

*Literary Life in Nineteenth-Century Berkshire County*

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**Berkshire History** Spring 1976 Vol. II, No. 1

published by the Berkshire County Historical Society

Pittsfield Massachusetts

As you sit in the Afternoon Garden at Naumkeag or as you stroll the terraces below, if you look to the south, you can see Monument Mountain. Your view will be somewhat limited by the fully leaved trees – not quite such a good view as Hawthorne had from the little Red House at Tanglewood, up the road, where the Stockbridge Bowl cleared the foreground of obstacles. The view was for Hawthorne a constant source of pleasure and he described it through seasonal changes.

In August:

Monument Mountain, in the early sunshine; its base enveloped in mist, parts of which are floating in the sky, so that the great hill looks really as if it were founded on a cloud. Just emerging from the mist is seen a yellow field of rye, and, above that, forest.

In October:

The foliage having its autumn hues, Monument Mountain looks like a great headless sphynx, wrapped in a rich Persian shawl.

In February:

The sunsets of winter are incomparably splendid, and when the ground is covered with snow..... our southern view.... with the clouds and atmospherically hues, is quite indescribable and unimaginable; and the various distances of the hills that lie between us and the remote dome of Taconic are brought out with accuracy unattainable in summer.

In May:

I think the face of nature can never be more beautiful than now.... Monument Mountain and its brethren are green, and the lightness of the tint takes away something of their

massiveness and ponderosity, and they respond with livelier effect to the shine and shade of the sky.<sup>1</sup>

Monument Mountain loomed importantly in Hawthorne's brief residence in Berkshire County.

In 1850, on Monday, August 5, one of the most important events in American literary history took place in Stockbridge – Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville met for the first time and began an intimate friendship which during the next fifteen months especially had profound effects on the creative efforts of both. Hawthorne at the time lived at Tanglewood in the Red House of the William A. Tappan estate on the north shore of the Stockbridge Bowl. Melville, until October 1850, was a boarder at Broadhall, his uncle Thomas Melville's estate, now the Pittsfield Country Club, then run as a boarding house by his uncle's widow, and later he was owner and farmer of Arrowhead on Holmes Road.

David Dudley Field, Jr., a prominent New York lawyer who maintained a summer home in his native Stockbridge, was the host for an elaborate party August 5, occasioned by the visit to Pittsfield of Melville's New York friends, Evert A. Duyckinck and Cornelius Mathews. Besides Hawthorne, Melville, and Melville's guests, were present Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, who customarily summered in Pittsfield, James T. Fields, the Boston publisher and his recent bride, Joel Tyler Headly, the historian of Revolutionary and Napoleonic battles, all on vacation, Henry Dwight Sedgwick, another New York lawyer then visiting his widowed mother in Stockbridge, and, of course, the Field family.

As they assembled at Laurel Cottage, "convenient and rambling and pitched down in the verdure," the early arrivals had time for a brisk climb on nearby Laurel Hill, or Sacrifice Mount, the scene in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's novel, *Hope Leslie* (1827), of the daring rescue of the young white boy by the Pequod Indian maiden, Magawisca. Next came a drive across the Housatonic for a "scramble" up Monument Mountain, a "rough projection of the cliffs, scarred and blasted," made famous by William Cullen Bryant's poem about the suicide of an Indian maiden who had loved not wisely but too well. Duyckinck described the ascent:

We took to our feet on its sides and strode upward Hawthorne and myself in advance, talking of the Scarlet Letter. As we scrambled over rocks at the summit which surveys a wide range of country on either side, a black thunder cloud from the south dragged its ragged edges towards us – the thunder rolling in the distance. They talked of shelter and shelter there proved to be though it looked unpromising but these difficulties, like others, vanish on trial and a few feet of rock with a damp underground of mosses and decay actually sheltered publisher Fields curled whiskers, his patent leathers and his bride's delicate blue silk. Dr Holmes cut three branches for

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<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *American Notebooks*, Randall Stewart, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932.)

an umbrella and uncorked the champagne which was drunk from a silver mug. The rain did not do its worst and we scattered over the cliffs, Herman Melville to seat himself, the boldest of all, astride a projecting bowsprit of rock while Dr Holmes peeped about the cliffs and protested it affected him like ipecac. Hawthorne looked wildly about for the greatest carbuncle. Mathews read Bryant's poem. The exercise was glorious.<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to believe that the entire exploit seemed "glorious," since James T. Fields recalled that

somebody proposed Bryant's health and "long life to the dear old poet." This was the most popular toast of the day and it took . . . a considerable quantity of Heidsieck to do it justice.<sup>3</sup>

On the return to Laurel Cottage, the dinner was, as Duyckinck described it, "a three hour's business from turkey to ice cream, well moisturized by the way" and

Dr. Holmes said some of his best things and drew the whole company out by laying down various propositions of the superiority of the Englishman. Melville attacked him vigorously. Hawthorne looked on and Fields his publisher smiled with internal satisfaction underneath his curled whiskers at the good tokens of a brilliant poem from Holmes at the Yale College celebration.

Even the long dinner was not the end of the festivities. There followed a walk through the Ice Glenn, "a break in one of the hills of tumbled huge, damp, mossy rocks in whose recesses ice is said to be found all year round." Then tea and more talk and finally for Melville and his guests the 10 p.m. train back to Pittsfield.

