In the following document you will find copies of all images I showed during the lecture, as well as links to those images that are available on library Web sites.

First, I want to thank the Harding family and Paul for the opportunity to be here. It’s a great honor for me to have been invited to give the Harding Lecture, because Walt was such an important influence in my life. I met him in 1975 when I was a new research assistant at the Thoreau Edition. I was in awe of him because of the formal contributions he had made to the study of Thoreau that I knew about: he had founded both the Thoreau Edition and the Thoreau Society; he had published extensively, including what is still the most comprehensive biography of Thoreau; and he was a distinguished faculty member, both in the English Department here and in the Summer Seminars that focused on Thoreau, Concord, and the Transcendentalists.

Over the next twenty-one years, as I became a Thoreauvian and Walt became a friend, I discovered how much more he had done informally to share what he knew about Thoreau. By founding the two most significant organizations that focus on Thoreau, the Thoreau Edition and the Thoreau Society, he introduced Henry Thoreau to more people around the world than any other single individual. But he also made himself available in person to other Thoreau enthusiasts at the annual gatherings of the Society, and his correspondence was extensive. I witnessed his generous support for others, and the longer I knew him, the more deeply I admired and respected him.

By founding the Thoreau Edition in the mid-1960s, and believing in the late 1970s that I would be able to direct it, Walt gave me the opportunity of a lifetime: forty-
two years of being immersed in Thoreau’s work, and especially the opportunity to know Thoreau through his manuscripts. Thanks, Walt!

The title of my talk this evening is “Thoreau’s Manuscripts and the Prepared Eye.” Thoreau put great stock in the prepared eye—and mind—and in his essay “Autumnal Tints,” he describes what that means to him. He writes,

Objects are concealed from our view, not so much because they are out of the course of our visual ray as because we do not bring our minds and eyes to bear on them; for there is no power to see in the eye itself, any more than in any other jelly. . . . We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, take it into our heads,—and then we can hardly see anything else. In my botanical rambles, I find that, first, the idea, or image, of a plant occupies my thoughts, though it may seem very foreign to this locality—no nearer than Hudson's Bay—and for some weeks or months I go thinking of it, and expecting it, unconsciously, and at length I surely see it. This, is the history of my finding a score or more of rare plants, which I could name. (Excursions, pp. 256-257)

The objects on which I have brought my mind and eyes to bear are Thoreau’s manuscripts, and the more I see of them the more I see in them. I’ll give you a few examples, and I’ll close with a glimpse of the manuscript evidence that reveals the way in which T prepared his own eye and mind to see nature, in detailed parts and in the whole those parts constituted.

To demonstrate how my eyes and mind have been prepared, and what I’ve seen as a result, I’m going to focus on letters. This is for a couple of reasons. For one thing, I’ve been concentrating on Thoreau’s correspondence—letters to and from him—for the past several years, as we work on a new three-volume edition. And for another, our
edition of Thoreau’s correspondence builds on Walt’s 1958 edition, which he did with Carl Bode—it’s another demonstration of how significant his contributions remain.

The 1958 edition of correspondence was the first collection of all of the extant letters both by Thoreau and to him: 498 letters that were based on the manuscript sources available then. Walt found many of these manuscripts in the traditional way—by tracking down relatives of Thoreau’s and descendants of his friends. (For some of Walt’s stories, see “Adventures in the Thoreau Trade,” American Scholar 61.2, 1992, and “In Search of Henry Thoreau,” Virginia Quarterly Review, Spring 1992.)

Since 1958, just over 150 new letters have turned up: letters go everywhere, you know, and it’s impossible to find them all. Some of these are recipients’ copies:

–A June 22 and 24, 1837, letter to John Shepherd Keyes, a fellow Concordian who entered Harvard just after Thoreau graduated, was sold on February 13, 2013, to an unknown buyer.
Cambridge June 21st 34.

Dear John,

I can write you nothing definite with regard to a room. I spoke with Mr. Emerson upon the subject, and he tells me that he has already received a number of applications, but as so circumstance is not to be able to return any positive answer at present. Presently, he says he will remember you and inform me of the result. I have called upon Mrs. Mason some half-dozen times but have not found her here. I understand that the next class will be a large one—there will enter from Andover.

Yours or haste. 

