Sweet Auburn

Winter 1987

The Newsletter of the Friends of Mount Auburn

The Friends of Mount Auburn take pleasure in printing the address of The Reverend Peter J. Gomes given at the dedication of Mount Auburn Cemetery's Willow Garden Crypts in June 1985. The Reverend Gomes' remarks express for us the essence of the purpose of the Friends, that Mount Auburn Cemetery is "more than just a cemetery, and dedicated to more than simply the memory of the dead. It is a place of living beauty and peace, a place of repose for the living."

The following is printed with permission of the author who is the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Minister in the Memorial Church, Harvard University.

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A Great And Good Idea

by Rev. Peter F. Gomes

What brings us together this afternoon is the continued expression of a great idea: for that is what Mount Auburn is: a great and good idea. When the Cemetery was founded in 1831, the first Garden, Rural Cemetery in America, it was to advance the idea that beauty and dignity, peace and serenity, were as essential to the reconsideration of death as to the experience of life. The founding of the Cemetery occurred at a time in our theological and moral thinking that saw death and nature not as opposite nor even as antagonists, but as a natural and shared experience by which life itself was defined. Thus, it was Mount Auburn's intention to be both beautiful and useful, a place for the burial of the dead, and for the rest and repose, not simply of the dead, but of the living as well. And so nothing was left to chance and everything here planned and designed to become a community of beauty for both the living and the dead, a variation on the theme of Josiah Royce made familiar to an earlier generation by my predecessor, Dean Willard L. Sperry, "the beloved community of memory and hope."

The idea of Mount Auburn worked so well from the very beginning, proved so attractive to the minds of Bostonians and their neighbors, that it soon became a part of the myth and lore of Boston itself, a venerable institution to be loved, envied, admired, and parodied. An example of this last sentiment is found in the bit of doggerel verse about the True Bostonian reprinted yet again by Barbara Rotundo in her essay on Mount Auburn published in 1974:

Mount Auburn Cemetery: A Proper Boston Institution

"A True Bostonian"

A soul from earth to heaven went
To whom the Saint as he drew near
Said, "Sir, what claims do you present,
To us to be admitted here?"
"In Boston I was born and bred,
And in her schools was educated;
I afterwards at Harvard read,
And was with honours graduated.

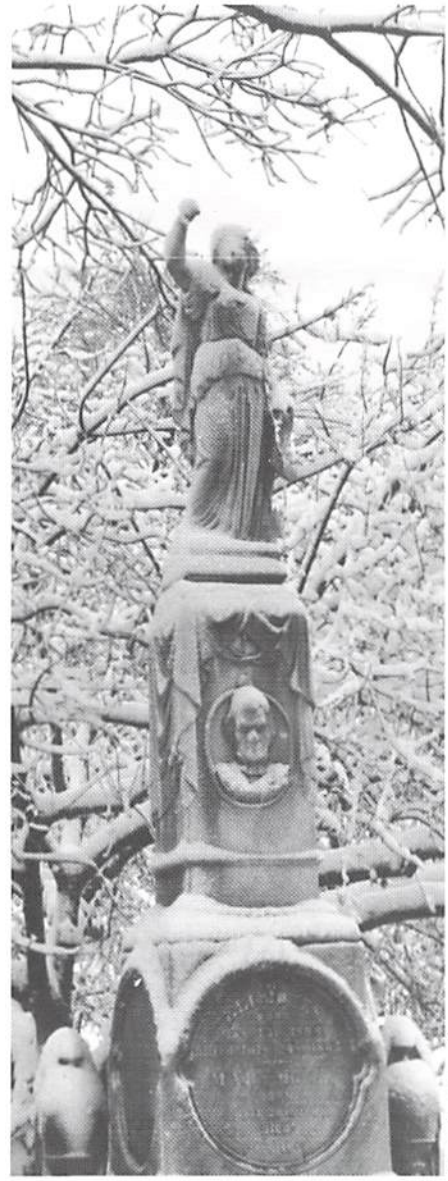


Photo by Eden Sizemore

In Trinity a pew I owned
Where Brooks is held in
such respect;
And the society is known
To be the cream of the select.
In fair Nahant, a charming spot
I own a villa, lawn, arcades,
And last a handsome burial lot
In dead Mount Auburn's
hallowed shades."
St. Peter mused, and shook his head,
Then as a gentle sigh he drew,
"Go back to Boston, friend," he said,
"Heaven isn't good enough for you."

