

Henry David Thoreau's Romantic Imagination of the Telegraph Harp

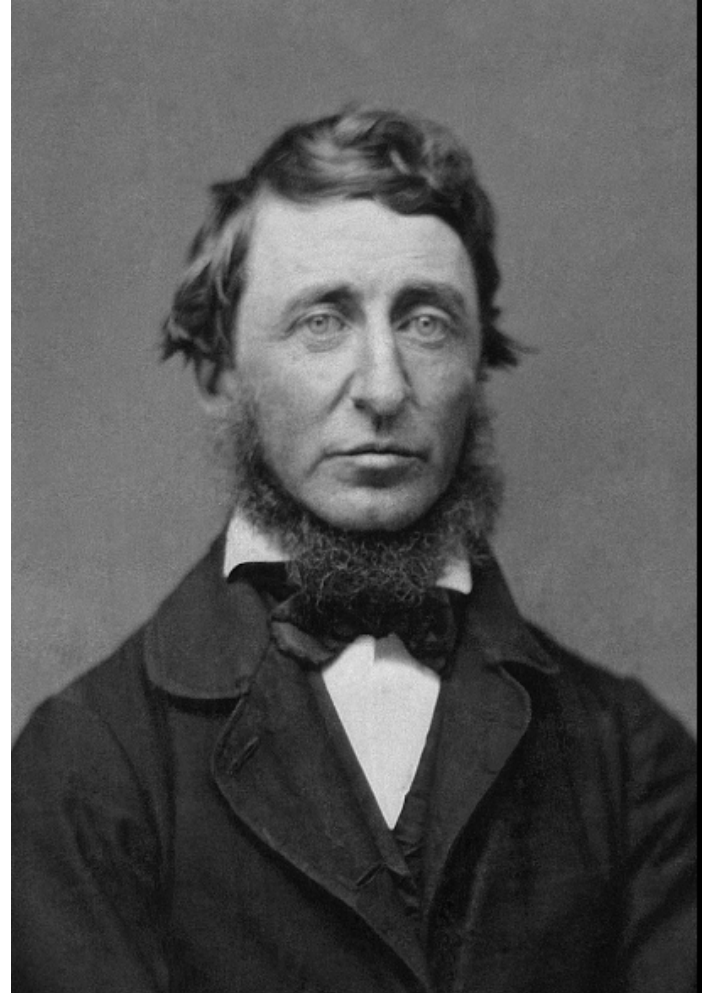
Fyza Parviz

Stanford University, Second Year Master of Liberal Arts



- Born
 - July 12, 1817
 - Concord, MA

- Died
 - May 6, 1862



Henry David Thoreau, 1856



- Lived at Walden Pond
 - 1845 - 1847
- Publication Date
 - 1854



Replica of Thoreau's one-room cabin at Walden Pond, image: Library of Congress

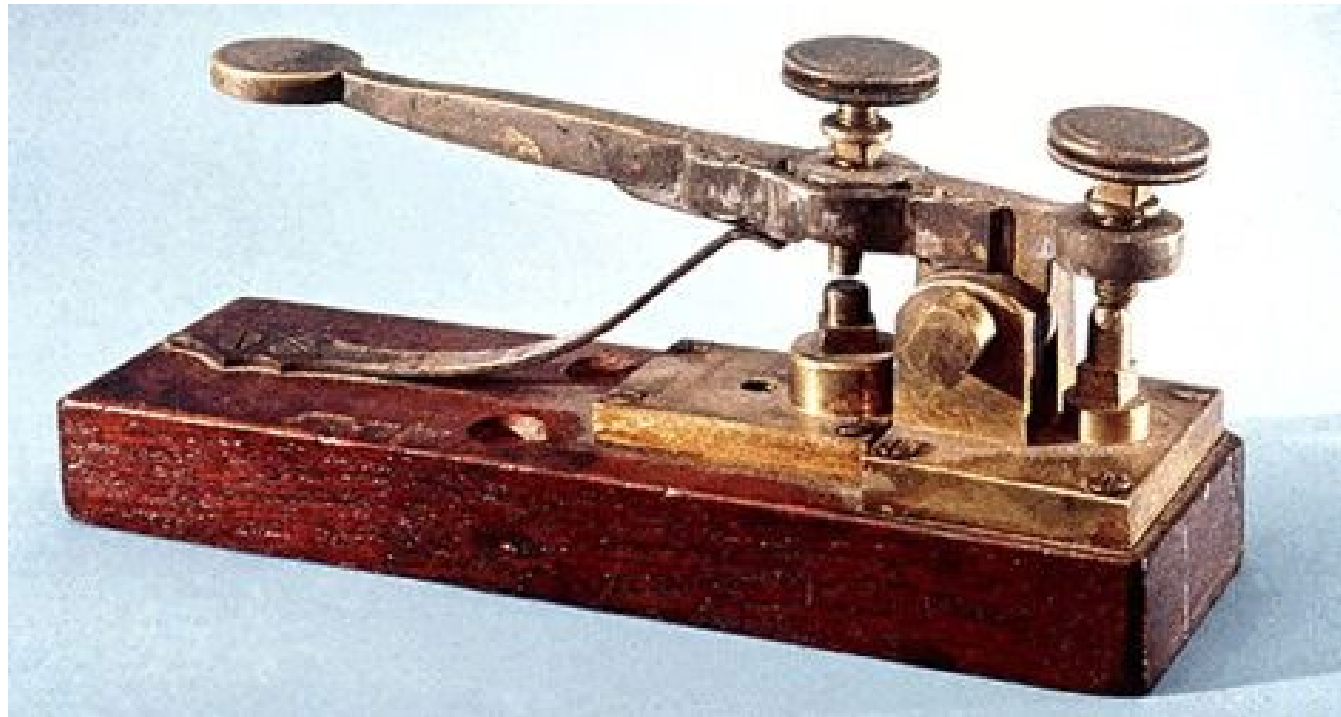
Walden Sat. July 5th 45

Yesterday I came here to live.
My house makes me think
of some mountain house, I have
seen, which seemed to have a
purer and more atmospheric
about them as if from the
halls of Olympus. It lodged at
the house of a saw-miller
