

**Three Essays Written by Edmund Quincy Sewall Jr.
While at the Thoreaus' School in Concord, 1840¹**

Birds. [written April 4, 1840]²

The Ostrich is a very large bird which lives in Africa. It's wings are so small that it cannot fly but they assist the bird in running. It's colour I do not know. Some of their feathers are very handsome and are worn by ladies in their bonnets. The nest is merely a large hole scraped in the sand.

The eggs are said to be sometimes 30 or 30 in one nest and are very large.

They have very strong stomachs which are capable of receiving³ iron and glass without injury. They have been some times brought to this country for a show.

I saw some once in Boston. I have never heard what their food consists of, and so not see what they can find in these deserts, unless it be the large insects which are said to infest them.

The eagle is also a large bird.

They have very strong wings and ~~legs~~ feet which last are armed with very large hooked claws. I have heard of an eagle who when he was shot had a fish in his claws weighing fifteen pounds. Their food is small birds and animals and the bald eagle also has a great liking for fish which he often obtains by robbing the Fish Hawk. Their sight is exceedingly acute and they are able to look at the sun without winking. The nest is built of large sticks on high rocks and cliffs. The eggs are but few in number and when the young have grown big enough to take care of themselves they are said to be driven away by their parents.

Falcons are large birds too and were once much used in sporting being trained to pursue and bring down small game of which its food consists. Great sums were paid for them.

Their flight is astonishingly rapid and I have read that they fly from Iceland where they breed, to the north of Scotland and back in a day.

One had also escaped from the king of Denmark and was found in Malta 24 hours afterward.

The ^above^ respectfully submitted by E. Q. Sewall who hopes to be excused for mistakes.

Fishes [April 28, 1840]

Trout are a freshwater fish and said to be very good eating. I know nothing at all of their size, shape, color, habits, or haunts for the reason that I never saw one in my life.

Pickerel are good to eat, but I don't know how good, of some size no doubt but I don't know of what size, -- probably has some food but I don't know what it is, -- must

¹ Originals in the Sewall Family Papers, AAS.

² This transcription follows the originals in spelling (including misspellings) and punctuation. Editorial additions and explanations are given in brackets [as in this example]. Words crossed out by Edmund are written with strikethrough as in this example and later insertions by Edmund are set off by carets as in ^this^ example.

³ Sic. There is an "x" in pencil under this word.

live somewhere but I don't know what places they like best – all this for the above reason, that I never saw or heard one described.

Pouts. Good to eat. I don't know if they are the same with the hornpout which I have seen about 4 inches long. I remember once I had a new jackknife and was itching to try it's edge on something, and as we went to school we fished out a hornpout from a pool and as he lay upon the grass I transfixed him with my knife. Cold blooded heartless murderer that I was! but it is some satisfaction to know that the victim was *coldblooded* also. Poor murdered innocent! he deserved a better fate. I remember no freshwater fish of whom I know anything. I pass on to salt-water fish.

Whales are useful in furnishing oil and whalebone. They are the largest of living creatures.

Sharks are pretty large fish. They are voracious fish and are dangerous to divers in some countries. They are said to have 7 rows of teeth.

Swordfish are remarkable for having a long pointed horn on their snout. They attack whales and give them severe wounds. They have been known to pierce the bottom of a boat or even of a ship.

Salmon are I believe a salt-water fish though they come up into the rivers once a year. They spring up falls of considerable height. They are very good eating.

Mackerel are a small fish—real good. They are caught with hooks or with a gaff. They are salted in barrels. They are marked Nos. 1, 2 and 3 according to their quality.

Cod are mostly salted and dried. They are abominable when salted, as are all salt fish to my taste. They are caught in great numbers on the banks of Newfoundland.

Haddock are about the size of a cod. They have a long stripe along their sides. I have heard that this was occasioned by Old Nick. Happening to be at work one day hammering the rocks and placing them in some dangerous positions, the old gentleman dropped ~~out~~ his hammer into the sea and stepping down to get it up took up a haddock instead and the marks of his fingers are to be seen to this day as he had just been employed in stirring the brimstone fire and had got his hands ashy[?].

Menhaden ~~is~~ are sometimes eaten. I remember a time when a great haul of them was made and a gentleman put a great many of them in one of his fields for manure. The field was right beside the lane through which I went to school and when the wind blew toward the road O! what a stench! We used to hold our noses and run by as fast as we could leg it. *The way we pinched our noses was a caution* not to meddle with pincers. I would ~~have~~ rather have rode in a chaise with a skunk in the box.

