

Thoreau and Walden

Henry David Thoreau, born in Massachusetts in 1817, was most notably a writer and philosopher. Thoreau was closely linked with the Transcendentalist movement, a group of people looking to change Americans' outlooks on the relationship between culture and nature.

"The one great rule of composition is to speak the truth."

In 1845 Thoreau built a small hut near Walden Pond, just two miles from Concord Massachusetts.

"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."

He lived in the cabin for two years and two months. Thoreau's most successful book, *Walden*, was written during and shortly following his time at Walden Pond.



Walden Pond

Thoreau died at the age of 45 after suffering from Tuberculosis.

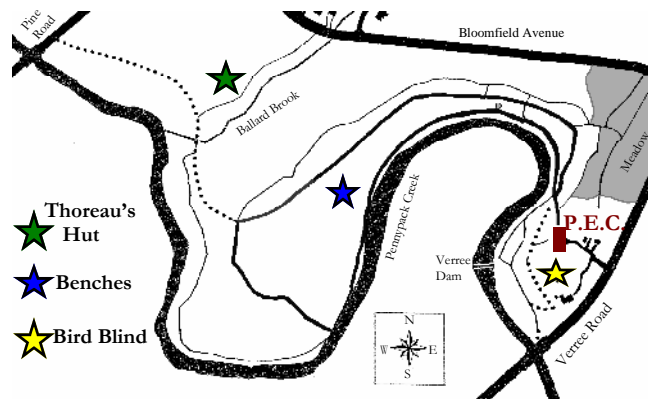
The Fairmount Park Art Association

initiated the program *New Land-Marks: public art, community, and meaning of place* in 1992. The Art Association is a long-standing Philadelphia cultural organization with a strong tradition of partnerships with Philadelphia communities. As was the case with all of the art projects associated with this program, community input from the Pennypack Environmental Center Advisory Council contributed to the conception and realization of this artwork.

Artist Ed Levine is a retired teacher from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he formerly served as director of the Visual Arts Program. He has had a long and distinguished career as an artist, thinker and educator.

(from the book New Land-Marks, by the Fairmount Park Art Association and edited by Penny Balkin Bach)

Embodying Thoreau was chosen as the theme by Artist Ed Levine after meeting with the Pennypack Environmental Center Advisory Council and recognizing the similarities between their mission to *inspire future generations to conserve and protect our environment* and the ideals of Henry David Thoreau.



EMBODYING THOREAU:

dwelling, sitting, watching

"In wildness is the preservation of the world."

H.D. Thoreau

Created by artist Ed Levine, in association with the Fairmount Park Art Association & Pennypack Environmental Center Advisory Council

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dwelling

Thoreau's Hut

Thoreau constructed the frame of his hut from trees he cut down in the immediate vicinity. He preferred a simple structure that would just meet his basic needs. Thoreau did all of his cooking outdoors when weather permitted. His nearest neighbor was a mile distant.

“Some of my pleasantest hours were during the long rainstorms...I sat behind my door in my little house and thoroughly enjoyed its protection.” - Thoreau

Levine's construction of *Thoreau's Hut* recreates the dimensions of Thoreau's cabin near Walden Pond. Sounds from nearby roads are audible from the *hut*, just as Thoreau often heard the sounds from a distant railroad track and road.

Think about the distractions in your own home. What benefits does a simpler house offer?

sitting

Benches

“My meditations are interrupted only by the faint rattle of a carriage or team along the distant highway.”

-Thoreau

Thoreau spent countless hours in meditation. Whether it was in his cabin, along the pond's shore, on a hike, or sitting in a boat on the water, he enjoyed being lost in thought while immersed in nature.



The oversized nature of these *Benches* “makes the sitter aware of the scale of the body in contrast to the surroundings,” says artist Ed Levine.

“The Benches become monumental in relationship to our bodies.”
-artist Ed Levine

Levine intends for the benches to place visitors “in a social and personal relationship to the park.”

Does sitting in these benches allow you to focus more clearly on your surroundings?



watching

Bird Blind

Different races of creatures awake to express the meaning of nature.

-Thoreau

Thoreau was envious of the deliberateness of all aspects of nature. He paid careful attention to the actions of all his fellow wildlife. He recognized their changes in behavior based on the seasons and altered his own actions accordingly.

Artist Ed Levine believes that birds in particular “give us an awareness of our inherent rootedness in the earth and our desire to transcend it.” The *Bird Blind* allows us to observe the birds without interrupting their behavior.

“When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence.”

-Thoreau