O. W. Thoreau
P. June 24th.

Hand at last saw Mr. Melon, and have the pleasure of informing you that Holmsoth No. 9, the room under him, will be rented for years. He had a deal to say about quiet, regularity, and order, and inquired particularly with regard to the character of your churn — indeed he was so apprehensive on that point, as to have no objection to your morning alone if you please it.
Mr. John Peyer
Concord, Mass.
A December 27, 1850, letter to the Harvard librarian, T. W. Harris, which had accompanied two books a friend returned to the library for Thoreau, was found in one of the returned books, at a page to which Thoreau had called the librarian’s attention. This is now at the Houghton Library at Harvard (Autograph File, T).
A handwritten page with various notes and calculations. The writing is in cursive and includes mathematical equations and chemical representations. Some sections are crossed out or annotated with corrections.
The letters I want to talk about tonight, though, weren’t found in the traditional way, and they’re not the documents—the pieces of paper—received by those to whom Thoreau addressed them. They’re drafts, and they have long been available among Thoreau’s manuscript remains, but they haven’t been seen. These are the ones that my years of work on the manuscripts have prepared me to see.

I’ve wished for the kinds of adventures Walt had, sometimes involving tart old ladies (they were probably about the age I am now!) and unexplored barns. My discoveries have been tamer, but just as exciting: I’ve made them sitting at my computer, squinting at images of manuscripts the screen (when you see the images you’ll understand the squinting). I’ve been helped by amazing improvements in imaging technology—high-resolution digital photography and scanning—and a concomitant strong and welcome commitment by special collections libraries to providing open electronic access to their rare materials.

You can expand a high-resolution image, with no distortion, until you can see things the naked eye can only imagine: for example, differences in the amount of pressure Thoreau put on his pencil when he was writing.

So far, seven libraries with significant Thoreau holdings have made images of some or all of their Thoreau manuscripts available freely: the Abernethy Library at Middlebury College, the Beinecke Library at Yale University, the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library, the William Munroe Special Collections at the Concord Free Public Library, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the John Hay Library at Brown University, and the Houghton Library at Harvard University (for MS Am 278.5-278.5.25, MS Am 1280.214.1, MS Am 3032, and HEW 12.7.10).
New technology and open access to collections are important factors in the first discovery. Manuscripts in the Abernethy Collection in Special Collections in the Davis Family Library at Middlebury College in Vermont were scanned and made available at the library’s website some time ago.

Last spring I was looking for something else in a group of manuscripts described as “Excerpts from Journal, December 1850-1860” when I caught a glimpse of T’s hand in a penciled draft letter.
New York Dec 20th 1854

Mr. Thureau Co

Gents

Enclos'd please find five dollars for which send us immediately the value in your best plumbago. We wish you would keep the agency to keep in this city, it would very much oblige.

Many Electrotypers

Yours Aisy

A. W. Ebel

58 Fulton St.

Edward Dec. 22 1854

Gentlemen

You say your

should like to have me keep off an agency &
deport in your city. I trust that will be
arranged with Mr. W. Wilmor.

I was paid & full for my engagement &
you have not received one cent from
mine.
But the letter began in another hand, which I recognized (I photographed this letter over twenty years ago in Raymond Adams’s study in Chapel Hill, NC; Charlotte Adams, Raymond’s widow, had invited me to see the collection. It’s now in the Thoreau Society’s Adams Collection, housed in the Henley Library at the Thoreau Institute.) A few letters with characteristic shapes are marked with arrows.
Dear George,

I should have sent you conveyance before now, but it was not possible. I have to say that I forgot it.

My health is improving and my appetite is tolerably good, but I am troubled with my teeth. If I were well, I think I should soon be restored to health. Menino's health is better, so that she is not in need of conveyance. I do not do much writing, but I do what I can. I have been writing letters to the bowen brothers and I think that has helped me more than anything else.

I have not made arrangements with one of the best agents in New York for the sake of any leads, but I am not without reducing the price.

I have been dancing to it, so Menino's health is better, so that she is able to work out. I believe she is very happy. I do not think I have done as much as you would have done for her, but she has been faithful in everything. I am now trying the bowen brothers. I think that has helped me more than anything else.

