



The Days of Henry Thoreau

Walter Harding

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"The best biography we have had." — Carl Bode, *The New York Times Book Review*

Henry David Thoreau is generally remembered as the author of *Walden* and "Civil Disobedience," a recluse of the woods and political protester who once went to jail. To his contemporaries he was a minor disciple of Emerson; he has since joined the ranks of America's most respected and beloved writers. Few, however, really know the complexity of the man they revere — wanderer and scholar, naturalist and humorist, teacher and surveyor, abolitionist and poet, Transcendentalist and anthropologist, inventor and social critic, and, above all, individualist.

In this widely acclaimed biography, outstanding Thoreau scholar Walter Harding presents all of these Thoreaus. Scholars will find here the culmination of a lifetime of research and study, meticulously documented; general readers will find an absorbing story of a remarkable man. Writing always with supreme clarity, Professor Harding has marshaled all the facts so as best to "let them speak for themselves." Thoreau's thoughtfulness and stubbornness, his more than ordinarily human amalgam of the earthy and the sublime, his unquenchable vitality emerge to the reader as they did to his own family, friends, and critics.

You will see Thoreau's work in his family's pencil factory, his accidental setting of a forest fire, his love of children and hatred of hypocrisy, his contributions to the scientific understanding of forest trees, and other more and less familiar aspects of the man and his works. You will find the social as well as the reclusive Thoreau. Reactions to him by such notable contemporaries as Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Walt Whitman — with Thoreau's responses to them — are given in rich detail.

The totality is as complete, accurate, fair, vivid, and fully rounded a portrait as has ever been drawn. On its appearance, Professor Harding's work immediately established itself as "the standard biography" (Edward Wagenknecht). It has never been superseded. For this Dover edition, the author has corrected minor errors, provided an appendix bibliographically documenting hundreds of facts, and contributed an Afterword updating some of his findings and discussing Thoreau scholarship.

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