The Education of John Burroughs  
The Spring 2008 Slabsides Day Talk  
By Robert Titus

In 1997, I was asked to deliver a commemorative lecture for the 200th anniversary of our school, Hartwick College, which was founded as the Hartwick Seminary. Originally located in the tiny village of Hartwick, in the northern foothills of New York State’s Catskill Mountains, it moved to its present facility in the nearby town of Oneonta in 1928.

I chose to evoke the cultural and historical context of Hartwick’s early days through the autobiographical writings of John Burroughs. Although the great author-naturalist never attended or taught here, his memoirs contain a vivid narrative of his quest for education in the Catskills of that era. I drew on Burroughs’ written recollections, especially as published in My Boyhood (MB) and excerpts from Our Friend John Burroughs (OF), which are always well worth revisiting.

As a very young boy, John Burroughs began to rebel against following in the footsteps of his forebears who toiled all their lives on farms. He offered this sober assessment of his likely fate: “I was the son of a farmer, who was the son of a farmer, who was again the son of a farmer. There are not professional or commercial men in my line for several generations, my blood has the flavour of the soil in it; it is rural to the last drop” (MB, p. 94).

In particular he looked at his father’s life as the ineluctable fate that awaited him. On the one hand, there were positive aspects about Chauncy Burroughs and much to admire: “[H]e improved the fields, he cleared the woods, he battled with the rocks and the stones, he paid his debts and he kept his faith. He was not a man of sentiment, though he was a man of feeling. He was easily moved to tears and had strong religious convictions and emotions. These emotions often found vent in his reading his hymn book aloud in a curious undulating sing-song tone” (MB, p. 103).

And yet, was this the future that John wanted for himself? His answer was clear:

He [Chauncy] knew nothing of what we call love of nature and he owed little or nothing to books after his schoolboy days. He usually

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Announcements

To Our Members and Donors
The JBA gratefully acknowledges the generosity of our members and donors. Our mission to preserve the legacy of John Burroughs would be impossible without your commitment and support.

Slabsides Program (guided by docent or naturalist)
- The Gretna Garden club
- Hudson Ramble
- Belle C. Martineau
- Steve Mercier
- New Paltz Middle School

Restoration
- Anonymous
- Rosemary Roberts in honor of Regina Kelly
- Vassar College

New Members
- Garrick L. Bryant
- Harry Goodman
- Mary Booth Johnson
- Cheryl Page
- Elaine K. Roberts
- David A. Spector
- Carol H. Wellington

Hudson River Valley Review

The Autumn 2008 special issue of The Hudson River Valley Review on John Burroughs in the Hudson River Valley includes newly published photographs, sketches, and articles. The cover features Orlando Roulant’s portrait of Burroughs at Slabsides that hangs in the Burroughs display case at the American Museum of Natural History.

In “John Burroughs—Regionalist (and Modernist?): A Meditation on Influences and Confluences,” H. R. Stoneback (SUNY New Paltz) exposes the influence of Burroughs on Modernist writers, such as Richard Aldington, Lawrence Durrell, Ernest Hemingway, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and Edith Rickert. In “John Burroughs’ Writing Retreats,” James Perrin Warren (Washington and Lee University) discusses the intriguing function of the writing cabin, meant to provide Burroughs solitary contemplation, even as he entertained a multitude of visitors. In “‘Our River’: The Essay Art of John Burroughs” Jeff Walker (Vassar College) examines how Burroughs constructed and revised his essays “Our River” and “A River View” from their origin in his journal. And in “John Burroughs and the Hudson River Valley in Environmental History,” Stephen M. Mercier (Marist College) uncovers how Burroughs’s essays create emotional bonds with species, such as the hermit thrush and passenger pigeon.

The Hudson River Valley Review takes an interdisciplinary approach to the local region and the study of regionalism. For more information visit www.hudsonrivervalley.org/hrvr.php or telephone 845-575-3052.

John Burroughs Association

The John Burroughs Association was formed in 1921 shortly after the naturalist-writer died. Among the Association’s aims are fostering a love of nature as exemplified by Burroughs’s life and work and preserving the places associated with his life. The Association publicly recognizes well written and illustrated nature essay publications with literary awards that are given after the annual meeting on the first Monday of April.