I have not made arrangements with one of the best agents in New York for the sake of any leads, but I am not without reducing the price.

I have been dancing to it, so Menino's health is better, so that she is able to work out. I believe she is very happy. I do not think I have done as much as you would have done for her, but she has been faithful in everything.

We are enjoying the weather very much, and I have been dancing to it, so Menino's health is better, so that she is able to work out. I believe she is very happy. I do not think I have done as much as you would have done for her, but she has been faithful in everything.

Yours truly,
John Thomson
Henry’s father John started in business as a shopkeeper. In 1821 his brother-in-law, Charles Dunbar, discovered a deposit of plumbago—another name for graphite—in Bristol, VT, and went into partnership with Cyrus Stow of Concord to mine the plumbago and make lead pencils. John Thoreau joined the company in 1823. Stow and Dunbar dropped out; Henry later made several innovations in the manufacturing and in the quality of the pencils; and by the 1840s the company—and the family—had become more stable financially. The business changed focus in the early 1850s to supply finely ground graphite in quantity for electrotyping, a printing process that had emerged in 1849.

The extent of Thoreau’s involvement in the family business has often been overlooked or minimized. He deprecated it himself, especially compared to the important work of thinking and writing. But he also said in *Walden*

I have always endeavored to acquire strict business habits; they are indispensable to every man. . . . It is a labor to task the faculties of a man,—such problems of profit and loss, of interest, of tare and tret, and gauging of all kinds in it, as demand a universal knowledge. (pp. 20-21)

In the paragraph preceding this one Thoreau states that his

. . . purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles; to be hindered from accomplishing which for want of a little common sense, a little enterprise and business talent, appeared not so sad as foolish. (pp. 19-20)

It’s clear that business has a metaphorical level of meaning, but it would be a mistake to ignore the literal level, which came directly from his experience in the family business.
Thoreau’s completion of the response that his father began drafting to one of the companies that regularly purchased quantities of ground lead shows something about how he was involved in that business, as well as his enforcement of “strict business habits.” Here is the manuscript again:
New York Dec 20, 1854

Sir,

John Thorne & Co.

Gentlemen,

Enclosed, please find five dollars, for which send us immediately the value in your best plumbago. We wish you would keep our agency in depot in this city, it would very much oblige.

Many Electrotype

Yours obliged,

A. T. Geely & Co.

58 & 60 Fulton St.

Command Dec 22, 1854

Gentlemen

You say you should like to have one kept up at any store. I think it would be desirable for the shop 2 boxes would do the purpose and could be easily packed. I will ask Mr. Wilson to send one, and if I have not received one, I will send you an account from
New York Dec 20\textsuperscript{th}/54
Msr John Thoreau & Co
Gents
Enclos’d please
find Five dollars, for which send us
immediately the value in your best plumbago,
We wish you would keep an agency & depot
in this city, it would very much oblige
many electrotypers
Your Obt
A H Jocelyn & Co
58 & 60 Fulton St

Thoreau’s father begins

Concord Dec\textsuperscript{r} 22\textsuperscript{d} 1854
Messrs A. H. Jocelyn & Co
Gentlemen
You say you should like to have me keep an agency & depot in your
City. I tried something similar with Mr W Filmer–

Then Thoreau chimes in, changing the tone of the letter significantly:

putting it up for him [that is, for Filmer] in 2 pound packages & giving him 3
months credit but though he promised well he has utterly failed to fulfill his
engagements–& though 6 months have elapsed I have not recovered one cent
from him–

Here’s a line-by-line transcript of both letters, with Thoreau’s contribution to the second
document in smaller blue type:

New York Dec 20\textsuperscript{th}/54
Msr John Thoreau & Co
Gents
Enclos’d please
find Five dollars, for which send us
immediately the value in your best plumbago,
We wish you would keep an agency & depot
in this city, it would very much oblige
many electrotypers
Your Obt
A H Jocelyn & Co
58 & 60 Fulton St
Concord Dec 22d 1854
Messrs A. H. Jocelyn & Co
Gentlemen

You say you should like to have me keep an agency & giving him 3 months credit depot in your City. I tried something putting it up for him in 2 pound packages^ but though he promised well similar with Mr W Filmer--^ first he has ^ though 6 months have elapsed utterly failed to fulfill his engagements--& ^ as yet I have not recovered one cent from him--

It may have occurred to you to wonder what those brown spots are. They look like blood to me—a couple of drops of blood that landed on the paper and were wiped away, perhaps with a finger and then the feather end of a quill pen. John Thoreau had tuberculosis; he died of it in 1859. Nosebleeds are one symptom of this disease. Did Henry finish the letter because his father had a nosebleed? Maybe the spots could be analyzed . . .

