

Interpretive Panel #2, Draft 9-28-21: Who is John Burroughs?*

John Burroughs was born in sugaring season, on April 3, 1837, up the road, in his parents' Roxbury, New York farmhouse.

He was, paradoxically, a well-traveled farmer and public literary figure who cherished "things of life...near at hand."

John Burroughs died in Kingsville, Ohio on a train returning from Pasadena, California on March 29, 1921.

His last words were, *How far are we from home?*

John Burroughs became popular in the nineteenth century as a writer about home-making and birds, literary criticism, and "semi-philosophical speculation." He was an artist who would, with words, he said, "paint the bird, or the trout, or the scene, for its own sake, truthfully anyhow, and picturesquely if I can."¹

From the winter wren and summer rain, from his own reaching arm to the stars, he reflected:

Can anything transpire of which the Whole does not take cognizance...Be assured we are not detached, cut off, by all these billions of miles of space, but still as close and dependent as the fruit that hangs to the branch.²

John Burroughs valued "sharp eyes." By this he did not mean only keen seeing by eyesight, but, also insight. For example, he wrote:

I have often amused myself by wondering what the effect would be if one could go on opening eye after eye to the number say of a dozen or more...[and] an eye constructed with more and different lenses...We open another eye whenever we see beyond the first general features or outlines of things...Of course one must not only see sharply, but read aright what he sees"

And, he believed, what we see and hold in our hearts go hand-in-hand,

The eye sees what it has the means of seeing, truly. You must have the bird in your heart before you can find it in the bush. The eye must have purpose and aim. No one ever yet found the walking fern who did not have the walking fern in his mind.

Who do you find in your heart? How did they get there? Who is your heart leading you see right here around you?

¹ In Clara Barrus, ed., *The Life and Letters of John Burroughs*, Vol I, 212.

² "The Divine Ship" in *The Light of Day*, 1900

