

HENRY D. THOREAU · WALDEN

The Accounts

Concord, 1845–1847

Thoreau lived at Walden Pond from July 4, 1845, to September 6, 1847, and printed what it cost him in the first chapter of his book, "Economy." These pages gather those accounts. The text is that of the first edition, Boston, 1854.

The House, 1845

Near the end of March, 1845, I borrowed an axe and went down to the woods by Walden Pond, nearest to where I intended to build my house, and began to cut down some tall, arrowy white pines, still in their youth, for timber. It is difficult to begin without borrowing, but perhaps it is the most generous course thus to permit your fellowmen to have an interest in your enterprise. The owner of the axe, as he released his hold on it, said that it was the apple of his eye; but I returned it sharper than I received it.

I have thus a tight shingled and plastered house, ten feet wide by fifteen long, and eight-feet posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap doors, one door at the end, and a brick fireplace opposite. The exact cost of my house, paying the usual price for such materials as I used, but not counting the work, all of which was done by myself, was as follows; and I give the details because very few are able to tell exactly what their houses cost, and fewer still, if any, the separate cost of the various materials which compose them:—

Boards,	$	8.03 ½	mostly shanty boards.
Refuse shingles for roof sides,		4.00	
Laths,		1.25	
Two second-hand windows with glass,		2.43	
One thousand old brick,		4.00	
Two casks of lime,		2.40	That was high.
Hair,		0.31	More than I needed.
Mantle-tree iron,		0.15	
Nails,		3.90	
Hinges and screws,		0.14	
Latch,		0.10	
Chalk,		0.01	
Transportation,		1.40	I carried a good part on my back.
In all,	$	28.12 ½	

These are all the materials excepting the timber stones and sand, which I claimed by squatter's right. I have also a small wood-shed

adjoining, made chiefly of the stuff which was left after building the house.

I intend to build me a house which will surpass any on the main street in Concord in grandeur and luxury, as soon as it pleases me as much and will cost me no more than my present one.

The Bean-Field, 1845

Before I finished my house, wishing to earn ten or twelve dollars by some honest and agreeable method, in order to meet my unusual expenses, I planted about two acres and a half of light and sandy soil near it chiefly with beans, but also a small part with potatoes, corn, peas, and turnips. The whole lot contains eleven acres, mostly growing up to pines and hickories, and was sold the preceding season for eight dollars and eight cents an acre. One farmer said that it was "good for nothing but to raise cheeping squirrels on." I put no manure whatever on this land, not being the owner, but merely a squatter, and not expecting to cultivate so much again, and I did not quite hoe it all once. My farm outgoes for the first season were, for implements, seed, work, &c., $14.72½. The seed corn was given me. This never costs anything to speak of, unless you plant more than enough. I got twelve bushels of beans, and eighteen bushels of potatoes, beside some peas and sweet corn. The yellow corn and turnips were too late to come to any thing. My whole income from the farm was

	$	23.44
Deducting the outgoes,		14.72 ½
There are left,	$	8.71 ½

beside produce consumed and on hand at the time this estimate was made of the value of $4.50,—the amount on hand much more than balancing a little grass which I did not raise.

Food, July 4 to March 1

By surveying, carpentry, and day-labor of various other kinds in the village in the mean while, for I have as many trades as fingers, I had earned $13.34. The expense of food for eight months, namely, from July 4th to March 1st, the time when these estimates were made, though I lived there more than two years,—not counting potatoes, a little green corn, and some peas, which I had raised, nor considering the value of what was on hand at the last date, was

Rice,	$	1.73 ½	
Molasses,		1.73	Cheapest form of the saccharine.
Rye meal,		1.04 ¾	
Indian meal,		0.99 ¾	Cheaper than rye.
Pork,		0.22	
All experiments which failed:			
Flour,		0.88	Costs more than Indian meal, both money and trouble.
Sugar,		0.80	
Lard,		0.65	
Apples,		0.25	
Dried apple,		0.22	
Sweet potatoes,		0.10	
One pumpkin,		0.06	
One watermelon,		0.02	
Salt,		0.03	

Yes, I did eat $8.74, all told; but I should not thus unblushingly publish my guilt, if I did not know that most of my readers were equally guilty with myself, and that their deeds would look no better

in print. The next year I sometimes caught a mess of fish for my dinner, and once I went so far as to slaughter a woodchuck which ravaged my bean-field,—effect his transmigration, as a Tartar would say,—and devour him, partly for experiment's sake; but though it afforded me a momentary enjoyment, notwithstanding a musky flavor, I saw that the longest use would not make that a good practice, however it might seem to have your woodchucks ready dressed by the village butcher.

The Whole Account

So that all the pecuniary outgoes, excepting for washing and mending, which for the most part were done out of the house, and their bills have not yet been received,—and these are all and more than all the ways by which money necessarily goes out in this part of the world,—were

House,	$	28.12 ½
Farm one year,		14.72 ½
Food eight months,		8.74
Clothing, etc., eight months,		8.40 ¾
Oil, &c., eight months,		2.00
In all,	$	61.99 ¾

I address myself now to those of my readers who have a living to get. And to meet this I have for farm produce sold

	$	23.44
Earned by day-labor,		13.34
In all,	$	36.78

which subtracted from the sum of the outgoes leaves a balance of $25.21¾ on the one side,—this being very nearly the means with which I started, and the measure of expenses to be incurred,—and on the other, beside the leisure and independence and health thus secured, a comfortable house for me as long as I choose to occupy it.

These statistics, however accidental and therefore uninstructive they may appear, as they have a certain completeness, have a certain value also. Nothing was given me of which I have not rendered some account. It appears from the above estimate, that my food alone cost me in money about twenty-seven cents a week. It was, for nearly two years after this, rye and Indian meal without yeast, potatoes, rice, a very little salt pork, molasses, and salt, and my drink water. It was fit that I should live on rice, mainly, who loved so well the philosophy of India.

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