I have had many say to me upon first seeing Mount Auburn in any of its beautiful four seasons: "This is as close to heaven as I am likely to get." That may not be necessarily so, but it makes the point.

Surrounded as we are by these monuments and tombs, the names that resound and those that now are but known to God and a few surviving relatives, we know that the dead are at home here: they receive us, even welcome us in a neighborhood of perpetual beauty and memory, the abode, as Henry James might have said, of "the sifted few." We curious who come to sketch or to gaze or to play trivial pursuit with the tomb stones might pause to remember T. S. Eliot's lines in Little Gidding where he says:

You are not here to verify, instruct
yourself or inform curiosity or carry
report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And
Prayer is more than Order of words,
the conscious Occupation of the
praying mind,
Or the sound of the voice praying.
And, what the dead had
no speech for
when living,
They can tell you being dead: the
Communication of the dead is
tongued
with fire beyond the language of the
living.

And so it is. And we fail to remember this at our peril as we come here this afternoon to continue that good work begun by the Trustees of Mount Auburn now one hundred and fifty-four years ago. These crypts remind us of our inevitable and perpetual linkage with the dead.

But the vitality of Mount Auburn, and I use that word quite consciously, is that it has been from the beginning more than that, more than just a cemetery, and dedicated to more than simply the memory of the dead. It is a place of living beauty and peace, a place of repose for the living.

We who walk among these trees and admire these flowers and the lush grass, we who escape here from the demands of an unbeautiful and unpeaceful world, we who watch the birds and even the stars, we too, the living, we are drawn to Mount Auburn, and always have been, not by accident or coincidence, but by the express intention of its founders. We too, historians, birders, environmentalists, quiet walkers, we too have a place here, and an appropriate one, along with the dead and those who loved and mourn them. We, too, care what happens here, for what happens here effects the quality of the lives of the living, as well as the circumstances of the dead, for at Mount Auburn the two have bound up together from the very beginning.

Photo by Eden Sizemore

In my capacity as a clergyman, I have brought many to their final rest in this place. I have committed mortal remains to the ground or the elements, I have watched the sorrowful, and have tried to be among those who give comfort to those who mourn. I know the care and dignity with which this place receives its dead, and I cannot pass among these stones without recalling old friends and old times. That in some measure is the purpose of a cemetery, and Mount Auburn fulfills its purpose honorable and well. These new crypts will help carry on that good work so that the future may be as well served as the past. We dedicate them today in the name of God whose nature is love and who offers rest to his beloved.

But Mount Auburn would not be the Mount Auburn we know if it was simply left to the dead. It has a place for the living too, for me, not simply as a professional habitué of cemeteries, but as a lover of beauty, peace, and concord: I come here more often than not for sanctuary, and I know others do as well. When the day comes when Mount Auburn will not be able to receive the dead any longer, it will still have a mission to receive the living; it will then enter upon a new phase in its long and glorious history, a phase as worthy and important to the well-being of the generations to come as the Cemetery as we know has been to us and our predecessors. No longer is the cemetery a place of ghoulish, fearful, haunted disquiet, the place one crosses to the other side of the road to avoid, a scene of neglect, and gloom and doom. No. It has become a place of bright grand holy beauty, a place with claims upon the living as well as the dead, an oasis to those who require relief from concrete, steel and noise.