Melville left no explicit account of the Stockbridge party, but "Hawthorne and his Mosses," appearing anonymously in the *Library World*, August 17 and 24, 1850, reflected his response to the man of whom Duyckinck said, "Hawthorne is a fine ghost in the case of iron – a man of genius and he looks it and lives it."<sup>4</sup> When Duyckinck returned to New York one week after the party, he took with him the manuscript of Melville's essay.

Of his momentous meeting, Hawthorne's journal entry told only the names of those present, with bare mention of the before-dinner climb of Monument Mountain, the interruption by a shower, and

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<sup>2</sup> Evert A. Duyckinck to his wife, August 6, 1850. See Luther S. Mansfield, "Glimpses of Herman Melville's Life in Pittsfield, 1850-1851," *American Literature*, IX (March 1937), 36-48, for full text of all Duyckinck letters referred to. The original letters are in the New York Public Library. Fuller details on the residence of the two authors in the country are given in Luther S. Mansfield's lead article in Howard P. Vincent, ed., *Melville and Hawthorne in the Berkshires*, Melville Annual 1966; (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1968), 4-21.

<sup>3</sup> James T. Fields, *Yesterdays with Authors* (Boston, 1872), pp. 52-53

<sup>4</sup> Evert A. Duyckinck to his wife, August 9, 1850.

the after-dinner scramble through the Ice Glen. But within a day or two he wrote to Horatio Bridge: “I met Melville, the other day, and I like him so much that I have asked him to spend a few days with me.”<sup>5</sup> Only three days after the Stockbridge party Melville called at the Red House in Lenox with Duyckinck and Mathews, and the following week he delivered to Hawthorne the package sent by Duyckinck in his care, which unknown to him contained all of his own published books. By the time Melville came to stay with the Hawthornes, September 3 to 7, they had read or reread most of these books, and they had also read, though without knowing Melville’s authorship, the essay in the *Literary World*. A strong and significant friendship had begun. With the revelation of Melville’s authorship of “Hawthorne and his Mosses,” which would come by late September, the relationship was further deepened. There would be more in November, 1851, there would be Melville’s next book, *Moby-Dick*, dedicated to Hawthorne.

Literary life in nineteenth-century Berkshire County was not always at the high pitch of the Laurel Cottage party, but there were numerous other activities for Melville’s New York guests of 1850 during their eight days in the country – drives to Pontoosuc Lake and to Columbian Hall, the resort hotel across the state line in Lebanon Springs, New York; an extended call on Hawthorne at the Red House and a return to Stockbridge for a hotel dinner with Headly and a call on Dudley Field; visits to both the Hancock and Lebanon Shaker communities; and a picnic on Gulf Road and a fancy dress ball given by Sarah Morewood, who was to become mistress of Broadhall in October. Some of these activities were repeated in 1851 when Duyckinck returned with his brother to the Shaker community at Hancock with Hawthorne and his little son Julian, and an overnight excursion of a party of eleven to the top of Greylock by railway, by wagon, and finally by foot, all planned and supervised by Mrs. Morewood.

The mountain climb was for Duyckinck “a great adventure, full of sublimity, fun, frolic and humor, human and divine.” He detailed in a letter to his wife the preparations for such a jaunt:

There is to be an indefinite supply of roasted cold chicken, say for a party of ten 3 or 4 pair of Berkshires; item the leg of a Berkshire pig sliced into sandwiches; item tongue, head illimitable. Add odd jars of brandy fruit. A dozen of champagne may be disposed of which evaporates so speedily on the top of a mountain that they should be supported by a liberal allowance of Port, Cognac and Jamaica. With this and a party of very good natured people – a pack of cards so you can get through the night.<sup>6</sup>

For residents and especially summer visitors to Berkshire among the chief sights of interest were the Shaker Villages at Hancock, four miles west of Pittsfield, and at Mt. Lebanon, just across the line in New York state. In 1776, Mother Ann Lee and her followers had established at Niskayuna, New

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<sup>5</sup> Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New Haven: Yale University, 1948), p. 107

<sup>6</sup> Evert A. Duyckinck to his wife, August 13, 1851.

York, the first American community of Shakers (properly called the Millennial Church or the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing). They held property in common, and they practiced celibacy. By 1850 communities of the set were scattered from Maine to Kentucky. Hawthorne on a trip to New Hampshire in 1831 with his uncle, Samuel Manning, visited the Shaker community at Canterbury, and half seriously protested interest in becoming a Shaker. "The Canterbury Pilgrims" and "The Shaker Bridal" were literary fruits of the visit. On September 28, 1842, he visited the Shakers at Harvard, Massachusetts, with Emerson, "who had a theological discussion with two of the Shaker brethren."