The Association owns and maintains Slabsides and the adjoining John Burroughs Sanctuary near West Park, New York. Open house at Slabsides is held the third Saturday in May and the first Saturday in October. A permanent exhibit about John Burroughs is in the American Museum of Natural History.

The membership year begins in April. Contact Secretary, John Burroughs Association, Inc., 15 West 77 Street, New York, NY 10024-5192, or e-mail: breslof@amnh.org. Telephone 212-769-5169. Web site: http://research.amnh.org/burroughs/


Slab by Slab
The Restoration of Slabsides
By Joan Burroughs

Remember going up the steps on the north side of the porch, how you felt a bit tipped back? And, if you felt as though you would lose your balance and you grabbed the railings they probably would not hold you? You will probably be pleased the next time you visit and go up the stairs to the porch. After determining that the steps and railings were not the originals we went ahead and replaced them with close replicas built for us by Woodside & Young, the Poughkeepsie firm that did all the other exterior restoration work on Slabsides. They used local eastern white pine and larch for the stringers, treads and risers and eastern red cedar, stripped of bark, for the handrails on each side. The large flat rock as the base will continue to serve as the base with the stringers positioned so they will not rest in any collected rainwater. The steps at the south end of the porch are also not original to Slabsides and are still in good condition. We did however add a single handrail for safety. That too is eastern red cedar. The next work to be done is the rebuilding of the foundation on the south side, to the right of the chimney. When winter begins to wane we will price out the work with the expectation to complete this aspect of the restoration in the spring.
Talk continued from page 1

took two weekly publications—an Albany or a New York newspaper and a religious paper called The Sign of the Times, the organ of the Old School Baptist Church, of which he was a member. He never asked me about my own books and I doubt that he ever looked into one of them. How far the current of my thoughts and interests ran from the current of his thoughts and interests! Literature he had never heard of, science and philosophy were an unknown world to him. Religion (hard predestinarianism), politics (democratic), and farming took up all his thoughts and time. He had no desire to travel, he was not a hunter or fisherman, and the shows and vanities of the world disturbed him not. When I grew to crave schooling and books he was disturbed lest I become a Methodist minister—his special aversion. Religion on such easy and wholesale terms as that of the Methodists neighbors made his nostrils dilate with contempt. But literature was an enemy he had never heard of. (MB, pp. 103-104)

And then there was the farm work itself, grueling hard work, from dawn to dusk—and not much of it very interesting or inspiring: “Hoeing corn, weeding the garden, and picking stone was drudgery, and haying and harvesting I liked best when they were a good way off; picking up potatoes worried me, but gathering apples suited my hands and my fancy better . . .” (OF, p. 75). There is a glimmer of the free spirit in the boy Burroughs and also a small touch of ambition:

As a boy, the only farm work that appealed to me was sugar-making in the maple woods in spring. This I thoroughly enjoyed. It brought me near to wild nature and was freer from routine than other farm work. Then I soon managed to gather a little harvest of my own from the sugar bush. I used to anticipate the general tapping by a few days or a week, and tap a few trees on my own account along the sunny border of the woods, and boil the sap down on the kitchen stove (to the disgust of womenfolks). (OF, pp. 74-75)

But there was a slow, dim growing sense that he was somehow different from those around him in his rural culture:

I was, in many respects an odd one in my father’s family. I was like a graft from some other tree. And this is always a disadvantage to a man—not to be the logical outcome of what went before him, not to be backed up by his family and inheritance—to be of the nature of a sport. It seems as if I had more intellectual capital than I was entitled to and robbed some of the rest of the family, while I had a full measure of the family weaknesses. I can remember how abashed I used to be as a child when strangers or relatives, visiting us for the first time, after looking the rest of the children over, would ask, pointing to me, “That is not your boy—whose is he?” I had no idea that I looked different from the others. . . . (MB, p. 69)

Schooling (It would later come to him as an epiphany) could lead him out of his surroundings and on to something better. Curiously, there is little of this in his earliest recollections: “I remember the first day I went to school, probably near my fifth year. It was at the old stone schoolhouse, about one and a half miles from home. I recall vividly the suit Mother made for the occasion out of some striped cotton goods with a pair of little flaps or hound’s ears upon my shoulders that tossed about as I ran” (MB, p. 79).