There indeed may well be more to heaven than Mount Auburn: for some we know that is quite enough. But here we have the experience of something perhaps even more comprehensive than heaven itself, for here both the living and the dead are united in bonds of memory, affection, and beauty, and for those of us who know and care for this place, this is not simply an idea, but an experience, and one that we honor and cherish deeply. What brings us together here today is the continuing expression of that idea and experience. We are grateful, and even glad.

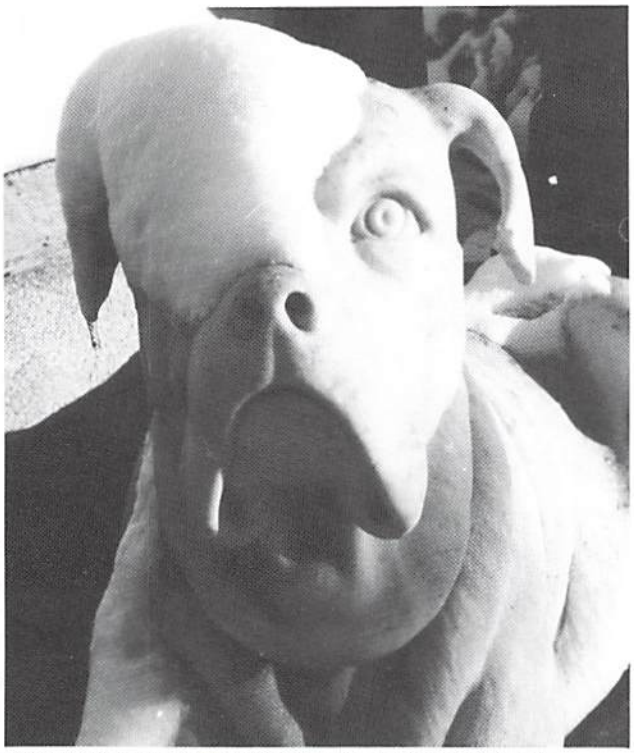


Photo by Eden Sizemore

English Mastiff watches over the gravesite of William Frederick Harnden (1812–1845), founder of the express mail business. Central Avenue, D 6 on the map.

Staff News Notes

A dinner party was held in October for Dan Cedrone and Philip "Tippy" Burgess in honor of their retirement. Dan had been the Cemetery's mechanic for thirty years, and Tippy worked as head mason for fifteen years. We wish them all the best in this new phase of their lives, and we miss them. Cathy Taylor for eight years offered information and solace to anyone who came to the front desk. Cathy joined the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a head secretary.

Recently hired or promoted: William "Bill" Seward, mechanic, Mauritz "Maurey" Nordstrom, head mason; Anastacio Ponton, gardener; and Joan Schaffner, assistant bookeeper.

Horticultural Exhibit

The Cemetery's horticultural staff have designed a delightful revolving exhibit in the main office highlighting some of the plants that are unusual or are of particular seasonal interest. Every week cuttings of six to ten plants from the grounds are displayed in numbered vases. The exhibited specimens can be located on the Cemetery grounds by matching the number on the vase with the corresponding number on the map behind them. The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 4:30, Saturday from 8:30 to 4:00. We hope that you visit this everchanging display, often.

Volunteers Make The Difference

Historically, Mount Auburn has been indebted to generous men and women who have donated their time and energies to making Mount Auburn Cemetery the national treasure it is today. In fact, members of a volunteer committee found the land for the Cemetery, sold the first lots to their friends and families to pay for it, and laid out the roads and paths. This year, the Friends have also been blessed with many talented and hard working volunteers.

Kathleen Dowhan has been diligently cataloguing the books in the Cemetery's library in order to make it accessible for study or pleasure. Ms. Dowhan has a Masters degree in Library Science from Simmons College, and a Law degree from Suffolk University Law School.

Elizabeth Johnson, a student at Boston College, made it possible for the Friends to send newsletters with the schedule of programs to many of the people who live near Mount Auburn. Ms. Johnson typed addresses into our computer so that they could be printed on mailing labels. Many of our neighbors joined us for lectures and tours last fall.

