

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Simplify, simplify

Life has never been more high tech and complicated.

Most of us spend a significant portion of our days sitting in cars going from place to place. At work and at home, we spend much of our time looking at television screens and computer monitors.

Our smart phones, ever present in our pockets, purse, or hands, receive a continuous stream of emails, text messages, tweets, and alerts.

Rational people must wonder if all this commotion is really progress.

One of my favorite historical figures, Henry David Thoreau, lived modestly — and rationally — in 19th century Concord, Massachusetts. He wrote the influential philosophical book, *Walden*.

Thoreau believed in simplicity,

reflection, and an appreciation of the natural world around us.

The son of a pencil manufacturer, Thoreau went to Harvard, lived alone as an adult, and supported himself at various odd jobs for most of his life.

“...I found that by working about six weeks in a year, I could meet all the expenses of living. The whole of my winters, as well as most of my summers, I had free and clear for study.”

He read voraciously and was widely knowledgeable about history, philosophy, ecology, and literature.

At 28, he built a tiny cabin, measuring 10 by 15 feet, in a small woods around Walden Pond, owned by his friend and mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

He lived at Walden Pond for two years. Although he seemed to be roughing it, he was actually a 20-minute walk from his parents' and friends' houses in Concord.

Walden gives Thoreau's reflections on living in solitude. The book's most famous line: “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.”

The biggest lesson I learned from *Walden* was independent thinking: “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



A replica of Henry David Thoreau's cabin is displayed at Walden Pond State Reservation in Concord, Massachusetts. The reservation covers 335 acres of woods and Walden Pond itself. Unfortunately, modern traffic clogs the roads nearby.