last summer, in the Catskill
mountains, high up as Pine
Brook in the blue-berry &
raspberry region, where the
quiet and clean lives & cool
men seemed to be all one,
which had the ambrosial
character. It was the miller
of the Haverhill Falls,
I say, was a clean & wholesome
family inside and out -
like the house. The latter
was not plastered - my ceiling
and the inner doors were
not hung. The house seemed

Pay attention

Be amazed

Tell about it

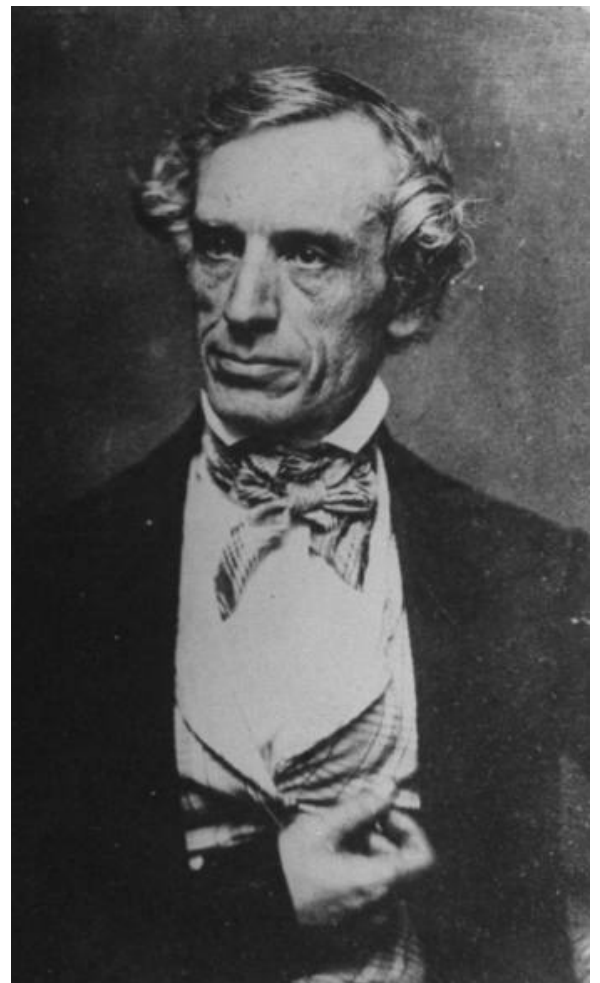


The Telegraph Key, Smithsonian Museum



- Born
 - April 27, 1791
 - Charlestown, MA

- Died
 - April 2, 1872



Samuel Morse, 1845

- **April 1844**
 - Washington to Baltimore Line

- **24 May, 1844**
 - First Message



What hath God Wrought!