Roberta McDermott and Agnes Starkey have served as gracious hostesses at many of the Friends' events.

Finally, many of the guides and lecturers for the programs sponsored by the Friends have generously donated their time and expertise.

We are most grateful to all of the volunteers who have shared with us their very valuable time and knowledge. Many things would not get done without them, and their help enriches our appreciation for Mount Auburn.

Photo by Eden Sizemore

Winter scene at Mount Auburn Cemetery.

Did You Know . . .

. . . that keeping Mount Auburn's grass green and healthy requires the application of twenty tons of fertilizer every year?

. . . that the European Beech *(Fagus sylvatica)* now flourishing in the area fronting Bigelow Chapel, was planted on October 19, 1860 by the then Prince of Wales and future King Edward VII?

. . . that in addition to the sphinx, Martin Milmore sculpted an angel for the Coppenhagen family on Sycamore Path?

. . . that snapping turtles weighing an estimated 50 to 75 pounds and seen only during their mating season, live in both Halcyon and Auburn lakes?

The Sculpture With 1000 Names

The twenty-one foot, nine ton, ductile iron sculpture situated in the Knoll Garden in the southern end of the Cemetery was the result of a limited competition conducted by the staff and Trustees in the spring of 1979.

The artist, Richard G. Duca, did not give the sculpture a formal name. To him, naming it would limit its many personal interpretations. Inspired by the sculpture, and capturing its spirit, Cambridge poet-playwright Ethan Ayer recently wrote:

> The flame of life, the flame of art
> Are all the same in paradise.
> One shares the other but in part,
> But both beyond together rise.

The idea of a theme piece for the Knoll area evolved after many years of careful consideration by the Cemetery's Trustees as the garden was one of the last major sections of the Cemetery left to be developed. As a semi-finalist, Duca submitted a bronze, twenty-one inch scale model, then constructed an on-site full-scale "mock-up". In March of 1980, the Trustees gave their final approval for the project. Cast ductile iron, known for its rich natural patina and its strength and durability as a "semi-steel," was selected for the casting material.

Working with his wife Meredith, Duca immediately began production of the sculpture in his Annisquam studio. Over the summer, the Ducas molded styrofoam to form a full-scale casting model. When finished, it was the exact image of the completed sculpture, nearly filling the studio to the ceiling.

Duca felt strongly that the sculpture should be cast in one solid section, not in several fabricated parts, or hollow. Therefore, it became necessary to use an industrial rather than an art foundry. Several industrial foundries in New England were unable to handle the estimated ten-ton weight. Finally, the Hodge Foundry in western Pennsylvania was selected for their facilities and outstanding reputation.

In the fall, the twenty-one foot styrofoam model which was to be used as the sculpture's pattern was ready for shipment to the foundry. Duca and his wife actively participated in the two weeks of intensive foundry work. At the foundry, the styrofoam piece was set into an enormous metal flask, and one hundred thousand pounds of special foundry sand was packed around the sculpture pattern. Eighteen thousand pounds of molten metal was then poured into the sand mold, instantly evaporating the styrofoam.

For the three days that it took the metal to cool enough to be uncovered, there was no way of knowing whether or not the casting was successful. To everyone's great relief and joy, when the casting was "broken out" and pulled from the rock-hard sand, it was the perfect image of the styrofoam model.

The completed sculpture arrived at the Cemetery in mid-December, 1980. A crowd of Trustees, staff, and friends eagerly watched the fifty-ton crane swing it into place. It was mounted on a previously installed twelve foot circular granite base. Beneath this base, set into the hill, is a specially constructed area for the interment of cremated remains which was designed by the Cemetery's Superintendent, Duncan Munro. Granite slabs are in-set around the sculpture to provide a place for the names of those interred there.

