

EDWARD S. HOAR REVEALED

by Ray Angelo

Edward Hoar, Thoreau's retiring companion, has aroused the curiosity of Thoreauvians for nearly a century. Dr. Samuel Jones, a Thoreau enthusiast of the last century, twice requested Concordian Alfred W. Hosmer to secure him a picture of Hoar. Hosmer, an amateur photographer who was so successful in finding and copying pictures of Thoreau, his family, and friends, was unable to fulfill Jones's request.

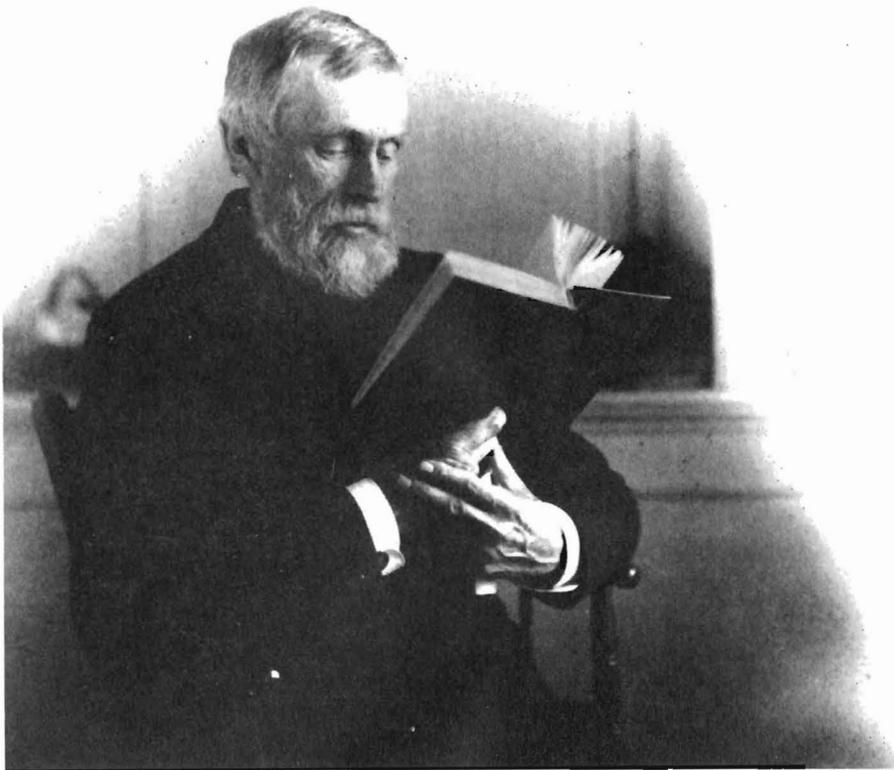
Where Jones and Hosmer failed, however, another of Thoreau's early admirers succeeded. Walter Deane (1848-1930), a respected amateur botanist and avid collector of photos and autographs of botanists, secured a photo of Hoar taken in 1885 when he was sixty-one. This has come to light among the Deane papers at Harvard's Gray Herbarium Library which also contain two letters by Thoreau and letters to Deane from Thoreau's friends H.G.O. Blake, Marston Watson, and Edward Hoar.¹ Published here for the first time, with the generous permission of the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University, is the Deane photograph of Edward Hoar. This is apparently the only published picture of Mr. Hoar.

Relatively little biographical information exists about Edward Sherman Hoar (December 22, 1823 to February 22, 1893). This is partly because, during his lifetime, he was outshone by two relatively famous brothers--Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar (1816-1895), Attorney General in the Grant administration and Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Judge, and George Frisbie Hoar (1826-1904), a United States Senator from Massachusetts for nearly thirty years. It is also apparent that Edward Hoar was the sort of man who avoided drawing attention to himself.