The Princeton Edition of correspondence will include the texts of twenty-one drafts not published in 1958 that reveal Thoreau engaged in some aspect of business—dealing with plumbago orders, soliciting or responding to lecture invitations, making arrangements to survey land, contacting or responding to publishers. It’s not a large number, but it’s about 6½ percent of the 325 or so letters by Thoreau that survive (about the same number as to him, to make about 650 all told), and these drafts considerably expand our knowledge of Thoreau as a businessman.
The next discovery I’ll describe came about because of my work on the second volume of *Correspondence*. The correspondent in this case is an Englishman, Thomas Cholmondeley (1823-1864), who arrived in Concord in September 1854 with letters of introduction to Emerson; he wanted to observe American institutions and culture. At Emerson’s suggestion, he boarded at the Thoreau household—for a dollar a day—for a couple of months. He and Thoreau became good friends, and they corresponded after Cholmondeley returned to England at the end of the year. Their letters cover politics and current events in American and Europe, as well as philosophical topics, and they make for fascinating reading.

In December 1856 Cholmondeley wrote Thoreau a long letter; he included the information that he was working at an essay on America, which gives me great pleasure and no little pain. I have a conception of America surveyed as “one thought;” but the members are not yet forthcoming. I have not yet written above a page or two.

For this essay he asked Thoreau for a favor:

. . . please obtain for me a catalogue (you’ll hear of it at the Boston Athenæum) of your local histories in the United States. There are hundreds of them, I believe; a list has been made which I want to examine. I suppose you are well versed in the French works written by early travelers and missioners on America. Would you tell me one or two of the best authors of Canadian or Louisianian research? (p. 506, *Correspondence 2*, forthcoming)

There’s no extant answer by Thoreau, but in 1964, Kenneth Walter Cameron published a transcript of a draft response (p. 76); here’s the manuscript, which is at the Morgan
Library (it’s a partial sheet that was laid into Thoreau’s Canadian Notebook, MA 595, and is now kept in a separate folder that has the same accession number):
I find my notes in the catalogue to be slight
"American local History. A
Bibliography". Published by

In 1846, Thaddeus Stevens died in N.Y. on Dec. 8.

The work was never published. The

Edward L. Pierce was interviewed by

Samuel F. B. Morse in 1848. Also examined. He can be

seen in Morse's "The Pictorial Museum."

Museums are erected in London and Paris.
Here’s a line-by-line transcript of the manuscript, showing Thoreau’s additions in smaller type:

of local histories

I did my best to find the catalogue

which

you spoke of—but in vain—Its title

is “A Literature of American Local History. A

Bibliographical Essay by Hermann E

Ludewig”—Published by Craighead New York

1846—The Author died in N.Y. Dec 1856

an antiquary & a

Mr. Drake ^ author of the Hist of

A competent authority in Boston &c tells me

that it was never published—only The

at the University

Librarian of the Harvard Library—says that

it is far from complete. A supplement

was published in “the Literary World” NY

Feb. 19th 1848—also separately—You can no-

the whole
doubt find it in the British Museum—

O.

Look also at Rich’s “Bibliotheca Americana

nova” published in London—& for books v scrap 2

The cross-reference at the bottom of the draft made me think that Thoreau had continued the draft: “v” is his abbreviation for “vide”, Latin for “see”, and in his later work he often references scraps on which he’s written material to be added to a draft.

I knew I was looking for a scrap. I had a set of old photos of bits and pieces laid into the eleven volumes of Indian Books at the Morgan Library, and I started with those. It didn’t take me too long to find what I was looking for (I haven’t seen this manuscript in person; it’s supposed to be in a separate folder that has the same accession number as MA 603, Thoreau’s Indian Book 9):
Here’s a line-by-line transcript; again, Thoreau’s additions are in smaller type:

and for Books on Canada—at
“Catalogue D’Ouvrages Sur L'Histoire
de L’Amerique” by G. B. Faribault
This is Quebec 1837— not in the shops here—
As for early & v p 8

You’ll notice that in the transcripts, the first part ends “& for books v scrap 2” and the second part begins “2 and for Books . . .”. “And for books” functions as a printer’s catch-word did: the repetition is a reminder of how the parts of the draft should go together, and the number “2” is an additional aid.