An awakening of new thoughts came from schooling: “I was the only one of the ten children, who, as Father said, ‘took to larnin’, though in seventy-five years of poring over books and periodicals I have not become ‘learned’” (MB, p. 67). And there were teachers who would influence him:

At the little old school house I had many teachers, Bill Bouton, Bill Allaben, Taylor Grant, Jason Powell, Rossetti Cole, Rebecca Scudder, and others. I got well into Dayball’s Arithmetic, Olney’s Geography, and read Hall’s History of the United States—through the latter getting quite familiar with the Indian wars and the French war and the Revolution. Some books in the district library also attracted me. I think I was the only one of the family that took books
from the library. I recall especially *Murphy, the Indian Killer* and the *Life of Washington*. That latter took hold of me; I remember one summer Sunday, as I was playing through the house with my older brothers, of stopping to read a certain passage of it aloud, and that it moved me so that I did not know whether I was in the body or out. Many times I read that passage and every time I was submerged, as it were, by a wave of emotion. I mention so trifling a matter only to show how responsive I was to literature at an early age. (*MB*, p. 85)

Burroughs’ recollections show a progression in his intellectual development. He was growing in directions that should not surprise us—that is, if you ignore a few phrenological bumps in the road:

My taste for books began early, but my taste for good literature was of a much later and of slow growth. My interest in theological and scientific questions antedated my love of literature. During the last half of my 'teens I was greatly interested in phrenology and possessed a copy of Spurzheim’s *Phrenology*, and of Comb’s *Constitution of Man*. I also subscribed to Fowler’s *Phrenological Journal* and for years accepted the phrenologists’ own estimate of the value of their science. (*MB*, p. 86)

Burroughs gradually found that he needed direction. He realized that he needed educating well beyond what was available in the local one-room schools. His efforts would lead to a devastating disappointment, one that continued to haunt him decades later:

I stayed at home, working on the farm in summer and going to school in winter, till I was seventeen. From the time I was fourteen I had had a desire to go away to school. I had a craving for knowledge which my brothers did not share. One fall when I was about fifteen I had the promise from Father that I might go to school at the Academy in the village that winter. But I did not go. Then the next fall I had the promise of going to the Academy at Harpersfield, where one of the neighbor’s boys, Dick Van Dyke, went. How I dreamed of Harpersfield! That fall I did my first ploughing, stimulated to it by the promise of Harpersfield. It was in September, in the lot above the sugar bush—cross-ploughing, to prepare the ground for rye. How many days I ploughed, I do not remember; but Harpersfield was the lure at the end of each furrow, I remember that. To this day I cannot hear the name without seeing a momentary glow upon my mental horizon—a finger of enchantment is for an instant laid upon me.

But I did not go to Harpersfield. When the time drew near for me to go, Father found himself too poor, or the expense looked too big—none of the other boys had had such privileges, and why should I? So I swallowed my disappointment and attended the home district school for another winter. (*OF*, pp. 88-89)

If he could not go to school, then, in his era, he could teach school. His first real employment was as a self-taught teacher. He traveled to Tongore, in Ulster County, where, at age seventeen, he began teaching in
the one-room school there. Perhaps he was inspired by some of the teachers that he had in his schools, but he was not too “full of himself.” After some experience at teaching young students the “Three R’s,” his feelings were decidedly mixed:

Oh, how crude and callow and obtuse I was at that time, full of vague and tremulous aspirations and awakenings, but undisciplined, unformed, with many inherited incapacities and obstacles to weigh me down. I was extremely bashful, had no social aptitude, and was likely to stutter when anxious or embarrassed, yet I seem to have made a good impression. I was much liked in school and out, and was fairly happy. I seem to see sunshine over all when I look back there. But it was a long summer to me. I had never been from home more than a day or two at a time before, and I became very homesick. Oh, to walk in the orchard back of the house, or along the road, or to see the old hills again—what a joy it would have been! But I stuck it out till my term ended in October, and then went home, taking a young fellow from the district (a brother of some girl I fancied) with me. I took back nearly all my wages, over fifty dollars, and with this I planned to pay my way at Heddings Literary Institute, in the adjoining county of Greene. (OF, pp. 96-97)

At long last he had an opportunity so get some formal schooling. Heddings Literary Institute has long since disappeared from the map, but to the young Burroughs it was a wonderful experience:

I left home for the school late in November, riding the thirty miles with Father, atop a load of butter. It was the time of the year when the farmers took their butter to Catskill. Father usually made two trips. This was the first one of the season, and I accompanied him as far as Ashland, where the Institute was located.

