgan holds almost all of Thoreau’s surviving journal—forty simple volumes filled with the observations and reflections of a lifetime. Throughout the exhibition, his notebooks are paired with resonant objects—his flute with a journal entry about the importance of listening, his spyglass with an observation about birds he saw while peering through it, a bundle of nails from his cabin by Walden Pond alongside a notebook he used while living there. At the center of the gallery stands the simple green desk on which he wrote the thousands of pages of his journal over the course of a quarter century, convinced that a closely examined life would yield infinite riches.



Top: Thoreau’s earliest surviving journal notebook, open to entries from November 1837. The Morgan Library & Museum; purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1909. Bottom: Henry Francis Walling (1825–1888), *Map of the Town of Concord*, Hand-colored lithograph, Boston, 1852. Concord Museum; gift of the Cummings Davis Society (Decorative Arts Fund), 1988; Pi2139a

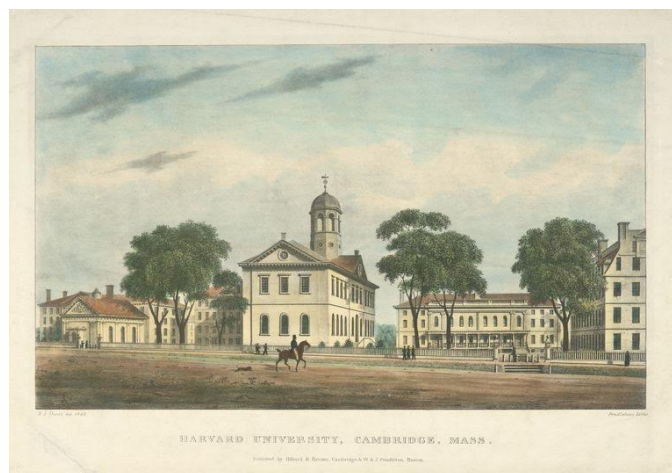
Neighbor

Thoreau's journal begins and ends in Concord—the Massachusetts town where he spent most of his forty-four years. It was there that he opened his first notebook in 1837 and closed his final one in 1861, as he began to grow weary with tuberculosis. One of the most frequently quoted lines from Thoreau's journal, dated December 5, 1856, reflects his profound connection with his native place: "I have never got over my surprise that I should have been born into the most estimable place in all the world – & in the very nick of time, too."

Concord—less than twenty miles from Boston—was an intellectually vibrant place. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau's dynamic neighbor, led discussions about the future of American society. Antislavery activists Wendell Phillips and Frederick Douglass passed through town (and through the Thoreau family house) with urgent calls for reform. The exhibition features intimate records of Thoreau's relationships with many of his Concord contemporaries, from a diary of fellow author Nathaniel Hawthorne to a heartbreaking letter from Louisa May Alcott describing how friends laid Thoreau's body to rest beneath a wreath of flowers in 1862. She predicted that "though his life seemed too short, it would blossom & bear fruit for as long after he was gone."

Student and Worker

Thoreau entered Harvard College in 1833 at age sixteen and followed a traditional course of study based on rote memorization, recitation, and repetition. Though he is said to have complained that Harvard taught "all the branches" of learning but "none of the roots," college was a transformative experience for him. His immersion in classical and modern languages, literature, and natural history set the course for a lifetime of self-directed reading and study. The exhibition

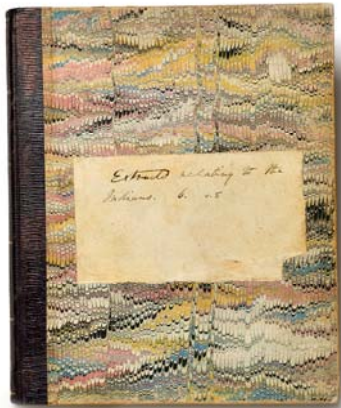


Left: William James Hubard (1807–1862), *Henry David Thoreau*, Cut paper silhouette portrait, Cambridge, 1837. The Neil and Anna Rasmussen Collection. Right: Alexander Jackson Davis (1803–1892), *Harvard University*, Hand-colored lithograph, Lithographed by William S. and John B. Pendleton; published in Cambridge by Hilliard & Brown, 1828. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, New York Public Library.

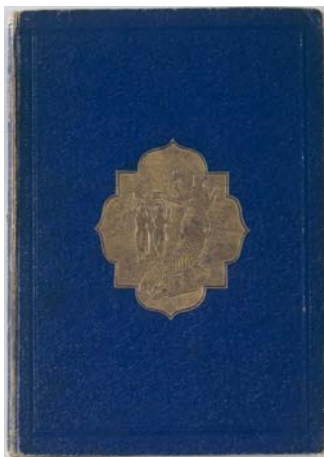


features playful correspondence from Thoreau's college classmates as well as student essays that contain hints of the big ideas that would continue to engage him, from the importance of simplicity to the value of independent thought.

