

# Introduction

William Henry Harrison Murray or “Adirondack Murray” as much of the late-nineteenth-century public, both admirers and detractors, called the man, was a Boston preacher who, in 1869, started a movement with the publication of his book *Adventures in the Wilderness, or Camp Life in the Adirondacks*. Murray’s *Adventure in the Wilderness*, at once travel guide and storybook, advocated time in nature, specifically New York State’s Adirondack Mountains, as an essential gateway to both physical and spiritual health. It is for this book and his advocacy of the importance of nature and camping to the health of modern industrial city-dwelling men and women that Murray was most well known during his lifetime, and, indeed, remembered today.

An examination of Murray’s life reveals an individual of far more depth and interest, however. From the 1860s until his early-twentieth-century death, Murray was a famous preacher, popular writer and lecturer, an equine enthusiast, patent owner, publisher, businessman, lumberman, temperance advocate, free lover, women’s right advocate, and advocate for educational reform. As one contemporary remarked, William Henry Harrison Murray was a miscellaneous man.

Murray’s nineteenth-century exploits are at times tragic, comic and even bewildering. Indeed, his life can sometimes seem less probable than that of any of the characters he invented in his many books and stories. As a youth, Murray displayed characteristics of the young rascal, a trait he never fully grew outgrew. But while he surely displayed a talent for mischief, his ability to focus intensely on an object he was passionate about was also evident first in youth, and then throughout his life.

Murray was a man of passion. As a youth, he became passionate about his own education—working on neighboring farms in Guilford,

Connecticut, in order to put himself through the newly formed Guilford Institute, and later Yale College. After a fairly unremarkable four years at Yale, Murray's intensity became focused on his calling as a Congregationalist minister. Starting in rural Connecticut towns, his dedication to the perfection of the sermon, and what he called "old time theology" led to the rapid rise of his fame as a preacher and a blossoming career that culminated at the head of Boston's well-known Park Street Church.

It was his pursuit of fine oratory skill to further his ecumenical leadership that led Murray to begin to write outside of his traditional ministerial duties. To better master his command of the English language, he determined to write on a daily basis. Murray wrote about what began to interest him more than anything else at that time, the Adirondacks and his experiences in that wilderness in upstate New York.

Thus, Murray's drive to become a better minister resulted in the creation of wilderness stories that would become the basis for the book from which he would derive his time-tested fame, *Adventures in the Wilderness*. His passion for the wilderness and advocacy of the many benefits of spending time in nature captivated the urban public of the late nineteenth century and drove thousands to seek the solace of the Adirondack Mountains.

Murray's congregation at Park Street Church was forced to share the attention of its minister not only with the formidable Adirondack Mountains, but also with the horse. Murray loved horses above all other animals. During his successful career in Boston, the preacher earned enough to convert his childhood homestead in Connecticut into a large stock farm for his beloved horses, complete with a race track. Much like his passion for the wilderness, Murray was compelled to write about his theories on breeding horses. These were published in his large volume titled *The Perfect Horse*. The preacher also purchased a patent for what he dubbed the "Murray Wagon" and started a wagon manufacturing company with several investors.

By the mid-1870s, Murray's life was turned upside down in nearly every conceivable manner. His career, personal life, and business interests crumbled, and he fled New England. His tendency toward singleminded obsessiveness and passionate advocacy for his fancies remained intact, though less obvious during this period of his life.

Following his personal crash, Murray's political and philosophical outlook grew quite progressive in nature. Newspaper interviews and lectures reveal a man who appears to have adopted the thinking of the

late-nineteenth-century Free Love movement, as an advocate for progressive divorce laws and women's rights. He was, from the beginning, a steadfast and vocal proponent of temperance.

The passion-advocacy spark that drove Murray's life was reinvigorated during the early 1880s. Recently relocated from Montreal, Quebec, to Burlington, Vermont, Murray's eye for natural wonderment and spirit of adventure found a new object to explore and advocate for—Lake Champlain. Like the Adirondacks, Murray introduced Lake Champlain to his readers as a marvel of nature, and pushed for the increased interaction of people with the lake. In this spirit, he became convinced, and sought to convince others, that Lake Champlain was a premier sailing venue. Murray, along with other residents, formed the Lake Champlain Yacht Club and introduced the Sharpie class sailing vessel, a native vessel of Murray's childhood Long Island Sound, to Lake Champlain. As with the wilderness and horses, Murray felt compelled to put his passion for Lake Champlain in writing, and published *Lake Champlain and Its Shores* in 1890.

A subsequent resurgence in his popularity and corresponding success of his lectures, allowed for Murray's return to his childhood home in Guilford. Leaving Burlington behind, Murray moved his wife and two daughters back to his birthplace. There he fathered two more daughters and his final passion. Compelled by strong feelings against the offerings of public education, Murray homeschooled his four daughters and found the results superior. In typical Murray fashion, he would not suffer this discovery of a superior method to go unnoticed. In 1900, Murray published his final book, *How I am Educating My Daughters*. This work, like *Adventures in the Wilderness* and *Lake Champlain and Its Shores*, was an advocacy and how-to book, and in many ways reflected the progressive education reform movement prevalent during that time.

Thus, Murray's passions drove him in various directions during his lifetime, for both good and ill. His tale is one of a myriad of careers, loves, successes, and failures. It is a story of targets hit, near misses, and shots that went wildly astray.

Perhaps more importantly, his often singlemindedness regarding his passions led to effective advocacy. Again and again, Murray became passionate about an object of nature or social movement and then became a strong public advocate for that passion. He found virtues in his passions that he was compelled to share with and preach to the general public.

Certainly this pairing of unrelenting passion and advocacy culminated in the lasting impact Murray has had on the Adirondacks and American

attitudes toward nature. Yet, Murray's advocacy of the other objects that captivated him, Lake Champlain, horses, free love, and education, is also important, as it provides us with a written reflection of the social attitudes and changing values in the late nineteenth century and first years of the twentieth. This book explores these passions and the man behind them.