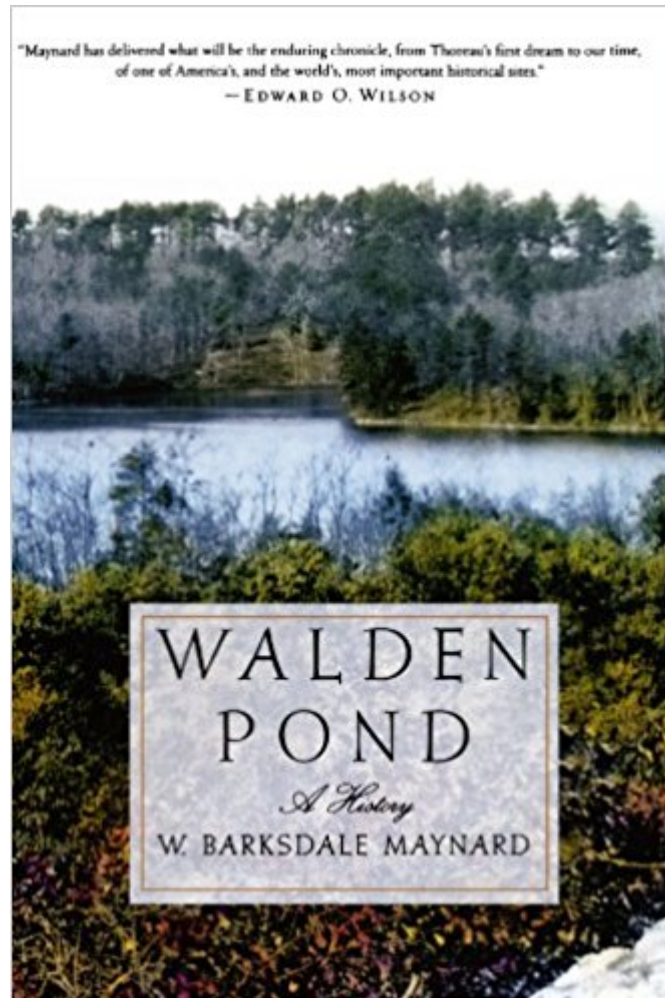




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Walden Pond: A History



Synopsis

Perhaps no other natural setting has as much literary, spiritual, and environmental significance for Americans as Walden Pond. Some 700,000 people visit the pond annually, and countless others journey to Walden in their mind, to contemplate the man who lived there and what the place means to us today. Here is the first history of the Massachusetts pond Thoreau made famous 150 years ago. W. Barksdale Maynard offers a lively and comprehensive account of Walden Pond from the early nineteenth century to the present. From Thoreau's first visit at age 4 in 1821--"That woodland vision for a long time made the drapery of my dreams"--to today's efforts both to conserve the pond and allow public access, Maynard captures Walden Pond's history and the role it has played in social, cultural, literary, and environmental movements in America. Along the way Maynard details the geography of the pond; Thoreau's and Emerson's experiences of Walden over their lifetimes; the development of the cult of Thoreau and the growth of the pond as a site of literary and spiritual pilgrimages; rock star Don Henley's Walden Woods Project and the much publicized battle to protect the pond from developers in the 1980s; and the vitally important ecological symbol Walden Pond has become today. Exhaustively researched, vividly written, and illustrated with historical photographs and the most detailed maps of Thoreau country yet created, *Walden Pond: A History* reveals how an ordinary pond has come to be such an extraordinarily inspiring symbol.