Melville's earliest known visit to the Hancock Shaker village came July 21, 1850, with his cousin Robert Melvill, when he bought a copy of *A Summary View of the Millennial Church &c.* He brought his house guests, Duyckinck and Mathews, back to Hancock August 7, 1850. And with the two Duyckincks and Hawthorne, Melville was there again August 8, 1851, when Evert Duyckinck described the visit for his wife:

Mr. Hawthorne had never been. We met them mowing their carefully groomed fields and at the Hancock settlement met again old Father Hilliard and trod the neat quiet avenues whose stillness might be felt. Here is the great circular barn where the winter cattle feed with their heads all to the huge mow in the centre.... Induced venerable Father Hilliard to open to us the big house. Its oiled and polished pine floors were elegant in spite of Shakerdom. The glazed finish of the white walls were as pure as yesterday's work, though they have been there these twenty years. Among these marks of neatness was a small funnel and a pipe to carry off the smoke of each lamp to the chimney. A tall old clock stood in the hall but some gay flowers on its face had been covered with white paint. You see no flowers in the sisters' room but a volume of unreadable theology (of its kind) with a pair of crossed spectacles by its side on a small table.<sup>7</sup>

From Hawthorne's recorded comments on the same visit it is easy to see that disgust would have kept him from making an excursion to Hancock on his own initiative:

There were no bathing or washing conveniences in the chambers; but in the entry there was a sink and washbowl, where all attempts at purification were to be performed. The fact shows that all their miserable pretence of cleanliness and neatness is the thinnest superficiality; and that the Shakers are and must needs be a filthy set. And then their utter and systematic lack of privacy; the close function of a man with man, and supervision of one man over another – it is hateful and disgusting to think of; and the sooner the sect is extinct the better.... At the doors of the dwellings, we saw women sewing or otherwise at work; and there seemed to be a

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<sup>7</sup> Evert A. Duyckinck to his wife, August 9, 1851.

kind of comfort among them, but of no higher kind than is enjoyed by their beasts of burden. Also, the women looked pale, and none of the men had a jolly aspect. They are certainly the most singular and be-deviled set of people that ever existed in a civilized land...<sup>8</sup>

The diversions of Melville and his summer guests in 1850 and 1851 suggest the kind of activities open to visiting or resident literacy figures in the Berkshire Hills. Besides the beauty of the natural setting and the accessibility of the country after the coming of the railroad in mid-nineteenth century, the hospitality of the local inhabitants was a strong enticement.

Mrs. Morewood gave parties in winter as well as summer. At one in November, 1851, when Melville and three of his sisters were present, lots were drawn so that Broadhall was continued as the name of the house and Melville's choice of names was drawn for the cows – Molly, Polly, and Dolly.<sup>9</sup> On one occasion when Melville himself could not accept a Morewood invitation, he wrote a gay note of regret:

My Dear Lady Broadhall: -

For every hereafter be this day thought a fortunate one instead of a luckless. For has it not brought me some share of a kind invitation from the ever excellent & beautiful Lady of Paradise – slip of the pen – of Broadhall, I mean? But then, unfortunately, I am absolutely compelled to decline my part of her summons. It gives me great grief; but I shall be with you in sympathy.

So adieu to Thee-

Thou Lady of Delight;

Even Thou, - the Peerless Lady of Broadhall.

H.M.<sup>10</sup>

Harry Sedgwick was on hand to climb Monument Mountain with James Russell Lowell in August, 1846, or in Lenox, where after her own literacy career got under way in the 1820's, Catharine Maria Sedgwick lived with her brother Charles and his family. She was responsible for the visit of Harriet Martineau in 1834 and for the later residency of Fanny Kemble, the British Shakespearean actress, at

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<sup>8</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *American Notebooks*, entry for August 8, 1851 – pp. 229-231

<sup>9</sup> Sarah A. Morewood to George L. Duyckinck, November 21, 1851, in Mansfield, "Glimpses," p. 47, n. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Undated letter, Herman Melville to Sarah A. Morewood, formerly in possession of her granddaughter, Agnes Morewood.

The Perch. It was probably the actress who first said that in Stockbridge and Lenox even the crickets chirped, “Sedgwick, Sedgwick!”<sup>11</sup>

Herman Melville had spent several summers on his uncle’s farm in Pittsfield in the 1830’s and in 1837 had taught school in the nearby Sykes District School near Washington Mountain. Hawthorne had made a trip by stage to North Adams several times, attended a Williams College commencement, and roamed among the lime kilns in the neighboring hills to collect the background materials eventually worked into “Ethan Brand.” Emerson, while a missionary preacher in the Connecticut River Valley, had first visited Lenox in 1827. When friends argued later that he should leave the “tame landscape” of Concord and move to “a more picturesque country,” either the seashore or the mountains, it was Caroline Sturgis (later, as Mrs. W.A. Tappan, responsible for the Hawthornes settling in the Red House) who, in 1842, suggested the Berkshires. Emerson’s daughter Edith attended Mrs. Charles Sedgwick’s School in Lenox in 1853, but the philosopher himself made no major visit to the county till November, 1865, when he gave an extended course of lectures at Williams College and was driven to the top of the present Taconic Trail to view the Adirondacks in the distance on the New York side and the Greylock and Hoosac ranges in Massachusetts. “The landscape is good for the eyes every hour of the day,” he said then, “with its frosty morning mountains, its noon purple glooms and serious invitations to the feet.” But he added this qualification:

.... for the mountains, I don’t quite like the proximity of a college and its noisy students. To enjoy the hills as a poet, I prefer simple farmers as neighbors.<sup>12</sup>

Thoreau made a walking trip to the Berkshires in July, 1844, when he commented on the Williams College buildings that their location at the base of a mountain was “as good at least as one well-endowed professorship.” The highlight of the trip was the daybreak from the top of Greylock, “above the clouds.” He had spent the night in the “rude” Williams-student-built observatory which had also sheltered Hawthorne in 1838 and was to shelter the Melville party in 1851, and he thus described the sunrise:

