

Introduction

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William Henry Harrison Murray is best known for his 1869 work *Adventures in the Wilderness or Camplife in the Adirondacks*. That book and the lecture series that followed introduced the urban public of the nineteenth century to the wonders of spending time in the wilderness and led to a tourism rush into the Adirondacks that lasted several years. The “Murray Rush” and the basic philosophy of nature that Murray espoused had a profound impact on outdoor life and has led some to regard Murray as the father of the outdoor movement and the vacation in America.

Murray was born in Guilford, Connecticut, on April 26, 1840. His childhood was spent reading, working, and, perhaps most tellingly, exploring the countryside surrounding the family homestead. Murray attended Yale University, graduating in 1862, and later the East Windsor Hill Seminary. As a Congregationalist minister in Connecticut, his oratorical abilities were honed, and in 1869, the twenty-nine-year-old was asked to become the minister of the famed Park Street Church in Boston, Massachusetts. Murray’s larger-than-life personality shone in Boston, often against the wishes of his more conservative congregation. His passions included camping in the Adirondacks, hunting and fishing, and, perhaps worst of all in the eyes of his church, horses.

After leaving Park Street Church in 1874, W. H. H. Murray started his own church in Boston, invested in a wagon company, went bankrupt, traveled, lectured, and lived for various periods of time in San Antonio, Texas; Montreal, Quebec; and Burlington, Vermont. Eventually, Murray returned to his childhood home in Guilford, Connecticut, and there, with his second wife, devoted his remaining years to raising his four beloved daughters.

His circle became complete in 1904 when Murray died in the same room that he had been born in some sixty-four years before.

While *Adventures* was Murray's first book, it was far from his last. From 1869 to his death in 1904, Murray wrote and published many works. His subsequent books included tomes on breeding horses, the deficiencies of deacons, Lake Champlain and yachting, traveling across Canada, and education. His written work reflects his many passions, which he ever sought to share with the public, and his evolution as a preacher, thinker, and man in late nineteenth-century America.

Murray's passions were many, but the Adirondack Mountains always remained foremost. For years he camped in the Raquette Lake area and traveled, usually by boat, throughout the New York wilderness. His lecture on the Adirondacks was presented more than five hundred times, and *Adventures* appeared in numerous printings and editions. Beginning in 1870, Murray began to compile and publish a collection of his short stories regarding the Adirondacks, as his *Adirondack Tales*. *Adirondack Tales* was published and sold, eventually by subscription only, throughout the later years of the nineteenth century. Comprising five volumes in all, the collection includes short stories, two longer novellas entitled *The Doom of Mamelons* and *Ungava*, and several of the lectures Murray had presented along the way.

It was within the stories presented in *Adirondack Tales* that Murray introduced his readers to three characters who took center stage in most of his wilderness stories: John Norton the Trapper, Henry Herbert, and the Lad (aka the Man Who Didn't Know Much). John Norton the Trapper was, for Murray, the prototypical "old-school, New England man." He was a man completely at one with nature and the wilderness. According to Murray, the character came about after a dinner with his publisher and other authors at which Ralph Waldo Emerson asserted that a good story required the inclusion of a female character, as sentimentality was impossible without one. Of that encounter, Murray tells us, "I was compelled to say that I did not see the need of introducing a woman into every story . . . and that in some masculine natures was a tenderness as deep, a sympathy as sweet, and a love as strong as existing in woman." At the

urging of his publisher, Murray took up this challenge and the result was John Norton.

Henry Herbert, an urban sportsman who befriends John Norton, is an avatar of Murray. Herbert is everything one would expect from a nineteenth-century city gentleman. He is well-educated and well-mannered. Herbert is also a lover of the wilderness and has gained a reputation as such. He is as at home in a canoe or on shore with a long rifle as he is back home in his genteel dining room. Herbert is the well-rounded, complete individual that Murray thought all should strive to be.

Finally, the man known only as the Lad, or the Man Who Didn't Know Much, is a character that exudes innocence and simplicity. He becomes friend and companion to both Norton and Herbert. The Lad joins the pair in many adventures and brings the wisdom of innocence with him, offering both characters and the reader lessons in the virtue of humility and kindheartedness.

At the heart of this compilation, four stories feature John Norton, Henry Herbert, and the Lad. In "The Story That the Keg Told Me," Norton and Herbert have their first meeting on the shores of a desolate Adirondack lake. There Murray spins a tale around the two men that focuses on the theme of redemption through time in the wilderness. The redemptive nature of the woods is a theme touched on again and again in Murray's writings and is made in reference to spiritual, mental, and physical health.