Edward Hoar was born in Concord, Massachusetts, the son of Samuel and Sarah Sherman Hoar. The Hoar family figures early in Concord history. Daniel Hoar is listed in Concord's petition of 1664 pledging to assist in maintaining the charter of the Massachusetts Colony. Squire Samuel Hoar (1778-1856) settled in

Concord as a lawyer in 1807 and became the town's foremost citizen, practicing his profession for forty-nine years until his death. He represented his community in both branches of the state legislature and his state in the United States Congress. Sarah Sherman (1783-1866) was the daughter of Roger Sherman of New Haven, Connecticut, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Edward was the fourth of five children, one of whom, Samuel J. Hoar, died in infancy. In addition to Edward's two noted brothers were two older sisters, Elizabeth Sherman Hoar (1814-1878) and Sarah Sherman Storer (1817-1907). Elizabeth was a talented and learned woman whose engagement to Ralph Waldo Emerson's brother Charles ended tragically with his death in 1836.



EDWARD SHERMAN HOAR

Spring 1885

(Courtesy of the Gray Herbarium Library, Harvard University)

Almost nothing is known about Edward's boyhood. In early 1840, to the distress of his family, he ran off to the West with another boy named Worthington who was thought to be a bad company. Edward returned, however, to attend Harvard. In April 1844, during Hoar's senior year, he and Thoreau accidentally set fire to the Fairhaven woods in Concord while cooking some fish. It is thought that Hoar's family connections saved Thoreau from legal action. Edward graduated from Harvard in August 1844.

Edward entered Harvard Law School but soon left for New York to study and practice law. He was admitted to the New York bar in 1848. The 1849 Gold Rush swept him to California. There he opened a law office and soon became recognized for his ability, serving as a district attorney. Afterwards, he was a planter in Santa Barbara. While at the West he traveled some and was visiting Peru when his father died in 1856. He returned to Concord in January 1857 to help run the Hoar household and to assist Elizabeth with their aging mother. His stay in the West had earned him the nickname "The Californian" among his Concord friends. In the summer of 1857 Hoar accompanied Thoreau on the last of Henry's Maine journeys. Hoar is memorialized in Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* by the account of their going astray at Mud Pond Carry. The tenderness of Hoar's feet resulting from this incident prevented Thoreau from revisiting Mt. Katahdin and using his new botanical prowess there. From Thoreau we learn that Hoar was near-sighted and smoked a pipe.

In June 1858 Emerson proposed to James Russell Lowell that Edward Hoar become a member of a party that was to visit the Adirondacks--a suggestion based on Hoar's abilities as a naturalist and botanist.² Emerson expressed the fear that Hoar might wander back to the Pacific. Edward did not participate in that excursion but that summer he did join Thoreau on his ascent of New England's highest peak, Mt. Washington, in New Hampshire. Thoreau appreciated Hoar's enthusiasm for and knowledge of natural history (which approached his own) and must have appreciated Hoar's assumption of the entire expense for their horse and wagon.

Hoar's wanderlust turned toward the east in the fall of 1858. On October 6 he sailed with his sister Elizabeth and a next-door neighbor for a tour of Europe. On December 28 in Florence, Italy, Edward married the neighbor, Elizabeth Hallett Prichard (1822-1917), a teacher and native Concordian. It is not known whether Edward and Elizabeth Prichard, before leaving Concord, had decided to marry. After a brief honeymoon the newlyweds joined sister Elizabeth in her furnished apartment in Rome on the Corso to spend the winter and spring. The Hawthornes were also in Rome at this time. Edward, his sister, and his pregnant wife set sail for home from Liverpool on August 27, 1859.

Upon returning from their tour, the couple bought a farm in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Their only child, Florence, was born in Concord in January 1860--her name honoring the site of their marriage. In 1865 Emerson was again recommending that Hoar be included in a field trip because of his abilities and "strong taste for wild life."³ This time it was a scientific expedition to South America headed by Louis Agassiz. When the party left, however, it included young William James but not Edward Hoar.