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Customer Reviews

As Maynard dismayingly shows, since the death of Henry David Thoreau, hundreds of thousands of

visitors have flocked to Walden Woods each year; they have trampled the flora, polluted the water with debris and urine, blared radios, set up hot dog stands and generally marred the face of this once sacred retreat. Maynard quotes one disheartened visitor who described Walden Pond in the 20th century as "a mass of humanity, a stew of frantic motion, boom boxes and squealing children." In this history of the pond and its surroundings, Maynard relates that in the past 10 years matters have improved markedly. Rock star Don Henley spearheaded the Walden Woods Project, raising millions of dollars for preservation; yet Thoreauvian purists remain skeptical about a Hollywood figure taking charge and pandering for corporate sponsorship. What would Thoreau think about the dramatic changes that have taken place in his name? How did an ordinary pond come to have such extraordinary meanings? Maynard, an architectural historian who has served as a consultant to the Walden Woods Project, tackles all of these questions in a painstakingly researched, reportorial history that begins with Thoreau's first glimpse of the pond in 1821 and carries through to the present day. It's a classic tale of Americans loving their national treasures to death, and though the middle portion of the narrative becomes a bit repetitive with its blow-by-blow account of the growth of crass commercialism, this book will surely appeal to Thoreau buffs and to those concerned with natural and historic preservation. It provides a comprehensive history of the landscape that inspired one of America's most important authors. 85 b&w illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Except for Stratford-upon-Avon, Walden Pond must be the most trafficked literary shrine anywhere, although most visitors probably aren't pilgrims per se. The place also functions as a fishing hole, a swimming beach, and, on its perimeter, the town dump for Concord, Massachusetts. Therein lies the nub of conflict between the sacred and the profane that is Maynard's theme. Ever was it so, beginning with Henry David Thoreau's back-to-nature experiment in 1845-47 (he denounced the adjoining railroad) through rocker Don Henley's save-Walden activism in the 1990s (he objected to condo development). Maynard's chronological narrative of Walden history recounts physical alterations made to Walden in the name of public access and safety and emphasizes a succession of people inspired to life-absorbing projects of protection and restoration. Whether Thoreau himself, his biographers, an early 1900s photographer, or dirt-on-the-hands naturalists, each such person's affinity for a special spot at Walden will resonate with Maynard's readers. The intimacy this generates in Maynard's history only strengthens its vitally important contribution to Thoreauvian studies. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text

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Thoreau's favorite place in the world and the source of constant inspiration to his work especially
Walden the most famous of his books.

good book

This is a book that has been over 200 years in the making. Maynard has done a fabulous job of combining history, environmentalism, science, popular culture and "gossipy stories" in order to paint a highly interesting and balanced history of Walden Pond, before, during and after Henry Thoreau's famous sojourn there. Thoreauvians will find lots to admire in this book. Maynard has obviously done his research on Thoreau and his times. In particular I was amused by the amazement of some Concordians, in Thoreau's time and after, who just couldn't figure out what all the fuss was about over the so-called hermit of Walden Pond. But more importantly, the book looks above and beyond Thoreau's relationship to the Pond and Maynard goes into exquisite detail about life at Walden after 1847. If dedicated Thoreauvians abhor the so-called commercialism of the place now, be thankful it's not the 1930's, when all vestiges of Walden as a "sacred" spot were practically destroyed. Maynard does well to explain the ups and downs that the Pond has been through the last 150 years. In particular I was pleased to see the way the author treated Thoreau's contemporaries, particularly Bronson Alcott. All of the Transcendentalists had a special fondness for Walden and their love of the place-and the love that millions have shared over the last 150 years- really comes out. It is obvious that Maynard loves Walden as well. And, he also does a good job of explaining the many fights to preserve Walden, and the in-fighting and back-stabbing that has, unfortunately, been as much a part of Walden's history as the Transcendentalists. But Maynard's reporting is fair and balanced and he doesn't seem to take sides. Still, I'm sure he will have stepped on somebody's toes with this book! If anyone is interested in American History, Conservation, Henry Thoreau or just an interesting piece of Americana, "Walden Pond; A History" is a must read!

