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Walden: From Cabin to Bath-House

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The citizens of Concord, Massachusetts, whose ancestors "fired the shot heard 'round the world," have mustered to defend one of the most famed cultural shrines in our nation. Nothing less than the woodland site of Henry David Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond is being threatened with mutilation by bulldozer and power-saw."

Cover Page Footnote

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WALDEN:
FROM CABIN TO BATH-HOUSE
JOSEPH C. DERITIS

The citizens of Concord, Massachusetts, whose ancestors "fired the shot heard 'round the world," have mustered to defend one of the most famed cultural shrines in our nation. Nothing less than the woodland site of Henry David Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond is being threatened with mutilation by bulldozer and power-saw.

With a request in hand for improved bathing facilities and outdoor refreshment stands at Walden, the Middlesex County Commissioners of the state of Massachusetts have begun their program of 'reconstruction.' Their aim is to transform the world-renowned site into an expanded recreation center.

For years the value of the Thoreau Memorial has been seriously impaired by the existing bathing facilities at Walden Pond. Any further additions to or expansion of the present recreational facilities would certainly add final ruin to the noble shrine. With modern transportation so rapid and efficient, the people of Massachusetts can easily go to other state ponds or bathing beaches.

The immediate problem is how this 'reconstruction' program can be reconciled with the deeds of gift which bestowed the shrine on the public, the object being to preserve the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau, its shores and woodlands (which have already undergone substantial devastation).

To be sure the error of the Middlesex County Commissioners at Walden is not intentional. It is rather an error of judgment. For their original aim was to develop and clean up Walden, which in itself is commendable, but they have confused the idea of an historic or cultural shrine with the idea of a recreation center for mass bathing. The two are incompatible.

The question now is: how to rectify the mistake? Legally this project is a violation of the deed of gift, but the law moves slowly. However, preventive measures are now being taken. I know of a young author, Truman Nelson, a member of the Thoreau Society, who is presently involved in the necessary court procedures to halt this Walden desecration. A committee also has been set up by this Society to legally stop this havoc at Walden. If you, as an interested reader, would like to add your word of protest, you may forward your letter of support to Mr. Truman Nelson, 20 Beckford Street, Salem, Massachusetts, or contact one of the editors of this magazine.

By all means, Walden Pond should be a shrine for the public. But any person who is not willing to hike into Walden as Thoreau himself did, and enjoy that green memorial, does not deserve the privilege. Let us not allow Walden Pond to be made a shrine to pop-bottles, beach-toilets and litter-bugs.