Resting on the base, the sculpture blends harmoniously with its environment through the careful landscaping of Vincent Merrill. The piece forms the theme of Knoll Garden, and is the focus of several radiating and circular paths. Patterns of plantings and trees accent and define the area, and provide a sweeping vista of Willow Pond, achieving a graceful overall effect.

Throughout the project, people's interpretations of the non-figurative sculpture varied. To some, it was an unfolding flower, a sail, a winged bird, or a flame. A visitor from Switzerland remembered an excerpt from a poem:

> Luring me on, and my mind higher
> Drawing me ceaselessly up
> To heights far, far above the human.

To Thomas Lynch, an Irish Bostonian aged ninety years, the sculpture represents "eternity". By not titling his sculpture, Richard Duca expects and encourages the viewer to develop a personal interpretation for him or her self.

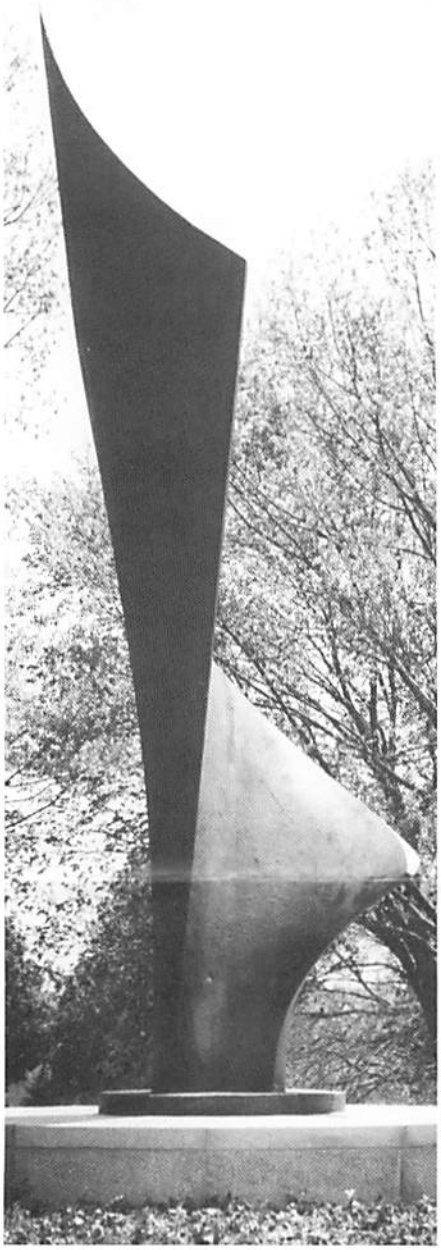


Photo by Richard Duca

Biographical Notes

Joseph Emerson Worcester
1784–1865

In simplicity and Godly Sincerity he had his conversation in the world

Epitaph on the Worcester memorial.

Lexicographer, geographer, philologist. His first *Comprehensive . . . Dictionary* (1830) contained his one permanent contribution to lexicography: the "compromise vowel," a sound midway between the *a* of *hat* and that of *father*. His final revision, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1860), produced despite the total loss of one eye, was distinguished for its refinement of taste, its excellent treatment of synonyms, and for being the first American dictionary to use illustrations.

During the half-century of battle between his dictionaries and those of his great and eventually victorious rival, Noah Webster, Webster's dictionary pleased the common man because he preferred local to British usage and some simplifications in spelling; while Worcester's won the favor of the literary circles of Boston because of its conservative dependence on English models. In his early years, Worcester also wrote several works on geography and history which were widely used as textbooks.

Reprinted from Mount Auburn Biographies, *"A Biographical Listing of Distinguished Persons Interred in Mount Auburn Cemetery, 1831–1952" by Foster W. Russell. Mr. Worcester is buried on Aster Path, D 5 on the map.*

An Invitation to Join The Friends of Mount Auburn

Please enroll me as a member of the Friends of Mount Auburn.