Concord September 12th 1886

Dear Mr. Deane,

Some time after the death of Edward's mother in 1866 the small family moved back to Concord and lived with sister Elizabeth. Edward's rheumatism prompted him to consider residence in a warmer climate. The farm in Lincoln was sold in 1871. Within a year the family established a home in Palermo, Sicily, where Edward cultivated oranges, lemons, and figs. His sister Elizabeth spent the winter of 1872-73 with them. According to his brother E. Rockwood, however, "they found the climatic perfection outweighed by the imminence of assassination."⁴ Edward Hoar and his family returned to Concord in June 1873, living again with Elizabeth in their father's house on Main Street.

Edward's sister Elizabeth died in 1878. At that time Edward renounced the practice of law and thereafter devoted all his time to his books and nature studies. He declined invitations to lecture at various New England colleges. His scientific acumen attracted the friendships of Louis Agassiz, ornithologist William Brewster, and botanist Walter Deane.

Two of the more interesting letters from Hoar to Deane (preserved at Harvard's Gray Herbarium Library and published here for the first time with permission) reveal Hoar's enthusiasm for botany:

Concord July 31st 1886

Dear Mr. Deane,

I shall be rejoiced to see you, either alone or in company with any botanist of your acquaintance on any day next week after Monday that you will name & hold myself ready to row you up or down the river in my boat as long as the daylight will serve. I would like however a line or telegram appointing the day so that I may not be out of the way.

Since your departure, I met Mr. Blake⁵ of Worcester, Mr. Thoreau's literary executor, & he gave me a signature⁶ to a letter addressed to him which I have subject to your order. He said he had given away most of his private signatures & scraps addressed to himself, but did not feel at liberty to give away writings entrusted to him by Mr. T's family, but if he finds any botanical fragment he will send it to you.⁷

I find that the tall *Scirpus* along the river bank is *S. eriophorum*,⁸ the commonest, and you remember a long submerged dark green filiform plant that embarrassed our oars a good deal & you wondered what it might be. Since you went it has put its head above water & blossomed on the North Branch⁹ and turns out to be *Scirpus subterminalis*.¹⁰ I have pressed a lot of it if you want it. But I presume you have it.

Mr. Brewster¹¹ & Mr. Purdy¹² are going up to Fairhaven tomorrow evening to hear the hermit thrush & he has been so good as to invite me & we mean to visit a bog¹³ where flourish *Ledum latifolium*¹⁴ & *Kalmia glauca*¹⁵ & the black spruce.

Very truly yours

Ed. S. Hoar

I suppose the reason of the absence of *Juncus militaris*¹⁶ from Mr. Thoreau's Herbarium may have been that he had begun to study the *Juncaceae*¹⁷ & *Cyperaceae*¹⁸ & grasses very shortly before his death and they were rolled up in bundles of old newspapers with pencilled provisional names and it is possible that his sister who gave them to me at his request may have overlooked some small package. He seems to have been very diligent in collecting every variation of form, however slight, but as you observed he committed the error of getting most of them & of the *Carices*,¹⁹ too young. The *J. militaris* was certainly not in his herbarium as I received it. Almost every other Concord & alpine form is there, & one or two sea side forms.

I took a walk the other day to Bateman's Pond in the north part of Concord & found there *Juncus longicaudatus*,²⁰ *Utricularia gibba*,²¹ *Potamogeton hybridum*,²² the striped maple or moosewood, *Viburnum acerifolium*²³ & (probably placed there by Mr. Pratt²⁴) *Sabbatia stellaris*,²⁵ and coming home found a little horse pond covered with *Brasenia peltata*,²⁶ likewise the Canada plum I found, rare in Concord. Miss Martha Bartlett²⁷ sent me a leaf of *Nelumbium luteum*²⁸ gathered this year in Concord River. I envy you your day with Mr. Morong;²⁹ & apropos of your suite of *Potamogetons*,³⁰ perhaps you can [tell] me the name of the enclosed which differs from any I have found in the River but although quite abundant has neither emerged floating leaves nor fruit. It is reticulated more obliquely than *P. claytoni*.³¹ Is it *P. gramineus* var. *graminifolius*?³² It grows four or five feet long on sandy bottom of Assabet.