As the light increased, I discovered around me an ocean of mist, which by chance reached up exactly to the base of the tower, and shut out every vestige of the earth, while I was left floating on this fragment of the wreck of a world, on my carved plank, in cloudland. . . . As the light in the east steadily increased, it revealed to me more clearly the new world into which I had risen in the night. . . There was not a crevice left through which the trivial places we name Massachusetts or Vermont or New York could be seen. . . . All around beneath me was spread for a hundred miles

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston, 1886), II, 128: Longfellow’s journal entry for August 8, 1848, which seems to be earliest recording of this often quoted remark.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Leslie Rusk, *Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, 1949), 299, 125, 363; see also *Journals*, X, 117-18, entry for November 14,

on every side, as far as the eye could reach, an undulating country of clouds. . . . There were immense snowy pastures, apparently smooth shaven and firm, and shady vales between the vaporous mountains; and far in the horizon I could see where some luxurious misty timber jutted into the prairie, and trace the windings of a watercourse, some unimagined Amazon or Orinoko, by the misty trees on its brink.<sup>13</sup>

For others, also, Berkshire County provided a new world or at least a different and very special world. Oliver Wendell Holmes spent summers in Pittsfield at Canoe Meadows, which he had inherited from his maternal grandfather – “a snug little place,” as Longfellow called it, “with views of the river and the mountains.” The river, of course, was the Housatonic, and when Holmes, near eighty, received an honorary degree from Cambridge University in England, it was of his beloved Housatonic that the River Cam reminded him. Like Melville, he was often finding Indian arrowheads on his acres. He argued that “the foliage of trees does not always require clipping to make it look like an image of life,” citing the view from the windows of Canoe Meadows, which included “all summer long a lion rampant, a Shanghai chicken, and General Jackson on horseback, done by Nature in green leaves, each with a single tree.”<sup>14</sup>

For his best known novel, *Elsie Venner* (1861), Holmes used importantly an item of the local setting, Rattlesnake Mountain, as Rattlesnake Ledge on the mountain between Rockland and Tamarack in his story. Elsie Venner was the child of a pregnant mother bitten in her home at the foot of the mountain by a straying rattlesnake. The bite did not prove immediately fatal, and the woman lingered on a few months, to die after Elsie’s birth. Elsie thus became “a double being,” possessed at times by a demonic power which produced eccentric behavior and, on occasion, genuinely evil drives. The outward symbol of the inner torment of this seventeen-year-old girl was “the diamond eyes.” Mention is made of “the still, wicked light in her eyes” and of “something not human looking out of Elsie’s eyes.”<sup>15</sup>

Holmes continued a light practice in Berkshire (attending Melville on occasion), and, as a physician, knew the legends, the gossip, even some of the secret personal tragedies of the local inhabitants. He claimed that his story was suggested by a real incident of prenatal influence, though not literally true. It would be a mistake, however, to identify Rockland too closely with Stockbridge or any other Berkshire village or to think that the Apollinean Institute, the girls’ school Elsie attended, was more than faintly related to the girls’ school run by Mrs. Charles Sedgwick in Lenox, although the novel was dedicated “to the school mistress who has furnished some outliners made use of in these pages and elsewhere. . . .”

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<sup>13</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), entry for Tuesday.

<sup>14</sup> *Elsie Venner* (Boston 1861), II, 45-46

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 261, 256, 233, 249.



Longfellow came first to Pittsfield in the summer of 1843 on his wedding journey after his marriage with Fanny Appleton. The couple stayed then and on a visit in 1846, with Appleton relatives at “the old-fashioned country seat” under the poplars, in whose hall stood the “old clock upon the stairs” of Longfellow’s poem. On a later visit, in 1848, they boarded at the Melville farm, Broadhall, which the poet liked much better. The Longfellows made the usual drives to Williamstown by way of Lake Pontoosuc, to the Shaker Village, to Lebanon Springs with its “German-looking hotel, - old fashioned, with never-ending verandahs and low ceilings – and the great sycamore; and the spring of living water.”<sup>16</sup> They also dined with the Theodore Sedgwicks in Stockbridge and had tea with the Charles Sedgwicks in Lenox, where Fanny Kemble Butler sang German and Scotch songs. And more than once they went to the site of their dream house, which never materialized, to Stockbridge by the Lenox lake through “air embalmed with mint and clover” to the Oxbow. Longfellow described it:

What a lovely place! On three sides shut in by willow and alder hedges and the flowing wall of the river; groves clear of all underbrush; rocky knolls, and breezy bowers of chestnut; and under the soil, marble enough to build a palace. I build many castles in the air, and in fancy many on the earth; and one of these is on the uplands of the Ox-bow, looking eastward down the valley, across this silver Dian’s bow of the Housatonic.<sup>17</sup>

Berkshire was a fairyland for Longfellow, as attested by his journal entry of August 21, 1848, when he left Pittsfield to return to Cambridge:

Farewell to Melville Hall, the lake, the piney mountain, the breezy orchard! Farewell Fayaway, and the playful Major! Farewell the sleepy summer, and the long drives!<sup>18</sup>