Accepting all of Thoreau’s revisions and putting the two parts together, we have a draft letter that reads:

I did my best to find the catalogue of local histories which you spoke of—
but in vain— Its title is "A Literature of American Local History. A Bibliographical Essay by Hermann E Ludewig"—Published by Craighead New York 1846— The Author died in N.Y. Dec 1856 a Mr. Drake an antiquary & author of a Hist of Boston &c tells me that it was never published— The Librarian of Harvard—says that it is far from complete. A supplement was published in "the Literary World" NYFeb. 19th 1848—also separately— You can no-doubt find the whole in the British Museum—

Look also at O. Rich’s "Bibliotheca Americana nova" published in London—
and for Books on Canada—at “Catalogue D’Ouvrages Sur L'Histoire de L’Amerique” by G. B. Faribault Quebec 1837— This is not in the shops here—

As for early & V p 8
“As for early & V p 8” is another catch-word, or more accurately a catch-phrase: the next time I’m at the Morgan Library, I’m going to go through all of the scraps that were laid into the Indian Books looking for a paragraph that begins “As for early”. I’ve looked through our old photocopies, but the quality is pretty bad and I know we don’t have shots of both sides of every scrap. If I don’t find it there, it might turn up somewhere in the hundreds of leaves of notes on natural history: these are my unexplored barns.

Another way in which the mind is prepared is by focusing on the same category of things for a long time. Thoreau writes that he “knew a girl who, being sent to pick huckleberries, picked wild gooseberries by the quart, where no one else knew that there were any, because she was accustomed to pick them up country where she came from” (Excursions, p. 259). I’m like that girl—after several years of working on letters, I was accustomed to see letters, and I saw them where others had not.

About 2 years ago, I ordered scans from the Houghton Library (of MS Am 278.5 [15]) for some Correspondence 3 letters. Among them was this image:
The river might be called
Kathow — The 2nd Ozenworth
Tuscarora
East Branch

The West "The Mama Wood"
The 1st article might be called
Ktahdn–the 2d Chesuncook
–the 3d The Allegash & Webster Stream East Branch.

The Whole “The Maine Woods”

H. D. T.

Here’s the backstory: During the last several months of Thoreau’s life he worked, with his sister Sophia’s help, on material that James T. Fields had solicited for publication—Thoreau knew he was dying, and he was making sure his sister and his mother, both of whom survived him, would have sufficient financial support. Among other work, he revised four lectures so they could be printed as essays, and he prepared a final draft of the account of his 1857 trip to Maine, “The Allegash and East Branch,” so it could be added to the first two parts, “Ktaadn” and “Chesuncook,” which had been published in magazines, to make a book. Ticknor and Fields published The Maine Woods on May 28, 1864.

When the editor of The Maine Woods in the Princeton Edition, Joseph Moldenhauer, saw this manuscript in the course of his work, he was focused on explaining what Thoreau intended for the arrangement of the book—it is evidence for the order in which Thoreau wanted the parts to appear, and for the title of the third essay, which wasn’t published in Thoreau’s lifetime. You’ll notice that there’s a change in that title: Thoreau originally wrote “The Allegash and Webster Stream.” “Webster Stream” is lined out in darker pencil, and “East Branch” is added—this is Sophia’s hand, often seen in these late manuscripts.
Joe, with his eye and mind prepared to see Thoreau’s intention for the book, characterized this manuscript as a “rough plan for the organization of the essays” (*Maine Woods*, p. 355). It is that, of course, but conditioned by having worked on the letters for a long time, my eye leapt to the “H. D. T.” and I saw . . . a signature at the bottom of a draft letter! It will be in the third volume of *Correspondence*; we assume that he’s writing to his publisher, Ticknor & Fields.