I remained at school for three months, the length of the winter term, and studied fairly hard. I had a room by myself and enjoyed the life with the two hundred or more boys and girls of my own age. I studied algebra, geometry, chemistry, French, and logic, wrote compositions, and declaimed in the chapel, as the rules required. It was at the time that I first read Milton. . . . I remember I stood fairly high in composition—only one boy in the school ahead of me. . . .

Toward spring we had a public debate in the chapel, and I was chosen as one of the disputants. We debated the question of the Crimean War, which was on then. I was on the side of England and France against Russia. Our side
won. I think I spoke very well. I remember that I got much of my ammunition from a paper in *Harper's Magazine*, probably by Dr. Osgood. It seems my fellow on the affirmative had got much of his ammunition from the same source, and, as I spoke first, there was not much powder left for him, and he was greatly embarrassed. *(OF, pp. 97-99)*

But his time at Heddings was fleeting; he simply did not have the tuition to remain. He had to go back to work, again at Tongore, and so he found himself repeating a cycle of teaching long enough to earn enough money to be a student again:

In April I closed the school and went home, again taking a young fellow with me. I was then practically engaged to Ursula North and I wrote her a poem on reaching home. About the middle of April I left home for Cooperstown Seminary. I rode to Moresville with Jim Bouton, and as the road between there and Stamford was so blocked with snowdrifts that the stage could not run, I was compelled to walk the eight miles, leaving my trunk behind. From Stamford I reached Cooperstown after an all-night ride by stage.

My summer at Cooperstown was an enjoyable and profitable one. I studied Latin, French, English literature, algebra, and geometry. If I remember correctly, I stood first in composition over the whole school. I joined the Wesleyan Society and frequently debated, and was one of three of four others chosen by the school to “orate” in a grove on the shore of the lake, on the Fourth of July, I held forth in the true spread-eagle style.

I entered into the sports of the school, ball playing and rowing on the lake, with the zest of youth.

One significant thing I remember; I was always on the lookout for books of essays. It was...
SLABSIDES IN WINTER
photos by Lisa breslof
at this time that I took my first bite into Emerson, and it was like tasting a green apple—not that he was unripe, but I wasn’t ripe for him. But a year later I tasted him again and said, “Why, this tastes good”; and took a bigger bite; then soon devoured everything of his I could find. (OF, pp. 104-105)

Once again, his time at school had ended, this time forever. Much later, John Burroughs would earn an honorary doctorate from Yale—but he never completed college. His quest to be an “educated man” was over.

Burroughs’ story is a good one if you want to understand the origins of such schools as the Hartwick Seminary. Several generations of nineteenth-century boys and girls aspired to get off the farm and make something of themselves in the wider world. The many schools that sprung up served the purpose of giving them opportunities, which contributed greatly to the expanding U.S. economy—but they offered very little to young John Burroughs.

According to his own assessment, Burroughs was a naïve young man, frustrated and disappointed by his inability to gain advanced educational credentials. Ultimately, however, he triumphed as a thinker and writer by his own efforts. A dedicated and persistent autodidact, he made it his business to learn all he needed on his own. We can now see that no number of years of formal schooling would have made him a better writer or a better man.

Any college today would boast of having included him on their roster of faculty or alumni, but I’m convinced that none could have done a better job of educating him than he did himself. Nevertheless, I regret the thought that on his way to Cooperstown, Burroughs must have passed right by the Hartwick Seminary. What did he think at that moment? Had he ever considered going there? If only someone had run out to the highway, dragged him into the seminary, and signed him up. Then my college might have had this very distinguished Catskills author, thinker, and naturalist as an alumnus. What if?

Robert Titus is a professor in the Department of Geological and Environmental Sciences, Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York.