Obviously Longfellow had heard tales of the eccentric and colorful Major Thomas Melvill, now deceased, and living in his house recalled the book by his author-nephew, *Typee*, read two years before. But it had been a “sleepy summer,” and the dream house on the Oxbow was probably never built because Longfellow found the Berkshire summer uncondusive to work. Of the Appleton “country seat,” he had complained, “It is difficult to write in this house, so closely is it shut in with trees.”<sup>19</sup> Relatives may have bothered there as much as trees. At the Melville farm, he recorded sitting all morning “at this lovely western window opposite the dark, mysterious mountain” and trying “to pour from my dreamy brain a thought or two upon paper, - with small success.”<sup>20</sup> Williamstown was too “noisy” for Emerson; Stockbridge was for Lowell “the quickest little village I

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<sup>16</sup> Longfellow, II. 127: journal entry for August 2, 1848.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 125: journal entry for July 22, 1848.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 129: journal entry for August 21, 1848. See p. 52; Longfellow read *Typee* July 29, 1846.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 54: journal entry for August 15, 1846.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 124: journal entry for July 20, 1848

was ever in.”<sup>21</sup> And Longfellow added his complaint against Berkshire: “I find it quite impossible to write in the country. The influences are soothing and slumberous.”<sup>22</sup>

Even Hawthorne admitted that “the summer is not my natural season for work; and I often find myself gazing at Monument Mountain broad before my eyes, instead of at the infernal sheet of paper under my hand.” And he protested to his publisher that he could not hurry: “I must not pull up my cabbage by the roots, by way of hastening its growth.”<sup>23</sup> By the second summer, the “horrible, horrible, most horrible climate” weighed more heavily: “One knows not, for ten minutes together, whether he is too cool or too warm: but he is always one or the other; and the constant result is a miserable disturbance of the system.”<sup>24</sup> Son of a sea-captain, he, not too strangely, thought he might be happier near the sea. Even so, years later, on a tour of Scotland, he recalled the Berkshire Hills and thought them grander than the Highlands.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly the reaction to the country was a matter of the individual writer’s temperament. Catharine Maria Sedgwick wrote all of her novels here, whether using a local background or not. Hawthorne in a short seventeen months in the Red House, wrote all of *The House of Seven Gables* and *The Wonder Book* and parts of *The Blithedale Romance*. He apparently kept a schedule of so much time spent writing every morning, and if Melville arrived to see him before that time was up, his wife Sophia provided a comfortable seat in the sitting room with the magnificent view of Monument Mountain and a copy of Emerson’s essays for the younger man to pass the time while he waited for Hawthorne.

Although Melville himself, after the move to Arrowhead, had the problem of running a farm on the side, at least during the first year, while *Moby-Dick* was being finished, he seems to have managed some regularity. He wrote to Duyckinck in December, 1850:

Do you want to know how I pass my time? I rise at eight – thereabouts - & go to my barn – and say good-morning to the horse, & give him my breakfast. (It goes to my heart to give him a cold one, but it can’t be helped) Then, pay a visit to my cow – cut up a pumpkin or two for her, and stand by her to see her eat it – for it’s a pleasant sight to see a cow move her jaws – she does it so mildly & with such a sanctity – My own breakfast over, I go to my work-room & light my fire – then spread my M.S.S. on the table – take one business squint at it, & fall to with a will. At 2-1/2 p.m. I hear a prerecorded knock at my door, which (by request) continues till I rise & go to the door, which serves to wean me effectively from my writing, however interested I may be. My friends the horse & cow now demand their dinner & I go & give it to them. My own dinner over, I rig my sleigh & with my mother or sisters

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<sup>21</sup> Lowell to Sydney H. Gay, August 4, 1846, in Charles Eliot Norton, ed., *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, I, 116.

<sup>22</sup> Longfellow, II, 127: journal entry for August 1, 1848.

<sup>23</sup> Randall Stewart, *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

start off for the village . . . . My evenings I spend in a sort of mesmeric state in my room – not being able to read – only now and then skimming over some large printed book.<sup>26</sup>

On excursions with summer visitors, Melville was in a fine mood, or smoking and talking metaphysics in the barn during a snowstorm visit from Hawthorne in March. But when the summer was over, and *Moby-Dick* was published, Hawthorne had left Lenox in November, 1851, the cruel fact of the need to make money from his writing to support his large household came painfully home. Months earlier he had written Hawthorne:

Dollars damn me . . . . What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, - it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the other way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches.<sup>27</sup>

Melville was further bothered by the coolness of the year round residents of Pittsfield to him. Their objection to his “religious views” and what they considered “irreverent language” shut him off, except for the Morewoods, from the social intercourse he so much enjoyed – indeed, needed – to stimulate creative activity. *Pierre* was thus written largely in “a state of morbid excitement,” caused, as Mrs. Morewood reported, by his being “so engaged in a new work as frequently not to leave his room till quite dark in the evening when he for the first time during the whole day partakes of solid food.”<sup>28</sup>

*Moby-Dick* had been dedicated to Hawthorne, “in token of my admiration of his genius,” and to this dedicatee Melville had once written exultantly:

I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling . . . . Knowing you persuades me more than the Bible of our immortality . . . . The divine magnet is on you, and my magnet responds. Which is the biggest? A foolish question – they are *One*.<sup>29</sup>

Long before *Pierre* was finished, the spirit of the summer was gone and Hawthorne had moved away from Berkshire. For companionship, Melville must now look north from Arrowhead to “nothing less than Greylock, with all his hills about him, like Charlemagne among his peers.”<sup>30</sup> Thus it was to that dominating feature of the landscape that Melville with cheerless bravado dedicated *Pierre*, “whether, thereto, The Most Excellent Purple Majesty of Greylock benignantly incline his hoary crown or no.”