And now, as I mentioned at the beginning, just a glimpse into Thoreau’s extensive preparations of his own eye and mind. I’ve been prepared, by working on Thoreau’s manuscripts, to see, read, interpret and contextualize his handwriting. But Thoreau had a much more significant and complex quarry—a cosmic quarry—for which he was preparing. He names it in “Autumnal Tints,” describing his search in a fantastically extended metaphor of hunting:

Why, it takes a sharp shooter to bring down even such trivial game, as snipes and woodcocks, he must take very particular aim, and know what he is aiming at. He would stand a very small chance, if he fired at random into the sky, being told that snipes were flying there. And so is it with him that shoots at beauty; though he wait till the sky falls, he will not bag any, if he does not already know its seasons and haunts, and the color of its wing,—if he has not dreamed of it, so that he can *anticipate* it; then, indeed, he flushes it at every step, shoots double and on the wing, with both barrels, even in cornfields. The sportsman trains himself, dresses and watches unweariedly, and loads and primes for his particular game. He prays for it, and offers sacrifices, and so he gets it. After due
and long preparation, schooling his eye and hand, dreaming awake and asleep, with gun and paddle and boat he goes out after meadow-hens, which most of his townsmen never saw nor dreamed of, and paddles for miles against a head-wind, and wades in water up to his knees, being out all day without his dinner, and therefore he gets them. He had them half-way into his bag when he started, and has only to shove them down. The true sportsman can shoot you almost any of his game from his windows: what else has he windows or eyes for? It comes and perches at last on the barrel of his gun; but the rest of the world never see it with the feathers on. (Excursions, p. 258)

For over ten years Thoreau prepared his eyes and mind to see and understand the beauty of nature, both the feathers and the bird, both in detail and in the whole.

He had a gift for observation—that’s clear even from the first Journal passages—and in the early 1850s he found a new purpose for this gift. He began recording seasonal phenomena in his Journal entries in greater detail than before, and he found himself surprised by the annual variations. In a Journal entry for September 12, 1851, he writes,

I can hardly believe that there is so great a difference between one year & another as my journal shows. The 11th of this month last year the river was as high as it commonly is in the spring—over the causeway on the Corner Road. It is now quite low. Last year Oct 9th the huckleberries were fresh & abundant on Conantum—They are now already dried up. (Journal 4, pp. 76-77)

In spring 1852, he read Linnaeus’s Philosophia Botanica—“simpler more easy to understand & more comprehensive—than any of the hundred manuals to which it has given birth” (Journal 4, p. 354), he wrote in his Journal, and William Gilpin’s Remarks on Forest Scenery. Linnaeus inspired new attention to the details of plants and their life
cycles. Gilpin, one of the originators of the idea of the picturesque, influenced Thoreau to study and analyze the ways in which details combined to create landscapes, to see prevailing colors and variations.

Thoreau continued and expanded his observations, and in a Journal entry for April 18, 1852, he recorded a realization that represented a paradigm shift in his view of nature:

For the first time I perceive this spring that the year is a circle. I see distinctly the spring arc thus far. It is drawn with a firm line.

He follows up this realization with the questions that he spends the rest of his life preparing to answer:

Why should just these sights & sounds accompany our life? Why should I hear the chattering of blackbirds, why smell the skunk each year? I would fain explore the mysterious relation between myself & these things. I would at least know what these things unavoidably are, make a chart of our life, know how its shores trend, that butterflies reappear & when, know why just this circle of creatures completes the world. Can I not by expectation affect the revolutions of nature, make a day to bring forth something new? (Journal 4, p. 468)

Thoreau was both a poet and an engineer: he wanted “the events of the day [to] have a mythological character & the most trivial [to be] symbolical” (Journal 4, p. 468), and he also wanted to understand the facts of nature. He developed a system in order to learn the details of the seasonal circle and to explore the “mysterious relation” between himself and nature.

For convenience in finding the observations he recorded in his Journal, Thoreau began inscribing two short parallel marks next to them, in the margins of the Journal.
pages. I don’t know when he started doing this. I suspect that when he realized such marks would come in handy for comparisons, he went back through entries and added them. From the time of that realization forward—whenever it was—he probably included many of them as he was writing.

