

## *The History Corner*

### **When Ralph Waldo Emerson Spent the Night in New Hampton.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was one of the most famous American philosophers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century here and across the globe. He was the author of many books and, over his long career, delivered thousands of lectures across the country. “Waldo,” as he was known to friends, was invited to speak to the three literary societies at New Hampton School. Traveling with his daughter, Ellen, he addressed the societies on the evening of June 30, 1875, and spoke at commencement the next day. The Emersons spent the night in the boarding house of Abigail and William Dyer at 36 Main Street (now “Harvey House”). Waldo and Ellen were led in a parade to speak in the evening – and again to commencement the next day. As reported in the NHS Annual Catalogue for 1874-75, *“The anniversary exercises were made especially interesting and memorable by the presence of one of America’s ripest and ablest scholars, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who listened with manifest interest to the exercises, and expressed his satisfaction to the students in a few simple and beautiful words, at its close.”*

After the ceremony, Waldo and Ellen headed north to Plymouth, then and on to the White Mountains for a “vacation” through July 6. We are fortunate to have a detailed account of his visit in a letter that Ellen Emerson wrote to her sister, Edith. They traveled by train to Bristol, which is where the excerpts below begin.

*Mr. McIntyre [graduating NHS senior who went on to Dartmouth] received us at Bristol at about five o’clock. He had a carryall for us, and we first drove by one of the finest falls I ever saw – indeed two, one on each side of the bridge... and then through enchanting scenery under a perfect sky for about five miles to New Hampton, where we stayed at Mrs. Dyer’s, a place after my own heart.*

*A marshal with portentous baton took Father, and a humbler one with pink ribbons on a cane took me, and assigned us our places in the procession, and we marched in unbroken silence with infinite solemnity to the Academy... We were brought with much pomp into the Hall, which was very well filled... The audience was unusually responsive for a country audience, and a universal scream of delight hailed Miss Fanny Forbe’s speech about dress, though Father trembled a little beforehand lest they should be too orthodox and strait-laced to bare it. [In his address, “Social Aims,” Emerson quoted the experience of a woman who declared that being perfectly well-dressed gives an inner tranquility that cannot be found in religion!].*



**Waldo enjoys the morning news**



**Waldo and Family in Concord, MA. Ellen is standing on the left**

*When we had been marshaled home, a pile of autograph-books was brought in from the Academy... The first thing after breakfast the band of music and Academic Procession appeared at the gate and carried us once more to the Hall where they had regular Commencement Exercises till one o’clock. Mr. McIntyre had won our hearts driving us*

*over... He was first scholar and had the Valedictory.*

*We took the cars in Ashland and left them at the Pemmigewasset House at Plymouth. There we took tea, went to walk, saw a most lovely sunset, and I went to bed before dark you may be sure. The next forenoon we went strawberrying, and right after dinner took the stage for the Flume House. We had the box seat with the driver. The day was perhaps the most heavenly ever seen – clear July glory – and I being dressed for a sleigh ride was able to forgive the coldness of the wind, so there was no drawback, and Father enjoyed every inch of the way and could not have done praising everything. He thinks he never had such a delightful drive....*

*We're to take stage for Franconia at 1:20. We need to spend the night at the Flume House. We have bought a mug and tin-pail that I may go strawberrying. This amuses Father. He almost dies over it... He feels very rich, however, with the New Hampton money, and we are going to blow it out straight and have all the luxuries. He paid for the tin pail with pleasure.*

The next time you are driving down Main Street, imagine a solemn procession, led by a marshal with a baton, marching along with Ralph Waldo Emerson and his daughter, Ellen at the front. Perhaps Waldo might be smiling at the thought of all those strawberries he would be collecting as he enjoyed his honorarium from the Academy - after all, pie was his favorite dish for breakfast!

For more information on the history of the town, please visit the New Hampton Historical Society website at <https://www.newhamptonhistory.org/>

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