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<sup>26</sup> Melville to Everet A. Duyckinck, December 12, 1850, in Jay Leyda, ed., *The Portable Melville* (New York, 1952), 424-25

<sup>27</sup> Melville to Hawthorne, June 1 (?), 1851, in Jay Leyda, ed., 430.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah A. Morewood to George L. Duyckinck, December 31, 1851, in Mansfield, “Glimpses,” p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> Melville to Hawthorne, November 17 (?), 1851, in Jay Leyda, ed., 453-55.

<sup>30</sup> “The Piazza,” *Piazza Tales* (1856)

*Pierre* (1852), of course, owed more to the local scene than the dedication, for the Broadhall was the model for the fictional Saddle Meadows, the real balance rock suggested the fictional Memmon Stone, one of the rocky outcroppings in the upper field of the Hopper became “Enceladus the Titan. . . writhing from out the imprisoning earth,” as the mountain dedicatee once known to the hero, Pierre Glendenning, as the “Delectable Mountain” became for him, as his tragedy deepened, the “Mount of the Titans.”

*Piazza Tales* (1855) took its title from the introductory sketch of Melville’s famous north porch at Arrowhead, where the tales were written. The tales themselves owe little to the Berkshire landscape or history. Some are bleakly pessimistic, as is also the novel, *The Confidence-Man* (1857). Still Melville was able to write, and what difficulties he had in personal mood and impulse and the persistence in critical and uncheerful themes probably have little relation to the fact that he was until 1863 a resident of Berkshire.

Even though Melville delighted in the vacation excursion, especially with jolly companions, it is clear that he never enjoyed the routines of regular country living as much as, for instance, Edith Wharton. In 1901, to escape “the watering place trivialities” of Newport, the Whartons built the “spacious and dignified house” they named the Mount, “overlooking the dark waters and densely wooded shores of Laurel Lake,” near Lenox. Mrs. Wharton years later described what coming to the “real country” of Berkshire meant to her:

If I could have made the change sooner I dare say I should never have given a thought to the literary delights of Paris or London; for the life in the country is the only state which has always completely satisfied me, and I had never been allowed to gratify it, even for a few weeks at a time. Now I was to know the joys of six or seven months a year among fields and woods of my own, and the childish ecstasy . . . swept away all restlessness in the deep joy of communion with the earth . . . There was a big kitchen garden outspread below the wide terrace overlooking the lake. There for over ten years I lived and gardened and wrote contentedly . . . the Mount was to give me country cares and joys, long happy rides and drives through the wooded lanes of that loveliest region, the companionship of a few dear friends, and the freedom from trivial obligations which was necessary if I was to go on with my writing. The Mount was my first real home, and . . . its blessed influence still lives in me.<sup>31</sup>

One of Mrs. Wharton’s friends, often a guest at the Mount, described her schedule:

. . . her writing was done early in the day, though very little allusion was made to it, and none at all to the infinite pains she put into her work or her inexhaustible patience in searching for

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<sup>31</sup> Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York, 1934), 124-25.

the material necessary to perfect it. By eleven o'clock she was ready for friends and engagements, for walking or garden work.<sup>32</sup>

Although Emerson found Williamstown too “noisy,” Lowell found Stockbridge too “quiet,” and Longfellow found Pittsfield too “slumberous” for effective work, all acknowledged the pleasure and refreshment they got from Berkshire. And even though Hawthorne objected to the rapid changes of the “horrible” summer climate, in no equal period of his life elsewhere was he so productive as in the eighteen months in the little Red House on the shore of Lake Mahkeenac. Despite intruding farm chores and constant financial worries, Melville got much writing done during the first half-dozen years in the environs of Pittsfield, though never again with such fine results as during the first year, while he was finishing *Moby-Dick*. Probably Edith Wharton combined pleasure and productivity more happily than the others. And she also found, as she claimed, material in the local environment – in Bear Mountain and the hill people – for such stories as *Ethan Frome* (1911) and *Summer* (1916.)

Starkfield, of the former story, had, of course, no faintest resemblance to Lenox, which was in no way representative of the back country, though not too far away from Lenox. Mrs. Wharton could have found rundown farms like Ethan's and many slopes like that down which Ethan and his wife's cousin Mattie sped in the bobsled deliberately aimed to hit the big elm near the bottom. The frustration and sense of entrapment which led to the choice of suicide as the only way to escape the tyrannical wife, Zeena, might well have been found in isolated country folk in Berkshire. And the stoicism with which the trio accepted the failure of even this drastic method of escape, the resignation to Mattie's life-long invalidism and Zeena's need to nurse her were traditional New England qualities.