It was just after graduation that Thoreau began to keep a journal of his observations and reflections. His earliest surviving journal is on view, open to an entry that served as a guiding principle for his lifelong practice: "My desire is to know what I have lived, that I may know how to live henceforth."



Throughout his life Thoreau found various ways to, in his words, "get a living"—working as a teacher, schoolmaster, handyman, lecturer, writer, pencil maker, and, most regularly, as a surveyor. At the same time, he aimed to reverse the usual balance. How could he work less and live more? Shortly after he turned forty, he wrote a journal entry, dated October 29, 1857, concluding that he had chosen the professions best suited to his temperament. "I have aspired to practice in succession all the honest arts of life," he wrote, "that I may gather all their fruits."



Reader and Thinker

Thoreau read voraciously and in several languages, often with pen in hand, copying extracts into the same type of notebook in which he kept his journal. The exhibition includes a blank book he began using in college to copy selections from his reading. He devoted sixteen full pages to *The Laws of Manu*, an English translation of a classical Hindu text that influenced him profoundly. It is shown alongside Thoreau's own copy of the *Bhagavad-Gítá*, another of his most cherished texts. Also on view are selections from Thoreau's extensive self-directed study of indigenous North American cultures—a project that comprised some three thousand handwritten pages in a dozen notebooks.

Top: Thoreau's t-square, protractor, and compass, 19th century. Concord Museum; gift of Cummings E. Davis or George Tolman, before 1909; Th12, Th12c, Th13.
Middle: One of Thoreau's research notebooks on North American indigenous cultures, ca. 1847–61. The Morgan Library & Museum; purchased by Pierpont Morgan, 1909.
Bottom: Thoreau's copy of *Bhagavad-Gítá*; or *The Sacred Lay: A Colloquy between Krishna and Arjuna on Divine Matters*, ed. by J. Cockburn Thomson. Hertford: Stephen Austin, 1855. Concord Museum; gift of E.H. Kittredge, 1942; Th6B.

For Thoreau and many of his Concord contemporaries, a journal was the perfect venue in which to cultivate a dynamic, *direct* relationship with nature rather than relying only on books, teachers, elders, and religious authorities. He also famously committed himself to living responsibly and focused his thinking and writing on consumerism, materialism, individualism, spirituality, and what we now call environmentalism.

Thoreau was a passionate abolitionist and sometimes provided assistance to African Americans who had escaped from slavery as they made their way to Canada via the Underground Railroad. He wrote almost nothing about these illegal activities in his journal. What he did express—at length—was his fury with a government that sanctioned an institution as heinous as slavery.

In 1846, Thoreau spent a night in jail for failure to pay a tax in protest against state-sanctioned slavery. Out of that experience he developed his most influential essay, “Resistance to Civil Government” (later published as “Civil Disobedience”), which is shown in its first printed appearance alongside the lock salvaged from Thoreau’s jail cell.

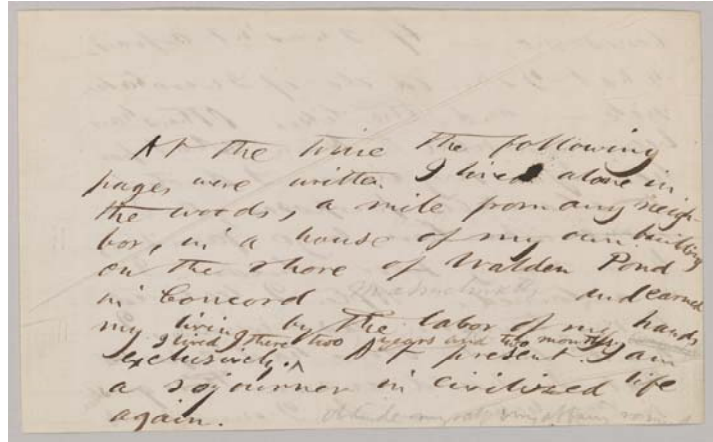
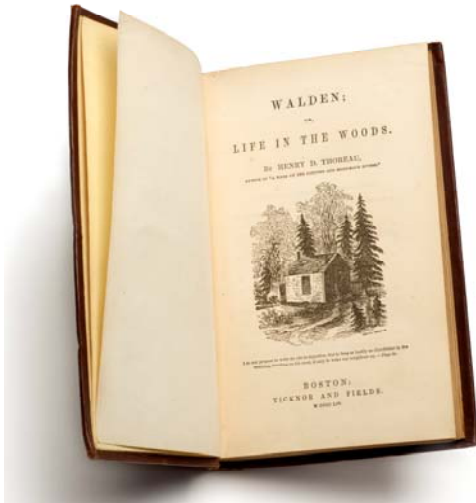
In the years that followed, Thoreau became the most outspoken public apologist for the militant abolitionist John Brown and turned again to his journal to rail against a government “that pretends to be Christian & crucifies a million Christs every day.” Many of these journal entries made their way, in revised form, into his fiery public speeches and published essays.