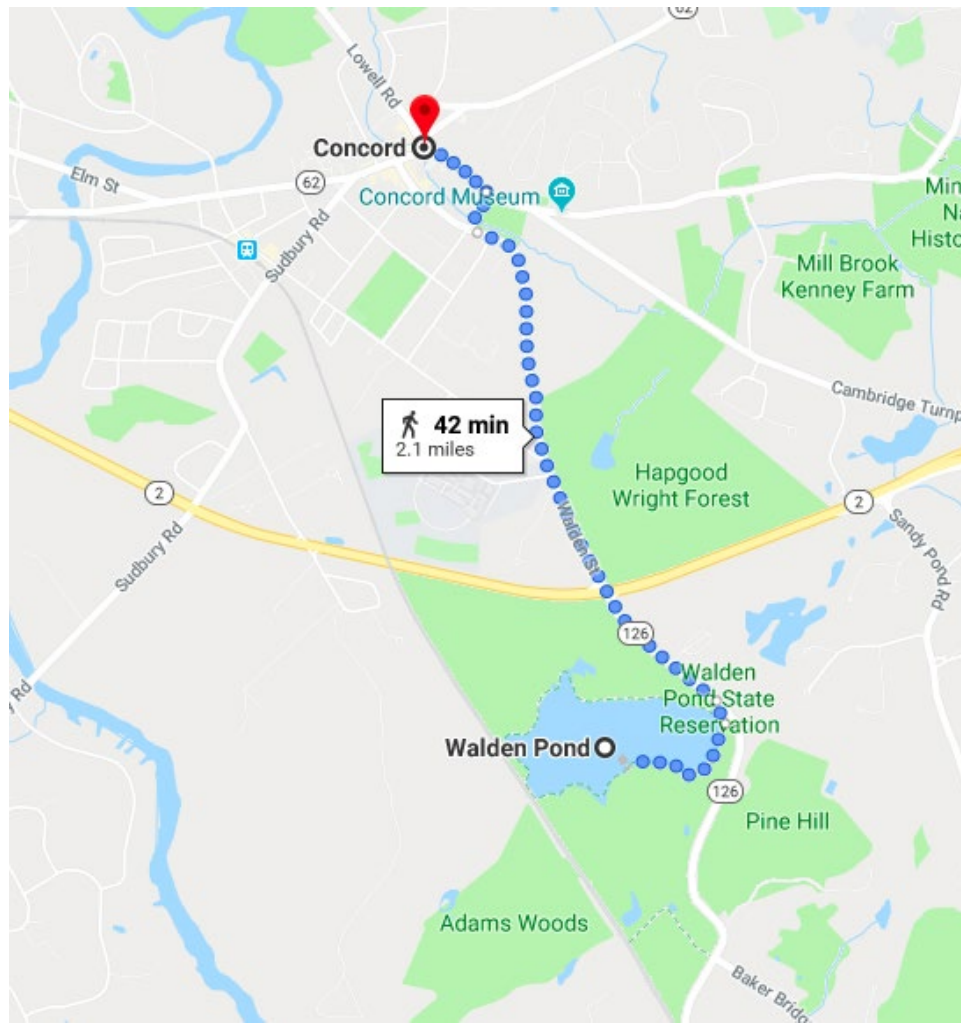
Annie G. Ellsworth, 1844



“I went to the woods because I wished to live **deliberately** , to front only the **essential facts of life** , and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear...”