Here’s an instance from a Journal entry dated June 3, 1851—very early: the marks are in pencil; they were probably added retrospectively:

// I observed the grass waving to day for the first time—the swift Camilla on it— It might have been noticed before— You might have seen it now for a week past on grain fields.

(The manuscript is accessioned as MA 1302:11 at the Morgan Library; the passage appears on p. 243 of Journal 3.)
As Thoreau developed this practice, he would have been able to see what phenomena signaled seasonal patterns and variations most characteristically, and that would have shaped his decisions about what he chose to record and mark. I’m sure this was a dynamic process that continued throughout his life as an observer, which came to an end only a few months before he died in May 1862.

At the end of the 1850s—perhaps in spring 1860, as Robert Richardson thinks (p. 381)—Thoreau began compiling the observations he had marked in his Journal, probably with several new projects in mind.

First, he created lists of phenomena by month or by category of event, organized primarily by year and secondarily by date. Here’s an example—both sides of a leaf with general phenomena for November 1860 and 1861 (the recto has items dated November 24-30, 1860 and November 1-11, 1861; items on the verso are dated November 13-29, 1861 [rotate the image to see the list]).

(This manuscript is in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. The folder is titled “[Notes on general phenomena]. Holograph notes.”; the entire folder is available at http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/d67fe400-7347-0132-1ea9-58d385a7bbd0.)
Phenomena in November 1857

1st. Full moon on 24th. Moon high in the heavens. The moon was apparently 3/4 full.

Last month's weather: cloudy, 25th.

Another day, 30th.

Weather from 1st to 30th.

Rain falling, rain sometimes.

61. Clear afternoon but dark at sunset.

Cold wind at 8 o'clock. Snowing at 9 o'clock. Snow in the afternoon. Snow falling at night.

A storm at 12 o'clock. Snowing at 9 o'clock. Snow in the afternoon. Snow falling at night.

Rain. Rain falling at 9 o'clock. Rain falling at 11 o'clock.

Cloudy at sunset. Rain.

Rain beginning at 9 o'clock. Afternoon.

So you can see the process, let’s focus on these lines on the recto page (these are 1860 items):

- Get in boat 29th
- Thin ice of the night floating down river in morning
- (Hear that some boys skated on Goose Pond the 26th)
- F. H. Pond is skimmed over, all but the channel

(You may have noticed that Thoreau has recycled a business letter, dated October 27, 1854, for this list—a common practice for him. This one is especially interesting, though, because it’s from the very “W Filmer” whom Thoreau mentions in his addition to his father’s letter. Here Filmer says he’ll pay in November—we know that as of December 22, 1854, the Thoreau Company had not received “one cent” from him.)

Each of the November 29, 1860, items that Thoreau includes in the list appears in his November 29, 1860, Journal entry, indicated by marginal marks. The first three items on the list are on the first page of the following image; here’s a line-by-line transcript:

- // Get up my boat 7 am
- // Thin ice of the night is floating down the river— I hear that some boys went on to Goose-Pond on the 26th & skated. It must have been thin.

The fourth item is on the fourth page of the image; here’s a line-by-line transcript:

- F.H. Pond is skimmed over, all but //
- the channel.

(The manuscript is accessioned as MA 1302:39 at the Morgan Library.)
I am ... upon me. I love you, but ... the day. I am not sure if I can reconcile my feelings. It is a difficult time for me.

Your love is a solace to me, and I cherish it deeply. Although we have not always been easy for each other, I believe that our love can transcend our differences.

What you said about the power of love and its ability to conquer all seems to resonate with my heart. It is a sentiment that I hold dear.

Every night, I lie awake, thinking about you. I wonder what you are doing and what you are thinking. I am filled with a mixture of hope and anxiety, hoping that we can find a way to be together again.

Dear [Name],

I hope this letter finds you well. I have been thinking about you a lot lately. I miss you deeply, and I hope that we can see each other soon.

With love,
[Your Name]
such a way that this column does not leave the place of its column when I turn a new page.

The page dimension is 612.0x792.0.
There are many lists, covering categories including general phenomena for all months but July, August, September; rainy days and other weather; growth and leafing; birds; frogs; flowers; quadrupeds; reptiles; insects; fishes, shell-fish, and leeches.