___ Individual $10
___ Household $20
___ Senior Citizens and Students $5

In addition to my membership dues, I would also like to contribute $_____ to help defray the costs of the Friends.

Contributions over membership dues are deductible from income taxes to the extent provided by law.

Enclosed is my check for $_____ payable to *Mount Auburn Cemetery.*

M
Name(s)

Address

Telephone

If you would like this to be a gift membership, please enclose your name and address so that we may notify the recipient.

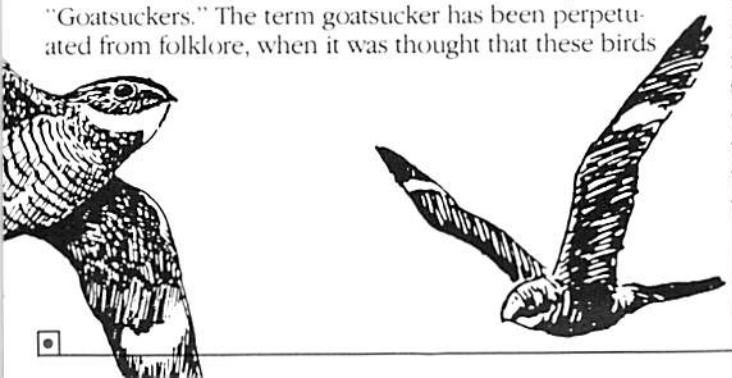
Friends of Mount Auburn
Mount Auburn Cemetery
580 Mount Auburn Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
617/547-7105

Mount Auburn's Nighthawks

by Robert H. Stymeist

In the fall the migration of the Nighthawk to South America is a very predictable and for the most part, visible, phenomenon. Nighthawks begin their migration as early as the first week in August, but the majority of the birds migrate during the last ten days of August and the first week of September. In fact, the Massachusetts Audubon Society has sponsored a coordinated Nighthawk watch for over ten years during the period from August 20 through September 7. This past fall I manned the lookout at Washington Tower in Mount Auburn and recorded 571 migrating Nighthawks on nine evenings. Nighthawks usually begin their southward movement a few hours before sunset. The largest number was noted on August 21 when I tallied 169 birds in just a little over an hour. Other high counts included 90 Nighthawks on August 25 and 93 birds on September 2.

The Common Nighthawk is a badly named bird for it is not a hawk, but rather a member of the family called "Goatsuckers." The term goatsucker has been perpetuated from folklore, when it was thought that these birds fed on goats' milk in the pastures of Europe. They were, in fact, feeding on flying insects stirred up by the animals while grazing. In flight the Common Nighthawk is remarkably similar to a falcon, except its tail is slightly forked, while the tail on a falcon is square.



There are six species of goatsuckers found in North America, but here in the northeast only two species occur regularly: the Whip-poor-will and the Nighthawk. Members of this family are for the most part nocturnal, though the Nighthawk is crepuscular (active at twilight). Nighthawks feed on the wing by capturing flying insects with their very wide mouths. During the day they rest on the ground or lengthwise on the horizontal branch of a tree because their weak feet prevent them from perching. Nighthawks nest on the flat roofs of small buildings in the cities, and can be seen in the Back Bay of Boston, in Cambridge, and in Somerville.

Ornithologist William Brewster (1851–1919, buried on Larch Avenue, C 5 on the map) in his *Birds of the Cambridge Region* (1906), reported numerous migrating Nighthawks in the Cambridge area. In fact, he probably watched them from Mount Auburn! He reported: "They moved onward steadily, if rather slowly, in the same direction, ordinarily towards the south or southwest. At first they fly at rather high altitudes, but, as the daylight wanes, they descend to just above the tops of trees." This year I had the pleasure of witnessing from the Tower virtually the same scene as Mr. Brewster did, over eighty years ago.

Mr. Stymeist is an active birder and President of the Brookline Bird Club. He will be leading several walks for the Friends in May.