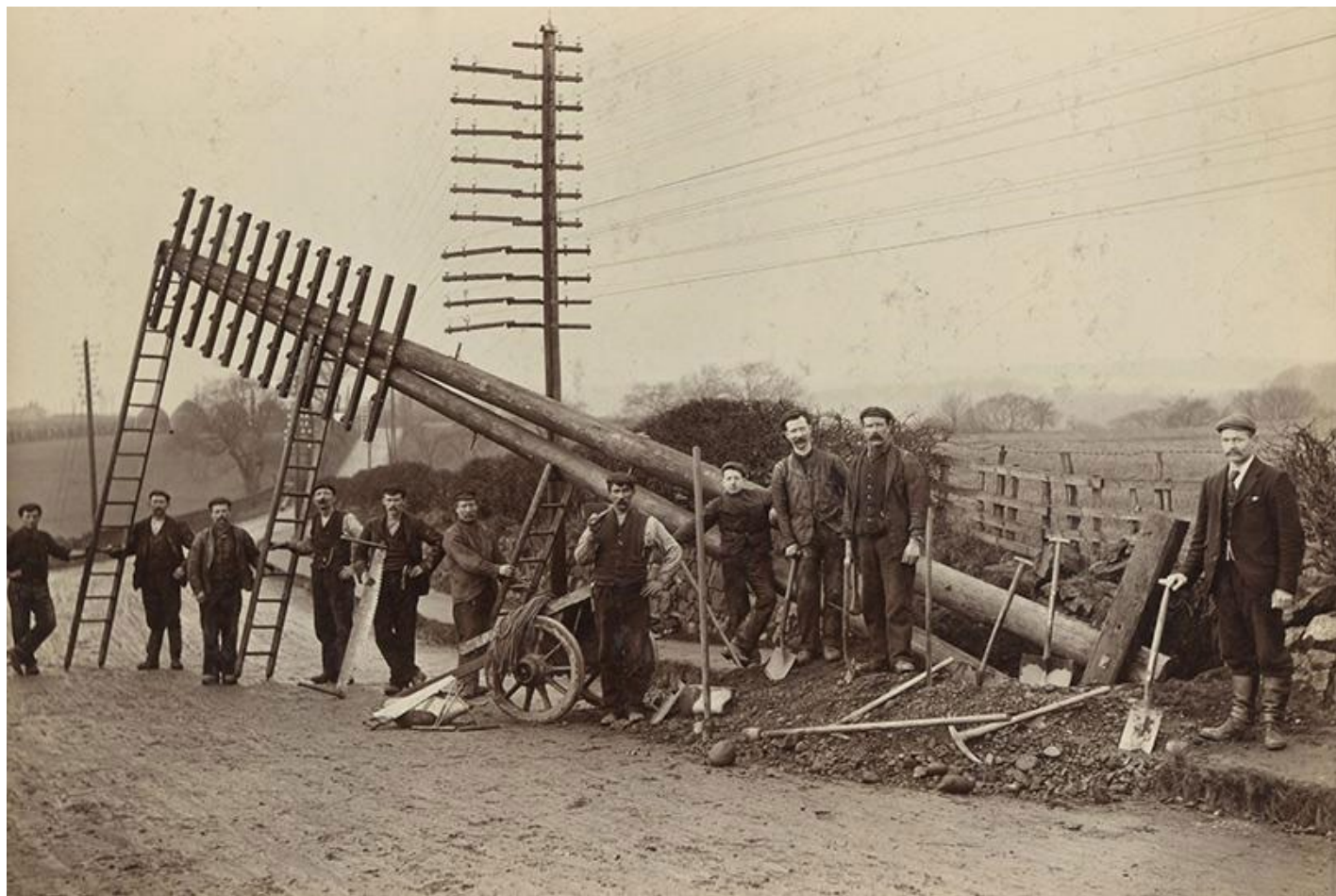
Henry

David Thoreau, *Walden*





Railroad Tracks near Walden Pond, photograph by Andrew Zander



Telegraph Engineers, 1895



“As I went under the **new telegraph -wire** , I heard it vibrating like a **harp** high overhead. It was as the sound of a far-off glorious life, a supernal life, which came down to us, and vibrated the lattice-work of this life of ours”

The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, September 3rd, 1851



“Yesterday and to-day the stronger winds of autumn have begun to blow, and the **telegraph harp** has sounded loudly...I put my ear to one of the posts, and it seemed to me as if every pore of the wood was filled with music.”

The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, September 22, 1851.

“... the winds caused this wire to vibrate so that it emitted **harp-like** and **æolian music** in all the lands through which it passed, as if to express the satisfaction of the gods in this invention.”

The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, September 22, 1851.



Aeolian harp made by Henry David Thoreau, Concord Museum



“Every swell and change or inflection of tone pervaded and seemed to proceed from the wood, the divine tree or wood, as if its very substance was transmuted. What a recipe for preserving wood, perchance, — to keep it from rotting, — to fill its pores with **music**!”

Journal of Henry David Thoreau, September 22, 1851.



“To have a **harp** on so great a scale,
girdling the very earth, and played on by the
winds of every latitude and longitude”

The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, September. 22, 1851



“The Telegraph harp ... allies Concord to
Athens and both to **Elysium** .”

The Journal of Henry David Thoreau," January 9, 1853.



“Thus as ever the finest uses of things are accidental. Mr Morse did not invent this music.”

The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, January 23, 1852





“We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate.”

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*



Suggestions for Further Reading

- <https://www.walden.org/collection/journals/>
- *Henry David Thoreau: A Life*
 - by Laura Dassow Walls

Thank You

Questions ?

Extra Slides

“As if the main object were to talk fast and not to talk sensibly. We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the Old World some weeks nearer to the New; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad, flapping American ear will be that the Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough.”

“And that the invention thus divinely honored and distinguished—on which the Muse has condescended to smile—is this magic medium of communication for mankind!”

Journal of Henry David Thoreau, September 22, 1851.