Renewal
Accepting Nature’s Flux

By Gary Noel Ross

In 1972, when I was ready to design and construct my own home in Baton Rouge, I was still infused with the “new environmentalism” sparked by Rachel Carson’s now iconic book, Silent Spring. I sought to create a marriage between aesthetics, architecture, environment, and energy efficiency. Similar projects, of course, had been designed by others. “Falling Waters” in Pennsylvannia, for example, was conceived by visionary Frank Lloyd Wright and remains America’s most renowned model. In most cases, however, such designs focused on monumental structures in spacious rural settings. I had to plan on a smaller scale and more urban setting.

I began by searching for a relatively new subdivision that had not been totally cleared of its deciduous tree cover. Although Baton Rouge was known for its extensive greenery, the prevailing practice for developers was to clear-cut, in order to minimize costs incurred when laying out streets and underground utilities. Within months, however, I managed to locate an ideal subdivision being carved from a flat, forested tract dominated by 90- to 100-foot-tall cherry bark oaks (Quercus pagoda) and to a lesser degree, cow oak (Q. michauxii) and water oak (Q. nigra). Pay dirt!

I selected a one-acre parcel bordered by three streets, to maximize curbside viewing by the public. I would remove only those trees absolutely necessary for construction. My master plan called for a one-story Spanish-style house of approximately 4,000 square feet, complemented by auxiliary structures such as brick-enclosed patios and driveways with iron gates, brick pillars, and archways. The key landscaping idea was not to have any lawns, which are notoriously costly and wasteful to maintain. Instead, I decided to plant evergreen ground covers punctuated with flowering bulbs and evergreen, flowering shrubbery such as azaleas—a Deep South spring favorite. While for the most part, the flowering plant species I chose were not part of the native Louisiana landscape, they would add an important aesthetic component and provide a source of food for pollinating insects and birds. I also planned to install large, organic-looking metal or
wood outdoor sculpture by a popular local artist, to be illuminated at night. I even chose a name for my home site, reflecting my professional work as a teacher of biology at Southern University and my entomological fieldwork in Mexico: Na-Pepen, which means “place of the butterflies” in the Maya language.

Over the years, some alterations and maintenance were necessary. For example, each spring I had to cull the numerous seedlings that would sprout, and if left unchecked would clutter the landscape. Additionally, I had to periodically fertilize and prune trees and shrubbery to maintain healthy specimens. And in 1994, I removed several medium-sized trees in order to create a sunny venue so that I could install a distinct butterfly/hummingbird garden. But overall my project was fully realized, and Na-Pepen was even registered as Official Habitat Number 4373 in the National Wildlife Federation’s Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program. And from an educational standpoint, I have on occasion hosted local garden clubs, school groups, and garden enthusiasts.

Then came September 1, 2008. Hurricane Gustav, packing winds of nearly a hundred miles per hour, roared into coastal Louisiana. Baton Rouge, located inland from the Gulf and occupying a river terrace thirty-five feet above the current floodplain of the Mississippi River, had a measure of protection from flooding. But Gustav proved to be the worst storm in the city’s history. Gustav plied a course just west of the city and then, instead of veering farther west as predicted, continued on a slow trajectory directly north. The Capital City remained on the highly dangerous eastern sectors of the storm for nearly three entire days. The city’s extensive tree population was devastated.

Luckily, my house was not split in half by an uprooted tree or dislodged limb, as happened to many residents in the city. But two medium-size limbs did pierce the roof of my dining room, others cracked several brick walls of my patios, and several of the larger trees leaned ominously toward the house. Virtually all my trees had suffered damage, littering my property with debris, and many large limbs still dangled from above. All shrubbery and lower story vegetation was flattened. As I contemplated my Yard from Hell, news came over my battery-driven radio that another hurricane, “Ike,” was in the Gulf and moving in the direction of Louisiana.

I felt I had to act quickly. As the rain gradually subsided, experts in tree removal from around the country were flocking into Baton Rouge. One such company, from Missouri, was in my neighborhood clearing streets, and so I contracted with their six workmen to clear my property immediately of fallen limbs, to prune damaged trees, and fell those posing a threat to my residence. Over four days, eighteen large- to medium-size trees were felled, their majestic limbs and trunks unceremoniously pushed curbside. With my property cleared and secure from further wind damage, I felt a tinge of relief (and Ike mercifully veered westward, coming ashore near the Texas-Louisiana state line).