*Summer* (1916) seems almost a conscious effort to show that tragedy does not require “the sadness of snow,” which had been so insistent in *Ethan Frome*. Charity was the five-year-old daughter of wild and shiftless mountain parents, “a drunken convict and a mother who wasn't ‘half human’ and was glad” to be rid of her, when Lawyer Royall brought her down from the mountain to solace his childless home in North Dorset and bring some cheer to the last years of his ill wife. The seduction of this naïve country girl in her teens by a charming and affectionate summer visitor, Lucius Harney, is a story that might have occurred in other settings but seems convincing enough against a Berkshire backdrop, since Harney has come from the city to sketch interesting eighteenth-century houses.

It is perhaps worth noting that Mrs. Wharton actually wrote both *Ethan Frome* and *Summer* in France, far from the Berkshire Hills. Indeed, *Ethan Frome*, with other names for the characters and slight variations of plot, was initially written in French in shorter form as a series of exercises for her

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<sup>32</sup> Millicent Bell, *Edith Wharton and Henry James* (New York, 1965), 79.

Parisian tutor about 1906 and only redone and expanded in English five year later.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps to write these stories of the local environment, Mrs. Wharton had to put at a distance the possibility of such inhibiting criticism as the reputed remark of an imperious Lenox matron, “As a family, Mrs. Wharton, we demand cheer!”<sup>34</sup>

Here at the Mount, Edith Wharton entertained her friends- the poet and editor Richard Watson Gilder, who summered in nearby Tyringham; lawyer and jurist Robert Grant, author of the novel, *Unleavened Bread*; from England, American playboy Howard Sturgis, author of a single novel, *Belchamber*; Walter Terry; “Bay” Lodge, the poet son of the senator; the playwright Clyde Fitch; and many others – but most importantly Henry James, who for a long time had thought that Mrs. Wharton “*must* be tethered in native pastures”<sup>35</sup> and was a guest at the Mount in 1904, 1905, and 1911.

James’ first visit to the Mount came in October, when the Berkshire autumn, “the mere *fusion* of earth and air and water, of light and shade and colour,” proved for him “the almost shameless tolerance of nature for the poor human experiment.” Here was the “land beyond any other, in America, today. . . of leisure on the way to legitimation, of the social idyll, of the workable, the expensively workable, American form of country life.”<sup>36</sup> Using such terms as “the verdurous vista” and “the great elm gallery” to describe the tree-lined streets, the long-absent expatriate toured the hills and valleys of the region in the Wharton automobile, finding “the grand manner” in “the winding ascent, the rocky defile, the sudden rest for wonder, and all the splendid reverse of the medal, the world belted afresh as with purple sewn with pearls – melting. . . into violet hills with vague white towns on their breasts.”<sup>37</sup> For James, the automobile, as he enjoyed its use in Berkshire, was “a great transformer of life and of the future,” able “to rope in, in big free hauls, a huge netful of impressions at once.”<sup>38</sup>

One of Henry James’ favorite drives was “a particular plunge, from one of the highest places, through an ebbing golden light, into the great Lebanon ‘bowl,’ the vast, scooped hollow in one of the hither depths of which. . . we found the Shaker settlement once more or less, I believe, known to fame, ever so grimly planted,” like “a Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas – though more savagely clean and more economically impersonal.” James thought the whole settlement, then but sparsely inhabited, wore “the strangest air of active, operative death . . . the oddest appearance of

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<sup>33</sup> *A Backward Glance*, 295-96; Grace Kellogg, *The Two Lives of Edith Wharton* (New York, 1965), 164-66.

<sup>34</sup> Grace Kellogg, 161 n.

<sup>35</sup> James to Mary Cadwalader Jones, 1902, in Millicent Bell, 74.

<sup>36</sup> Henry James, *The American Scene*, Leon Edel, ed. (New York, 1968), 40.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49

<sup>38</sup> Henry James to William James, July 2, 1905, in Percy Lubbock, ed., *The Letters of Henry James* (London, 1920), II, 36.

mortification made to ‘pay.’<sup>39</sup> But for James the decay of the Shaker community represented not New England, but New York, which seemed “a looser, shabbier, perhaps even rowdier world.”

The automobile made a major difference for literary and other visitors to Berkshire by increasing accessibility and expanding horizons. Even Henry Adams, kept from his usual summer in France by the war, was happy in 1916 to rent for six summer months Ashintully, the huge Tytus estate in Tyringham, with many of his friends within easy reach by car. He wrote one of his English correspondents:

Indeed this summer I have the swellest house and the most guests I ever did have, and feel like a small stockbroker who has made money; - only I have not made money, but spent it.<sup>40</sup>

Another letter reporting the visit of brother Brooks Adams and his wife, also mentioned what was apparently a typical activity of the summer:

Yesterday I was assumed in driving over to Harry White’s . . . to meet old Joe Choate there, now eighty-three, and we old people could abuse all our juniors.<sup>41</sup>

White lived then at Elm Court, just south of Lenox and Choate had obviously come up from Naumkeag, Henry Adams, who called himself “stable companion to statesmen,” and these two former ambassadors doubtless enjoyed criticizing the diplomacy which had permitted World War I. When age had reduced or even eliminated the urge and physical strength for writing, proximity in a delightful summer setting permitted vis-à-vis conversation. The automobile, indeed, made many differences for literary and other visitors to Berkshire. Its widespread use marked the end of the nineteenth century more meaningfully than any date on the calendar.