I am possessed with a longing to go up next spring to the great *Rhododendron maximum*³³ swamp at the foot of *Monadnoc*³⁴ with you & Mr. Brewster & hear the winter wren sing. Perhaps this is too idyllic an ambition ever to be gratified in this wicked world. But there is all winter to consider of it. Please say to Mrs. Deane that my wife joins me in wishing to be remembered.

Very sincerely yours

Edward S. Hoar

Undoubtedly Hoar's most significant contribution to science is the collection of plants that was presented to the New England Botanical Club in 1912 by his daughter Florence (Mrs. Moses B. L. Bradford). These consisted of about 1,000 specimens, among which were nearly 100 specimens of grasses and sedges collected by Thoreau (referred to in Hoar's September 12, 1886, letter above). Hoar's own collecting was strongest in the grasses and sedges, difficult groups even from a modern standpoint. The care with which he

provided the data for his collections is in striking contrast to the brief, cryptic scrawls that accompany Thoreau's specimens. Interestingly, the dates on Hoar's specimens are clustered about the late 1850s and the late 1880s as if his botanical enthusiasm began with his interaction with Thoreau upon Hoar's return from California, subsided with the death of his friend in 1862, then briefly rekindled with the new friendship with Walter Deane.

Following the tradition of his family, Hoar was in sympathy with the progressive movements of his time, but, in keeping with his personality, shied away from public life. His brother, E. Rockwood, affirmed this retiring nature in a conversation with Oliver Wendell Holmes at the Saturday Club. When Dr. Holmes was maintaining that all people worth anything came to the surface and were known as such, Rockwood replied: "I don't agree with you. I've a dear brother at home, who is worth a dozen of me, whom nobody knows."³⁵ Rockwood elsewhere characterized his brother as one whose knowledge of books and "refined nature, kindly though sensitive and shy, made him a charming companion to the few who had the privilege of knowing him."³⁶ Curiously, Edward's other distinguished brother, George Frisbie Hoar, in his two-volume autobiography, fails to mention Edward by name or include him in the index.³⁷

In November, 1892, Hoar wrote to his friend, Edward S. Burgess,³⁸ in Washington, D.C., to request assistance in finding quarters there. Hoar's physician had advised that he "should pass the winter in a milder and less malarious region than our Concord meadows."³⁹ Early in 1893 he took up temporary residence in Washington, D.C., where he shared with Mr. Burgess some reminiscences of Concord friends. Burgess, realizing the value of Hoar's conversations, took notes.⁴⁰

Hoar's recollections of Thoreau are among the most interesting recorded by Burgess, particularly since Edward Hoar today is remembered primarily for his association with Thoreau. Hoar's affection is revealed by the loan of a horse and carriage to Thoreau when the latter's health deteriorated during his last illness. In spite of this, Edward admitted to Burgess that he greatly regretted not knowing Thoreau better. While remarking that he and Thoreau often went out together, Hoar pointed out that he was shown only the natural history side of Thoreau and was wholly unaware at the time of the moral side that appeared in Thoreau's books. Hoar also mentioned that Thoreau persuaded him not to become an ornithologist by emphasizing observations of how birds live and behave rather than the collection of specimens--in spite of Hoar's ability to hit a bird on the wing at 200 yards.

The lung disease from which Hoar had suffered in 1892 did not improve. He died in Washington on February 22, 1893. His body was laid to rest in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery near his father, mother, and siblings. There is no more fitting summary of the man than the inscription written by his brother, George Frisbie Hoar, that adorns his gravestone:

He cared nothing for the wealth or fame his rare genius might easily have won. But his ear knew the songs of all birds. His eye saw the beauty of flowers and the secret of their life. His unerring taste delighted in what was best in books. So his pure and quiet days reaped their rich harvest of wisdom and content.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Mrs. Elizabeth Maxfield-Miller for generous assistance and use of her research relating to Elizabeth Hoar and the Hoar family. I am also grateful for the assistance of Marcia Moss and Joyce Woodman, and the use of manuscript letters and notes, at the Concord Free Public Library. Finally, I am especially grateful to the Gray Herbarium Library of Harvard University for permission to publish the photograph of Edward Hoar and the texts of two Hoar letters.