Writer and Observer

As a young man, Thoreau wrote poetry, but he found his voice in prose. He published two books during his lifetime: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, which did not cause much of a stir, and *Walden*, which most certainly did. Both of these works and others had their beginnings in his journal. In lectures and published works, Thoreau developed a first-person public voice designed to provoke, tease, stimulate, challenge, and, sometimes, entertain. In his private writings, he let his words flow more naturally, expressing surprise, anger, frustration, awe, joy,



Steel lock and key from the cell where Thoreau spent a night in jail for tax resistance in 1846. Concord Museum; gift of Cummings E. Davis, 1886; M2081.



Henry D. Thoreau (1817–1862), *First edition of Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854. The Morgan Library & Museum; bequest of Gordon N. Ray, 1987. Henry D. Thoreau (1817–1862), *Walden*, Manuscript draft of the opening page, ca. 1852–54. The Morgan Library & Museum; gift of Norman H. Strouse, 1966.

and even ecstasy. In his early notebooks, he often extracted pages and repurposed the text. Later, though, he left the volumes intact. Over time, the journal became his most essential work of art.

Walden, published in 1854, would make Thoreau an American legend—a first edition copy is on view. The title page illustration is based on Sophia Thoreau’s drawing of the cabin where her brother Henry lived for two years, two months, and two days on the shores of Concord’s Walden Pond. In writing the book he pulled heavily from his journal entries. It was toward the end of his composition process that he added the iconic first paragraph, a draft of which is on view:

When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again.

Thoreau walked for hours every day and in all seasons and used his journal to record, in great detail, what he observed. As he grew older, his engagement with the natural world intensified and he spent years logging descriptions of natural phenomena. The exhibition features pressed plants from his herbarium and examples of the detailed phenological tables he drew up late in his life, pulling extensive data on plant flowering from past journal entries. “I have the habit of attention to such excess that my senses get no rest,” he wrote in 1852. But he reminded himself that observation was not all about effort: “Go not to the object, let it come to you.”

Epilogue

Did Thoreau intend his journal to be read by the public? He repurposed and revised many passages during his lifetime and shared them in lectures and published writings. At the same time, the enterprise was deeply personal. "Says I to my-self should be the motto of my Journal," he wrote in 1851.

On view in the exhibition is his final entry, made in November 1861 after a violent rainstorm. He was paying attention, as he had done all his life, to ordinary details and seeing what conclusions he could draw. The second half of the notebook is empty. He died six months later.

A contemporary work inspired by Thoreau's journal

The gallery installation incorporates a large-format photographic work by contemporary Cuban-born American artist Abelardo Morell, inspired by Thoreau's *Walden* and his journal.

Public Programs

CONCERT **Not Less Than the Good**

Commissioned by **New Thread Quartet** and composed by **David Morneau**, this world premiere of *Not Less Than the Good* simulates a sunrise by combining the meditative playing of the saxophone quartet with ambient synthesizers and sounds recorded during the pre-dawn and early morning hours at Walden Pond. The hour-long performance is punctuated by readings of excerpts from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* performed by poet **J. D. McClatchy**.

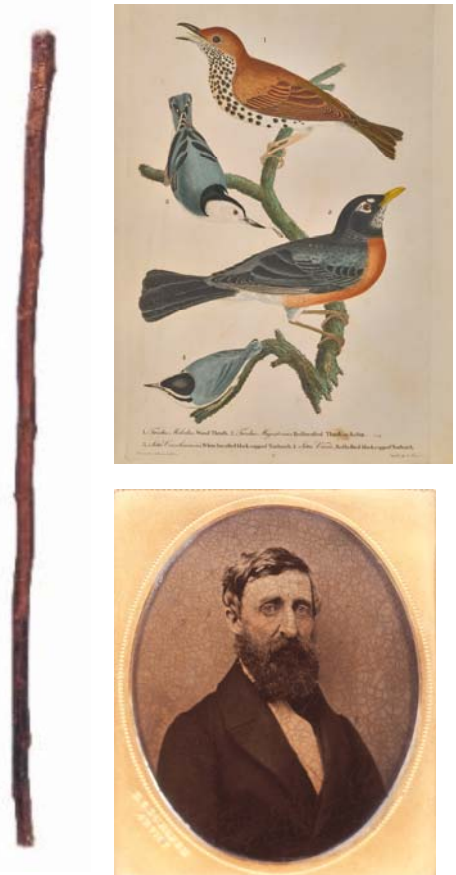
Friday, June 2, 7:30 pm
Tickets: \$25; \$20 for members

The exhibition *This Ever New Self: Thoreau and his Journal* will be open at 6:30 pm for program attendees.