Writing under the pseudonym of “Godfrey Greylock” in 1852, J.E. A. Smith, the young poet friend of the Melvilles and the Morewoods, prefaced his volume, *Taghconic*, with a dedication to “Summer Ramblers on the Berkshire Hills,” in which he listed the charms the county offered:

If the traveler. . . asks for a retreat among wild picturesque scenery, adorned by much that is pleasant and refined in his city life, but far removed from its heat and turmoil; where he can draw closer the silken cord of social intercourse, and yet throw loose some of its galling chains; where nature ennobles by her greatness but never chills with a frown, he may find it all amid the varied beauty of the Berkshire Hills.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Henry James, *The American Scene*, 49.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Adams to Charles Milne Gaskell, October 3, 1916, in Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Letters of Henry Adams (1892-1918)*, (Boston, 1938), 641.

<sup>41</sup> Henry Adams to Charles Milne Gaskell, July 10, 1916, in W.C. Ford, ed., 640.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph E. A. Smith *Taghconic: The Romance and Beauty of the Hills* (Boston, 1852). See also account of meeting Melville and Hawthorne in 1879 edition of this book, p. 318.

More prosaically Evert Duyckinck had in 1851 praised the Melville family's way of life in Pittsfield: "simple and excellent with country nature and city taste."<sup>43</sup>

No literary visitor or resident was unresponsive to the nature of the region. For William Cullen Bryant, while still a Berkshirite, "The groves were God's first temples," but the "various language" which Nature spoke to him was perhaps best expressed in the invocation to his poem, "Monument Mountain" :

Thou who wouldst see the lovely and the wild  
Mingled in harmony on Nature's face,  
Ascend our rocky mountains. Let thy foot  
Fail not with weariness, for on their tops  
The beauty and the majesty of earth,  
Spread wide beneath, shall make thee to forget  
The steep and toilsome way. There, as thou stand'st,  
The haunts of men below thee, and around  
The mountain-summits, thy expanding heart  
Shall feel a kindred with that loftier world  
To which thou art translated, and partake  
The enlargement of thy vision . . .

For inspiration and refreshment, for communion with the "visible forms" of nature and with friends – the one making easier the other – for intimacy, the casual visitor and the literary man alike came to Berkshire. Intimacy was the main feature of the 1850 Monument Mountain picnic and the "battle of lions" that followed at Dudley Field's dinner in Laurel Cottage – an occasion for Holmes, Hawthorne, Melville, and others to argue and laugh together, with mutual stimulation.

After Edith Wharton had settled at the Mount, intimacy of a slightly different, but no less significant, order characterized the small assemblies of friends under the striped awning of the terrace, gathered perhaps for "literary rough-and-tumbles," as the hostess called them, perhaps to hear Henry James read poetry. Mrs. Wharton recorded two memorable evenings:

... I had never heard Henry James read aloud – or known that he enjoyed doing so – till one night some one alluded to Emily Bronte's poems, and I said I had never read

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<sup>43</sup> Evert A. Duyckinck to his wife, August 7, 1851.



“Remembrance.” Immediately he took the volume from my hand . . . I had never before heard poetry read as he read it; and I never heard it since. He chanted it, And he was not afraid to chant it, as many good readers are, who, though they instinctively feel that that the genius of the English poetical idiom requires it to be spoken *as poetry*, are yet afraid of yielding to their instinct because the present-day fashion is to chatter high verse as though it were colloquial prose. James, on the contrary, far from shirking the rhythmic emphasis, gave it full expression. His stammer ceased as by magic as soon as he began to read, and his ear, so sensitive to the convolutions of an intricate prose style, never allowed him to falter over the most complex prosody, but swept him forward on great rollers of sound till the full weight of his voice fell on the last cadence . . . unaffected by fashion or elocutionary artifice. . . . Another day some one spoke of Whitman, and it was a joy to me to discover that James thought him, as I did, the greatest American poets. “Leaves of Grass” was put into his hands, and all that evening we sat rapt while he wandered from “The Song of Myself” to “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” (when he read “Lovely and soothing Death” his voice filed the hushed room like an organ adagio), and thence let himself be lured on to the mysterious music of “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” reading, or rather crooning it in a mood of subdued ecstasy till the fivefold invocation to Death tolled out like the knocks in the opening bars of the Fifth Symphony.<sup>44</sup>

Whereto answering, the sea,  
Delaying not, hurrying not,  
Whispered me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,  
Lisped to me the low and delicious word death,  
And again death, death, death, death,  
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my aroused child’s heart,  
But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,  
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and leaving me  
Softly all over,  
Death, death, death, death, death.

After this touching recital, in what Mrs. Wharton called “one of his sudden humorous drops from the heights,” Henry James – still talking of Whitman – “flung up his hands and cried out with the old stammer and twinkle: ‘Oh, yes, a great genius; undoubtedly a very great genius! Only one cannot help deploring his too-extensive acquaintance with the foreign languages.’”

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<sup>44</sup> Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 185-86.

Not wishing to end too much on the heights, I am now tempted to ask: Would the twentieth century perhaps bring to Berkshire “too-extensive acquaintance” with the motor car, so that communion with nature and such moments of intimacy as those at Laurel Cottage, at Naumkeag, and at the Mount would be increasingly rare? On the eve of American entry into World War I, as many lingering echoes of the nineteenth century and the men of that century died out, there was assuredly no hint that the lure of Berkshire would be less strong, though it might be different, for literary men and women in the twentieth century.