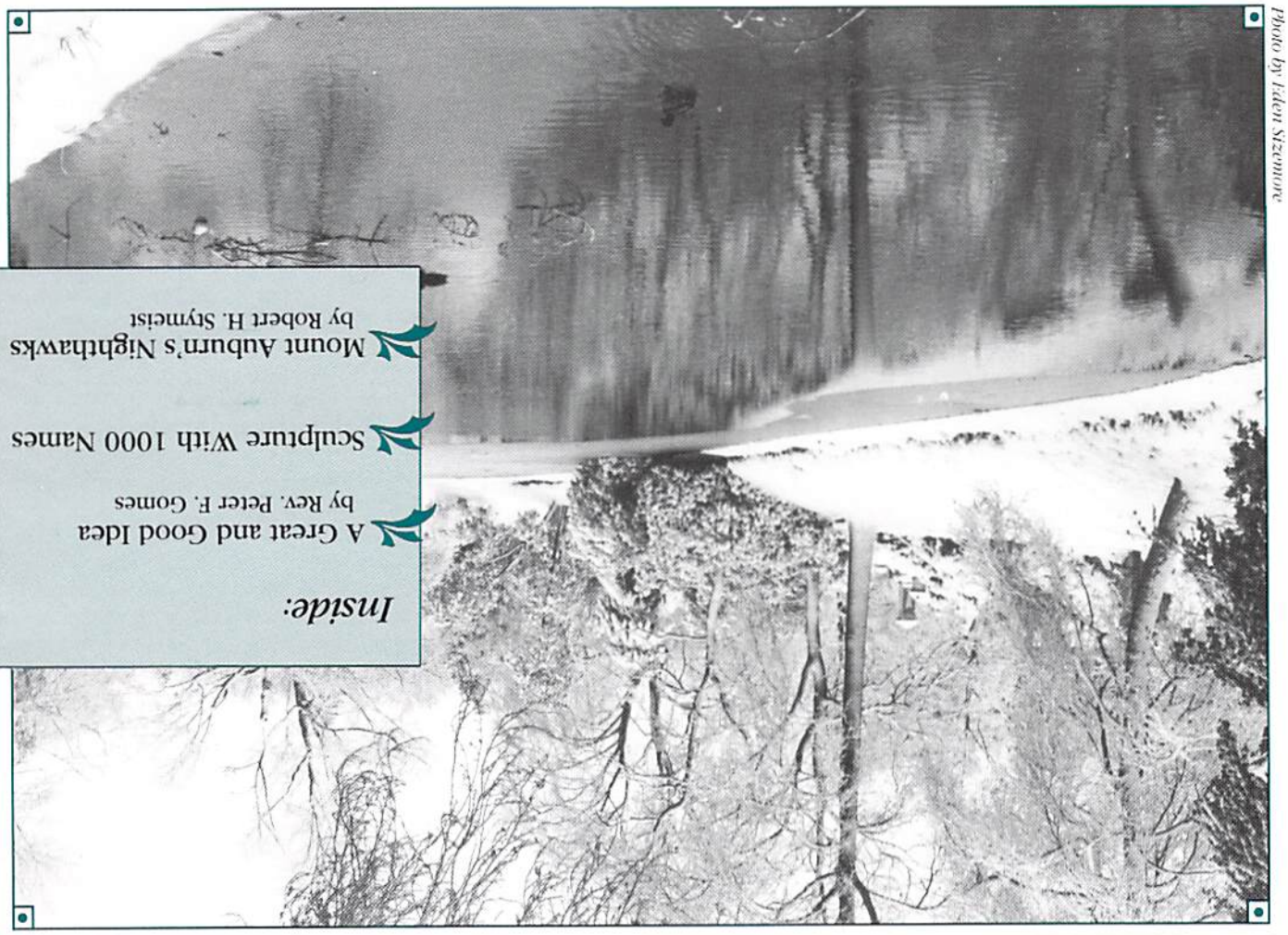


Photo by Eden Sizemore

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