But crisis passed, it sank in that my dream-built Na-Pepen was laid to waste. The transparency and disorganization of my property were overwhelming. What was I to do? I was sixty-eight and lived alone. One day slipped into another. With electricity and telephone service still not restored, I walked the
streets within the neighborhood, or simply stood motionless in front of my property. I felt cut off from humanity and nature. I was definitely on a fast track to depression.

About a week later, however, a close neighbor out walking her dog commented on how sorry she was for my plight. “You know,” she said, “all these years you have enjoyed your trees and shady grounds. Now its time to create something new.” Those kind, simple words served as a swift kick to the head. Hey, as a scientist, I understood that the universe is dynamic: all matter—whether living or inanimate—is in a constant state of flux. When we acknowledge this, we are forced to view all vagaries—even those personal negative ones—as part of the grand continuum.

And I recalled a book that had proven so inspirational to me when I first contemplated creating my personal space decades before. In So Human an Animal, René Dubos, the Pulitzer-prize-winning microbiologist/environmentalist/humanist, penned:

> The interplay between man and nature results in creative symbiotic relationships that facilitate evolutionary changes. Man continuously tries to derive from nature new satisfactions that go beyond his elementary biological needs—and he thereby gives expression to some of nature’s potentialities that would remain unrecognized without his efforts.

With renewed energy I realized a “new leaf” was in order. Since intense sunlight now penetrated most of my property, it was time to go with nature’s flow and make the most of it. One solution was simple: I would extend my butterfly garden by planting butterfly-attracting, sun-loving vegetation. And to establish visual anchors in the more meadow-like landscape, I would install three new trees. These would be live oaks (Quercus virginiana), a native species that, unlike the oaks originally found on my property, is notable for its dense wood and mushroom-shaped canopy bespeaking a low center of gravity—ideal traits for withstanding storms. I would position the live oaks so that they would not jeopardize physical structures on the property or shade the new plantings. While I will not live long enough to see those trees mature, future generations will benefit.

I anticipate completing my retooling during the summer of 2009. Already I feel a sense of renewal. The events of September 1, 2008, no longer fill me with despair or discouragement. Instead, Hurricane Gustav seems a chapter in my personal “Gospel of Hope.”

Gary Noel Ross, a past winner of the JBA Nature Essay Award, is a Research Associate with the McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity (Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida in Gainesville), and Director of Butterfly Festivals for the North American Butterfly Association.

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**Sharp Eyes V Conference Summary**

*By Jeff Walker*

The fifth biennial Sharp Eyes conference was held at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, on June 15-20, 2008. The conference, which I organized, was subtitled “John Burroughs, Nature Writing, and 19th Century Science.” The conference was moved from its normal location at SUNY Oneonta so that participants might take advantage of the Vassar College Special Collections holdings of Burroughs papers (introduced Monday morning by Ron Patkus, Vassar College Special Collections librarian), as well as the Burroughs properties in West Park, New York, just across the river from Poughkeepsie.

The conference kicked off Sunday night with an open house of the Warthin Museum of Geology and Natural History featuring a special exhibition: “The Evolution of the Natural Sciences: Selections from the Natural History Museum at Vassar College Museum” presented by Lois Horst (museum curator), and Rick Jones (exhibit curator).

The academic portion of the conference opened Monday with a keynote speech by Charlotte Zoe Walker (SUNY Oneonta) entitled “John Burroughs, Sharp Eyes and Reading the Book of Nature Today” and closed Thursday night with a keynote address by Harry Stoneback (SUNY New Paltz) entitled: “John Burroughs—Regionalist (and Modernist?): A Meditation on Influences and Confluences.”

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*Wake-Robin Volume 41, Number 2, Winter 2009*
The John Burroughs Association, Inc., is a not-for-profit organization which was established in 1921 following the death of the naturalist and poet. It was established to promote the spirit and teachings of John Burroughs; to foster the American nature essay genre he created by honoring outstanding natural history writings; and to cherish and preserve tokens of his life, especially the cabin Slabsides and the surrounding lands of the John Burroughs Sanctuary.

Please assist in supporting the objectives of the John Burroughs Association by becoming a member. Becoming a Patron or Benefactor will reflect an even greater interest and help in the purposes of the organization. Stewardship of the John Burroughs Sanctuary can happen with your contribution.