"Henry Herbert's Thanksgiving" takes the Trapper and the Lad out of the wilderness and into the genteel Boston home of Henry Herbert. In this holiday story, Murray stresses the joy and importance of brotherly love and the honor of service to others. It is also in this tale that Murray subtly explores Henry Herbert as the ideal, well-rounded man. Herbert's home, filled with both nineteenth-century Victorian luxuries and the trophies of a man well-familiar with wilderness adventure, is described as a strange conjunction of the semibarbaric and effeminate. Throughout the *Adirondack Tales*, we find that Henry Herbert represents a similar conjunction. The out-of-place Trapper is also used by Murray to again draw the reader's attention to the power of the natural world versus the very unnatural urban environment. Norton, when speaking to Henry about the inhumane poverty the Trapper has

witnessed in the city, reminds his friend that “yer eye gits keen in the woods, but the settlements blind ye.”

“The Ball” is actually a chapter excerpted from the longer story of “The Story of the Man Who Didn’t Know Much,” in which Murray introduces Norton and Herbert and the reader to the eponymous Lad. The chapter is included here as another good example of Murray’s play upon the interaction between the “civilized” world and the “natural world.” Here the Lad’s fiddle-playing allows Murray to express the transformational qualities of music when it comes from a place of pure innocence and genuine emotion. The story also provides more insight into the character of Murray’s prototypical New England man: John Norton. The author tells us that “his nature had within its depths that fine capacity which enabled it to receive the brightness of surrounding happiness and reflect it again,” and “the man of the woods, of the lonely shore, and of silence, seemed perfectly at home amid the noise and commotion of human merry-making.”

The last of the Norton/Herbert/Lad stories included in this volume is the story entitled “How John Norton the Trapper Kept His Christmas.” This story was included in the book *Holiday Tales*, published by Murray, and focuses on the events of John Norton’s Adirondack Christmas. While Henry Herbert and the Lad appear only in abstention, Murray uses Norton’s adventure to drive home the true meanings of Christmas, that of charity and love.

“Freemasonry of Outdoor Life” was originally published as part of Murray’s supplemental notes to his *Mamelons* and *Ungava* stories that comprised the fourth volume of *Adirondack Tales*. It is included here as a succinct expression of the esteem Murray placed on both the natural world and its abilities to aide humankind.

Finally, “Jack Shooting in a Foggy Night” is included as an example of the humorous stories that Murray peppered both *Adventures in the Wilderness* and *Adirondack Tales* with. While the story originally appeared in *Adventures*, Murray apparently liked it enough to publish it again as part of volume 4 of *Adirondack Tales*. It is a silly story in which Murray is the narrator. Like all of the stories that were originally included in *Adventures*, Murray

has left it to his readers to decide whether “Jack Shooting” is true account or fable.

The words included in this collection were first written well over one hundred and forty years ago by a man convinced of the importance of interaction between man and nature. Murray believed that the complete and healthy individual combined elements of both the natural and educated world. He recognized the curative powers that time in the wilderness had for nineteenth-century urban dwellers who faced the daily tribulations of rapid industrialization. At their core, these stories remain relevant in today’s frantic world filled with distractions that Murray could not begin to imagine. While the negative impacts of the industrial revolution that plagued the cities of Murray’s America have been largely abated, today our too-hurried lives face constant bombardment from the distractions of high technology. It is not hard to imagine William Henry Harrison Murray’s cure for our modern ills: “Put the screen down, leave the virtual behind, get off the couch and get into the woods.”

I leave you reader with the words of my great-great grandfather:

To all that camp on shores of lakes, on breezy points, on banks of rivers, by sandy beaches, on slopes of mountains, and under green trees anywhere, I an old camper, a wood lover, an aboriginal veneered with civilization, send greeting. I thank God for the multitude of you; for the strength and beauty of you; for the healthiness of your tastes and the naturalness of your natures. I eat and drink with you; I hunt and fish with you; I boat and bathe with you; and with you by day and night enjoy the gifts of the good world. Kneeling on the deck of my yacht, stooping far over and reaching low down to fill to the brim the old camping cup that longer than lives of some of you has never failed my lips, and holding it high in the bright sunlight I swing it to the circle of the horizon and standing, bare-headed, with the strong wind in my face, I drink to your health, O campers, whoever and wherever ye be. Here’s health to you all and long life on the earth and something very like camping ever after.

—W. H. H. Murray