Endnotes

1. Ray Angelo, "Two Thoreau Letters at Harvard," The Thoreau Society Bulletin, 162 (Winter, 1983), 1-2.
2. Ralph L. Rusk, ed., The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York, 1939), vol. 5, p. 110.
3. Rusk, Letters, vol. 5, p. 409.
4. Moorfield Storey and Edward W. Emerson, Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar, A Memoir (Boston, 1911), p. 317.
5. Harrison Gray Otis Blake (1816-1898), teacher and a disciple of Thoreau.
6. Thoreau's signature given to Walter Deane was cut from the letter from Thoreau to H.G.O. Blake dated March 27, 1848, Thoreau's first letter to his disciple. The signature is now in Deane's papers at the Gray Herbarium Library of Harvard University. For the text of this letter see Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds., The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau (New York, 1958), pp. 214-217.
7. Eventually, Blake did forward Deane a manuscript letter from Thoreau, dated October 5, 1854, now among Deane's papers at the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University. See Harding and Bode, Correspondence, pp. 342-343.
8. The name "Scirpus eriophorum" corresponds to three species of Wool-grass (a type of sedge) in Concord (S. cyperinus, S. atrocinctus, S. longii).
9. Another name for the Assabet River.
10. This species is common in the Assabet River. A specimen collected by Deane in 1886 is in the New England Botanical Club Herbarium. Its common name is Water Club Rush.
11. William Brewster (1851-1919), ornithologist from whose diaries and journal October Farm was compiled.
12. Henry Augustus Purdie (1840-1911), ornithologist and botanist.

13. This swamp, known to Thoreau as Charles Miles Swamp or Ledum Swamp, harbored a number of botanical rarities.
14. Labrador Tea (Ledum groenlandicum).
15. Pale or Bog Laurel (Kalmia polifolia).
16. While this species does not seem to be represented in Thoreau's herbarium, there are about thirty references to it in Thoreau's Journal. Its common name is Bayonet Rush.
17. The scientific name for the Rush Family.
18. The scientific name for the Sedge Family.
19. This is plural for Carex, the largest genus of vascular plants in New England. They are a type of sedge.
20. This refers to the species now known as Juncus canadensis (Canada Rush).
21. The common name is Humped Bladderwort.
22. This name includes two modern species, Spiral Pondweed (Potamogeton spirillus) and Hair-like Pondweed (Potamogeton capillaceus).
23. The common name is Mapleleaf Viburnum.
24. Minot Pratt (1805-1878), horticulturist, who is known for his introduction of alien species to Concord.
25. The modern spelling is Sabatia stellaris (Sea Pink).
26. The modern name is Brasenia schreberi (Water Shield).
27. Martha Bartlett (1824-1890), daughter of Dr. Josiah Bartlett.
28. The modern spelling is Nelumbo lutea (American Lotus). This introduced water plant is now abundant at Great Meadows in Concord.
29. Thomas Morong (1927-1894), botanist, whose specialty was Pondweeds (Potamogeton).
30. The scientific name for Pondweeds.
31. This name best corresponds to Potamogeton epihydrus (Surface Pondweed).
32. The common name is Grass-leaved Pondweed.
33. Great Laurel or Rosebay.
34. Mt. Monadnock is in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. This reference might be to Little Monadnock near Fitzwilliam, N.H., where a state park has been established to preserve the Rhododendron maximum.
35. Storey and Emerson, Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar, p. 317.
36. Storey and Emerson, Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar, p. 317.
37. George Frisbie Hoar, Autobiography of Seventy Years, 2 vols. (New York, 1903).
38. Edward Sandford Burgess (1855-1928), botanist.
39. Manuscript letter from Edward S. Hoar to Edward S. Burgess, November 23, 1892, in Concord Free Public Library.
40. Manuscript notes of Edward S. Burgess, "Notes on Concord People," [1893], in Concord Free Public Library.