Tax-deductible dues for the membership year April 1, 2009, through March 31, 2010

_____ Student $15   _____ Patron $50  _____ Bequest
_____ Senior $15   _____ Benefactor $100
_____ Annual $25   _____ Life $500
_____ Family $35   _____ Additional Gifts for John Burroughs Sanctuary
_____ Gift Membership of $_____ for (name and address):

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Make checks payable to the John Burroughs Association and mail to: John Burroughs Association, Inc., American Museum of Natural History, 15 West 77 Street, New York, NY 10024-5192.

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We are a 501 (3)c tax exempt organization

Amelanchier canadensis  photo by Steve Thurston

The John Burroughs Association informs members through *Wake-Robin* and the Web site http://research.amnh.org/burroughs. Occasionally, we reach out via e-mail with news alerts and reminders. Please send your e-mail address to the Secretary (breslof@amnh.org) so that we can better serve you. Members are encouraged to submit articles or news items for publication. Deadline for submissions to the Spring 2009 issue of *Wake-Robin* is **February 28**. Direct inquiries to the editors.

*Wake-Robin* Volume 41, Number 2, Winter 2009
In between were eighteen academic papers on Burroughs or other nature writers submitted by a diverse array of scholars from across the country (see listings below).

In addition to listening to academic presentations, the conference participants also had the opportunity to go on a nature walk led by John Tallmadge and a bird walk led by Vassar Associate Professor of Geography Mary Ann Cunningham. One full day was devoted to field trips to explore John Burroughs’s haunts in West Park including a tour of the Riverby property co-led by Joan Burroughs and Steve and Darcy Grim. The tour ended on the beach where some participants swung on a tire swing, and at least one person swam in the Hudson River. The participants then walked the 1.5 miles up to Slabsides for lunch, an open house of the cabin, and hikes around the Sanctuary.

Evenings were devoted to social activities: Monday night was an slide show on Burroughs’s life by Seldon Spencer, Tuesday was film night featuring two new DVDs on Burroughs: “John Burroughs: A Naturalist in the Industrial Age” by Lynn Spangler (SUNY New Paltz) and “Waiting” by Mark Doerrier (independent film maker), and Wednesday was a dance with the Walker Family (a regular feature of the last three Sharp Eyes conferences) followed by an open mike.

The interchange at the conference was enlivened by the presence of twenty-one students taking a for-credit, concurrent seminar (taught by Dan Payne, Steve Mercier, and John Tallmadge), and by members of the local community who came for one or more days.

The next Sharp Eyes conference will be back in Oneonta in June of 2010. Watch for announcements beginning next summer.

Jeff Walker is Professor of Earth Science at Vassar College.

List of Papers Delivered by Participants

Jeff Walker (Vassar College): “The Long Road: John Burroughs and Charles Darwin, 1862-1922”

John Tallmadge (environmental writer and independent scholar): “Religion and Romanticism”


Roger Thomas (Franklin and Marshall College): “Darwin, Melville, and Vonnegut”

Dan Payne (SUNY Oneonta): “Burroughs and Bergson”

Ian Stapley (Niagara County Community College): “John Burroughs and Gilbert White”

Jerry and Cathleen Loving (Texas A&M University): “Burroughs and the Fate of Whitman’s Redwoods”

Martin Settle (University of North Carolina-Charlotte): “The ‘Scientist of Faith’ and ‘The Faith of a Naturalist’”


Jill Schneiderman (Vassar College): “John Burroughs, Gendered Sublimities and the Construction of Masculinity”

Bob Titus (Hartwick College): “The Hudson Valley School of Rocks”

David Spector (Central Connecticut State University): “Who or Why or Which or What Is an Ornithologist?”

Steve Mercier (Marist College): “John Burroughs and the Passenger Pigeon”


Mark Smith (Lock Haven University): “Natural Science and ‘Human Significance’ in the Writings of John Burroughs”

Jerry Dollar (Siena College): “In the Footsteps of Emerson and Thoreau: Burroughs in the Adirondacks, Maine, and Yosemite”

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Calendar

April 6, Literary Awards Lunch (details in the next issue of Wake-Robin)

May 16, Spring Slabsides Day

July 3rd - 30th, Town of Esopus Library, Quadricentennial Event ’09, “John Burroughs His Life and Works,” A Rededication of the Library’s Collection (details in the next issue of Wake-Robin)