The lists were just an intermediate step for Thoreau, though. To make the best use of this phenological information, he needed to see the phenomena over a range of years. So he made charts—essentially databases—like this one that gathers the information in the November general phenomena lists (the manuscript is accessioned as MA 610 at the Morgan Library). You see that the events are written down the left side and the years are written across the top. The boxes contain information from the Journal, via the lists, about the event in (usually) November of the specified year:
The November 29 events marked in the Journal, and one piece of information about November 26 recorded on the 29th, all of which were transferred to the list, appear in this chart. The events are “Get in Boat” (first image, line 4 of the events; marked through with a wavy line), “F. H. Pond skimmed over” (second image, line 10 of the events), “River skimmed over” (second image, line 11 of the events), and “Skating” (second image, line 18 of the events; marked through with a wavy line).

I’ve counted seventeen such charts: there are fewer charts than lists, either because the process of making them helped Thoreau winnow the events he wanted to focus on, or because he didn’t live long enough to finish. I suspect it was some of both.

Now you see how extensively and thoroughly Thoreau prepared himself to really see nature. Even with this small sample of the work that was involved—and there are about 1800 pages of notes, lists, and charts—you can also see what a discipline of the mind would be required to move continually from the parts to the whole, from the view of the scientist to that of the poet.

Thoreau didn’t live long enough to make full use of what he was still learning about nature from the charts he created—he died on May 6, 1862. But the combination of precise, deep knowledge and poetic insight informs such late essays as “Autumnal Tints” and “Wild Apples,” as well as “Huckleberries” and “The Dispersion of Seeds.”

In closing, I want to return to the object of Thoreau’s intensive preparation: he was to be the hunter “that shoots at beauty.” In July 1857, he got a letter from Charles C. Morse, who asked him if he could be engaged to “deliver two or more lectures upon scientific subjects” to members of the Rochester Atheneum and Mechanics Association, just up the road from here (the document is at the Huntington Library in San Marino,
CA, accessioned as HM 20592). Thoreau drafted his response in pencil on a blank page of the bifolio containing Morse’s letter:
Athenum Mechanics Association Rochester N.Y.

Henry D. Thomas

Dear Sir, I have been unable to obtain from our bookellers your "Talk on the Present and Pastime and Crime" and therefore enclose you the supposed copy. You will please send it to my address. It will also inquire if you are in the lecture field and whether you could be obtained to deliver two or more lectures upon some scientific subject before our association this coming winter.

Yours Respectfully,

Chas. O. Moore
March 12, 1863

Mr. Charles O._Page 47

Dear Sir,

I must give a word by
a copy of my wish to
express.

I am in the lecture full
but my subject is associated
with Transcendental
aesthetic. I sent you one of
the atmosphere which I sent you
will be "walking on a Quiet
"Aesthetic Quiet."

The other which is the rest
represents that way in the
psychology. Your letter
We must take is it. We must have
some - I must be kind, kind

Yours truly,

Drew D. Brown
Here’s a line-by-line transcript of the second and third paragraphs of that draft:

I am in the lecture field—
—but my subjects are not scientific—
rather transcendental &
aesthetic— I devote myself to the
observation of nature generally—

Such as "Walking or the Wild"
"Autumnal Tints" {illegible} &c &c &c
Even if the title were scientific—the treat-
It is nature as She is beautiful
ment would hardly be so—in a
& affecting—rather than useful
popular sense— If you think
merely—
that your audience will incline
or erect their ears to such themes
as these—I shall be happy to read
to them.

In revising his draft, Thoreau removed two sentences that he may have thought were too idiosyncratic. One is easy to read because he simply lined it out: “I devote myself to the observation of nature generally—”

The other, hidden more effectively because he wrote right over it (it’s transcribed above in smaller gray type), speaks directly to Thoreau’s self-identification as a hunter of beauty: “It [the subject of his lectures and his investigations] is nature as She is beautiful & affecting—rather than useful merely—”

At the last, this is the Thoreau I have been pursuing for over forty years, and the Thoreau who captured Walt from his first reading of Walden. How lucky for both of us!

I want to thank you again for inviting me to speak—and for giving me your attention on this night in particular.
Sources Quoted or Mentioned


  Volume 1: 1834-1848 (2013)
  Volume 2: 1849-1856 (in press)
  Volume 3: 1857-1862 (forthcoming)


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