Walden Pond: A History has received positive reviews during its first month of release. Kirkus gave it a coveted 5 star. Also, the ecologist Ed Schofield has written the following five-star review on a national bookstore website: "AN AMAZING BOOK. I know a good deal about Walden Pond and Walden Woods as a result of many years of personal research. I never thought that anyone would be able to bring together, between the covers of one book, the astonishing amount of information

Barksdale Maynard has compiled and integrated in this scrupulously researched and well written book. He has brought together facts from all sorts of sources: newspapers and magazines, books, unpublished letters and diaries, eyewitness interviews, videos, radio broadcasts, maps, and so forth. There are fifty pages of endnotes and bibliography - over 500 of each. I am in awe at what he has been able to do. (Wish I could have done it!) Anyone interested in historic preservation, nature conservation, human nature, grassroots activism, literature, or (most important) Thoreau and Walden itself will enjoy this book. It has lots of information, yet it reads easily and has a good story line: how and why Walden has become the symbol it is and what people have done to protect it. The hero of heroes is Don Henley of The Eagles. There are lots of other people - heroes, villains, oddballs, famous people (Emerson, the Alcotts, John Muir, Walt Whitman, the Kennedys, the Clintons, and many others). I recommend the book highly.

Barksdale Maynard has performed a tour de force in writing WALDEN POND: A HISTORY. As someone who has tried (since the late 1950s) to follow the bewildering barrage of events and swirling controversies surrounding Walden and its use, misuse, and abuse over the decades and centuries, I stand in awe of what Mr. Maynard has been able to do. Since I know first hand something about the controversies and events the book describes, I can judge (1) the accuracy and (2) the adequacy of what he has written. It's right on the mark, and it evokes exactly what happened. How he did it I do not know! Everything he has written is scrupulously documented with fifty pages of endnotes and bibliography (over 500 endnotes and over 500 entries in the bibliography). He has taken information from an amazing array of sources--popular, scholarly, scientific, and manuscript--as well as from a veritable army of eyewitnesses and specialists--and has melded them into a truly wonderful and accessible narrative. He brings together literature, history, biography, science, and politics in a fascinating and meaningful way. His book is a landmark of scholarship, yet it reads beautifully. There is a lot of human interest in the gripping story he tells. There are humor, suspense, and other qualities that make for a good story. You don't have to be a Thoreau expert to benefit from the book. You'll love it if you're someone who cares about nature (and human nature, as well) and some of the best expressions of American history and ideals. The book helps to explain a lot of what I had formerly felt to be inexplicable. Certainly I personally learned an ENORMOUS amount from reading it. For people trying to preserve natural areas, open space, and historic sites elsewhere in the US and beyond, the story should hold great interest and encouragement. The book is well worthy of its subjects--Thoreau, Emerson, the Alcotts, Hawthorne, Walden Pond, Walden Woods, the book Walden, and the shining symbol that Walden has become

since the book was published a century and a half ago. The eighty-four illustrations are selected ingeniously (flip through the pages a few times, looking at the illustrations, comparing them with each other and with the text, to see what I mean). The story puts forth for all to see just why and how Walden has been so mistreated over the years--as well as how and why it has been "saved" (and who was responsible for doing so). There are many "heroes" and "heroines"--and even a martyr or two--in this book (and not a few lovable oddballs), from the venerable nineteenth century champions of Walden, through the redoubtable Gladys Hosmer, Mary Sherwood, Paul Tsongas, and Don Henley. It is a fascinating case study of just how agonizingly difficult it is to DO THE RIGHT THING in this world, what with competing egos, turf battles, obstructionism, cupidity, official opposition, public apathy, and just plain human perversity. There are villains in the book also (and some of the heroes and heroines have their flaws), most of them actually well meaning, a few of them greedy and truly mean spirited. And there are altogether too many clueless Philistines. One telling episode described in the book has Thomas Blanding sparring transcendently (and brilliantly) with a developer's bulldog of a lawyer, effectively defanging the latter's searing sarcasm. In my opinion, Don Henley comes off as the hero of heroes in this saga. The photograph of him walking out of Walden Woods between Bill Clinton and Hilary Clinton is the climax of the book. It is altogether fitting that Don Henley gets prominent recognition for his unstinting and unbelievably generous work on behalf of Walden. Had it not been for him the story might never end--or else the ending would be tragic. Don Henley put a much needed, solid foundation under the often squabbling idealists' heroic campaigns to do right by Walden. We owe him and Barksdale Maynard a lot. Two people who came to the fore at just the right time and did what had to be done!

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