Edmund Quincy Sewall.

My Uncle Ben [May 16, 1840]

My uncle Benjamin was a portly gentleman of 49 when I was born.⁴ I remember how he used to trot [?] me on his knee to the tune “This is the way the ladies ride” &c. And when I grew older he used to tell me many stories about himself and his adventures so that I know his history which I will now relate.

⁴ EQS, Jr. was born 1828, making Benjamin born in 1779.

He was born in the town of Toddyville in the state of [illegible, crossed out] Connecticut about the year of our Lord 1782 just before the war ended. According to his own account he had always been remarkably courageous, as a proof of which he declared that after he was 9 years old he was never afraid of a rat. He acknowledged that he had [correction mark?] previously somewhat afraid when he was sent down cellar but the following [inserted above line] circumstance proved that rate could be vanquished by a cool and courageous person.

His father who was a farmer loved hard cider like a certain other person much talked of at the present day⁵ and when he came home from the tavern often wanted a glass to top off with just before he went to bed. On the present occasion Uncle Ben happened to be up and his father sent him down stairs to the well known barrel. He went with fear and trembling for he fancied he saw some huge rat ready to snap at his nose at every step of the stairs. But he did not dare to ask his father to excuse him for fear it would only bring a box on the ear and a repetition of the command. On his way he went by a closet in the cellar the door of which was open. He thought he heard a rat [illegible, crossed out] gnawing. He looked—there was certainly one of the monsters making a hole in a fine cheese. He was so terrified that he did not dare to scream lest he should attract the attention of the animal so he crept softly upstairs. His father saw him and seized the pitcher intending to take a heavy swig but finding it empty hit Ben a tremendous slap exclaiming

[2]

“Why did you not get the cider as I told you to?” “There is a rat in the closet father” said poor Ben as well as he could for tears and terror, “and he is eating one of mother’s cheeses.” His mother hearing this sprang up [two or three words illegible, crossed out] “Show me the rat” said she “and it’s the last time he’ll steal cheese I can tell him.” So saying she snatched up the tamp in one hand and the shovel in the other and came down like a thunderbolt into the cellar. “There is a rat I declare” said she as she reached the closet and as the poor creature sprang from the cheese she gave him a blow which almost cut him in two and killed him on the spot.

Uncle Ben who had followed and seen this wondrous deed picked up the carcase and was never again afraid of rat or mouse. “If mother can kill them I’m sure I can” said he. As he grew up he became a great sportsman as his father had died in the mean time and there was a rusty old horse [?] pistol upstairs which he used to crack off on the 4th of July whenever he could make up a ninepence to buy some powder. He used to pick up a shot sometimes and he used to make slugs out of old nails and all sorts of things. He also put in stones on occasion. On the 4th of July he had been more than usually fortunate in procuring ammunition for he had bought a shilling’s worth of powder, had three buckshot and 4[?] wrought nails which he had found bent up for slugs.

Besides these he had a lead bullet which one of the boys had given him. These he eked out with stones. As last he had fired away the chief part of his ammunition and determined to put the ~~last~~ rest into one charge. It consisted of 4 fingers of powder, the bullet three slugs and 4 small stones.

⁵ William Henry Harrison (Presidential election of 1840).

[3]

A gang of boys had gathered round him and he was just priming when some boys came up with a poor cat whom they were going to drown. "Hold on a minute said Uncle Ben and I'll shoot her." The [?] cat was accordingly held out at arm's length by one of the boys by the hind legs the forelegs being tied and a stone hung round her neck so that she was forced to hang perpendicularly and could not help herself.

Uncle Ben put the barrel of the pistol close to the ear of the cat and fired. Her head was entirely blown away and they threw the carcass into the brush. "Ever after that" said Uncle Ben "I loved sporting." [illegible, crossed out] He was then 12 years old.

At the age of 17 he shot a skunk after having his clothes thoroughly perfumed.

A few years after this he had the end of one of his fingers blown off by his own beloved pistol. He was filled with wrath and when the wound was healed [sic] he took the pistol, filled it with powder and stopped off the muzzle tightly. He then put it on one side of a board fence and tied it firmly to a stake. Then he tied a string to the trigger and putting it through a crack in the fence pulled it and the pistol was blown to pieces. [illegible, crossed out] after his mother died he kept bachelor's hall in an old house and lived by his field and garden. He died when he was 88 years old.

Such is a skeleton of the life of uncle Ben.

Edmund Quincy Sewall.

[4]

Life of Uncle Ben
May 1840

Edmund Q. Sewall.