ADULT WORKSHOP

Sauntering with Thoreau: A Birding Walk in Bryant Park

A guided visit of the exhibition, *This Ever New Self: Thoreau and His Journal*, is coupled with a bird spotting walk through Bryant Park in this special before-hours event. Explore Thoreau's handwritten notebooks and the spyglass he used to



Left: Walking stick made by Henry D. Thoreau about 1853, Unidentified hardwood, possibly birch. Concord Museum; gift of Lee, Olive, and Earnest Russell, 1917; Th34. Top right: Alexander Wilson (1766–1813). *American Ornithology: or, the Natural History of Birds of the United States*. New York: Collins; Philadelphia: Harrison Hall, 1828–29. The Morgan Library & Museum; gift of Mary D. Lindsay, 2003. Bottom right: Edward Sidney Dunshee (1823–1907), *Henry D. Thoreau*, Ambrotype, New Bedford, Massachusetts, August 21, 1861. Concord Museum; gift of Mr. Walton Ricketson and Miss Anna Ricketson, 1929; Th33b

observe and document the birds at Walden Pond then set out with Gabriel Willow of New York City Audubon to discover the surprising variety of birds living in the heart of New York City. Presented in collaboration with New York City Audubon.

Tuesday, June 6, 9:30 am

Tickets: \$25; \$20 for Morgan and NYC Audubon members.

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Tuesday, June 13, 9:30 am

Tickets: \$25; \$20 for Morgan and NYC Audubon members.

**GALLERY
TALK**

This Ever New Self: Thoreau and His Journal

Christine Nelson, Drue Heinz Curator of Literary and Historical Manuscripts

Friday, June 16, 6 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

**GALLERY
TALK**

This Ever New Self: Thoreau and His Journal

Christine Nelson, Drue Heinz Curator of Literary and Historical Manuscripts

Friday, July 7, 1 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

FILM

Henry David Thoreau, Surveyor of the Soul

Director: Huey Coleman
(2017, 90 minutes)

Henry David Thoreau was proud to have been born in Concord, Massachusetts—"and in the nick of time, too." This documentary tells the story of this iconic American writer who famously built a cabin on Walden Pond, and dramatizes the impact of Thoreau's writings on the environment and civil rights movements, as well as individualist thought. Join producer, director, and editor Huey Coleman of Films By Huey Productions for a post-screening discussion. New York premiere.

Thursday, July 20, 7 pm

Tickets: \$15; \$10 for members

The exhibition *This Ever New Self: Thoreau and his Journal* will be open at 6 pm for program attendees.

LECTURE **Henry David Thoreau: A Life**
Laura Dassow Walls

Join Laura Dassow Walls, author of the forthcoming *Henry David Thoreau: A Life*, for an illustrated presentation on the profound, inspiring complexity of Henry David Thoreau. Drawing on Thoreau's copious writings, published and unpublished, Walls presents a Thoreau with all his quirks and contradictions: the young man shattered by the sudden death of his brother; the ambitious Harvard College student; and the ecstatic visionary who closed *Walden* with an account of the regenerative power of the Cosmos.

Wednesday, July 26, 6:30 pm
Tickets: \$15; \$10 for members; free for students with valid ID.

The exhibition *This Ever New Self: Thoreau and His Journal* will be open at 5:30 pm for program attendees.

Organization and Sponsorship

This Ever New Self: Thoreau and his Journal is organized by the Morgan Library & Museum, New York, and the Concord Museum, Concord, Massachusetts. The curator of the exhibition at the Morgan is Christine Nelson, Drue Heinz Curator of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, the Morgan Library & Museum. The curator of the exhibition at the Concord Museum is David Wood, Curator, the Concord Museum. The exhibition will travel to the Concord Museum, September 29, 2017–January 21, 2018.

The exhibition is made possible with lead funding from an anonymous donor, generous support from the Gilder Foundation, and assistance from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation.

The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.



The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

The Morgan Library & Museum
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