

Parks Commissioner August Heckscher welcomes the Mexican Rodeo to New York City

AUGUST HECKSCHER

A Man about the World – and Mount Desert Island

Carl Little

On his book, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints* (1927), the Unitarian minister Francis Greenwood Peabody described the arrival of distinguished individuals, among them educators and men of the cloth, to Mount Desert Island in the second half of the 19th century:

By degrees the tide of fashion and luxury swept over its Eastern shore, but for a time left unsubmerged the more rugged coast to the Westward, where plainer ways of living attracted impecunious ministers and 'emeriti' professors to colonization. A remarkable group was soon gathered in and about Northeast Harbor. President Eliot had settled on one headland and Bishop Doane on the opposite shore, and there soon arrived some of the wisest of college presidents, the most beloved of clergymen, and the most congenial of friends. It was jestingly said in those days that at Bar Harbor one was asked how much he owned, and at Northeast Harbor how much he knew; and the simplicity of President Eliot's habit of life on one side of the harbor, together with the pastoral affections of Bishop Doane on the other, established a tradition of refinement and restraint which even under later conditions of luxurious living is still perceptible and commanding.¹

As Peabody implies at the end of this passage, that “tradition of refinement and restraint” never ceased as distinguished figures from all walks of life made their way to Mount Desert Island. Indeed, every corner of the island has now served as the seasonal or year-round home of esteemed men and women of the cloth, of the arts, of government and education, business and philanthropy – even cuisine.

A few years ago the island bade farewell to an honor roll of some of

America's most revered and admired: master chef Julia Child (who signed a zillion copies of her cookbooks one day at Port in a Storm Bookstore); Emily Beck, steward of several editions of *Bartlett's Quotations*; and Philip Geyelin, editorial editor at *The Washington Post*, who played a key role in shifting that paper's point of view against the Vietnam War. Each of these figures looked upon this special place as historian Samuel Eliot Morison had, as a kind of paradise on earth where one could restore one's energy and ponder the vicissitudes of civilization from a healthy remove.

Among more recent arrivals – and departures – was August Heckscher, a remarkable polymath whose roles in life included arts administrator, public servant, journalist, social commentator, man of letters, historian, sailor, master of the printing press and beneficent head of a remarkable household. He embraced Mount Desert Island and found peace and some quiet on a point of land in Seal Harbor.

Born in Huntington, New York, in 1913, Heckscher was educated at St. Paul's (he would later write a history of this boarding school), Yale (B.A., 1936) and Harvard (M.A., 1939). He went on to become instructor of government at Yale (1939-1941), editor of the Auburn (N.Y.) *Citizen-Advertiser* (1946-1948), and editorial writer at *The New York Herald Tribune* (1948-1956; he was chief editorial writer from '52 to '56). During World War II he served with the Office of Strategic Services in this country and overseas.²

In 1956, Heckscher became director of the Twentieth Century Fund, a philanthropic foundation devoted to economic and social research and education.³ Six years later, while still directing the fund, he was appointed the first Special White House Consultant on the Arts by President John F. Kennedy.⁴ He lectured widely and was a familiar figure on television. His program "Books for Our Time" (1963-1964) won a Peabody Award.

In 1967, Heckscher received another prestigious appointment: Parks Commissioner and Administrator of Recreation and Cultural Affairs in New York City under Mayor John Lindsay. This experience he wrote about in *Alive in the City: Memoir of an Ex-Commissioner*, published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1974. At a time when American cities were undergoing crises, Heckscher saw in the parks "the opportunity for common enjoyment and for true reconciliation."⁵

As a child of the '60s living in New York City I can vouch for the suc-

cess of Heckscher's optimistic vision. Under his leadership, Central Park and many other public sites were resurrected as gathering places for city dwellers from all walks of life. During his tenure, Barbara Streisand



August & Charles Heckscher with President Kennedy

sang to 250,000 people; the New York City Marathon was launched; and permits were issued for several major anti-war demonstrations in the park.

Heckscher served for a time as president of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and edited *The Politics of Woodrow Wilson*, published in 1956. Thus, he was the ideal candidate to write what is considered the definitive life of the 28th president of the United States. *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography*, published in 1991, is a thorough and fascinating account of Wilson's life and times. A brief description of the President-to-be's visit to Mount Desert Island in 1902 is included. According to Heckscher, Wilson borrowed old clothes from his host, Junius Morgan, went sailing, fished for cod, picnicked on the boat and, in his own words, "rejoiced in the fine air of the open sea."⁶

Heckscher, his wife Claude (née Chevreux) and their three children, Stephen, Philip and Charles, joined the seasonal island population some time in the early 1960s, drawn in part by the prospects of sailing.

Heckscher was an avid sailor, having learned to sail as a child on lakes in the Adirondacks. The Maine coast offered exciting new prospects. Throughout the summer he and Claude sailed with family and friends, including Samuel Eliot Morison and Donald and Beth Straus.

Heckscher's grandfather had a large sailboat on Long Island called *Rambler*, a name which his grandson appropriated for his first Maine sailboat, purchased in the early 1970s. Some years later, in the late 1970s, he sold *Rambler* and bought a sloop, which he named *Acushla* (a term of affection in Gaelic). The family still sails this sloop.⁷



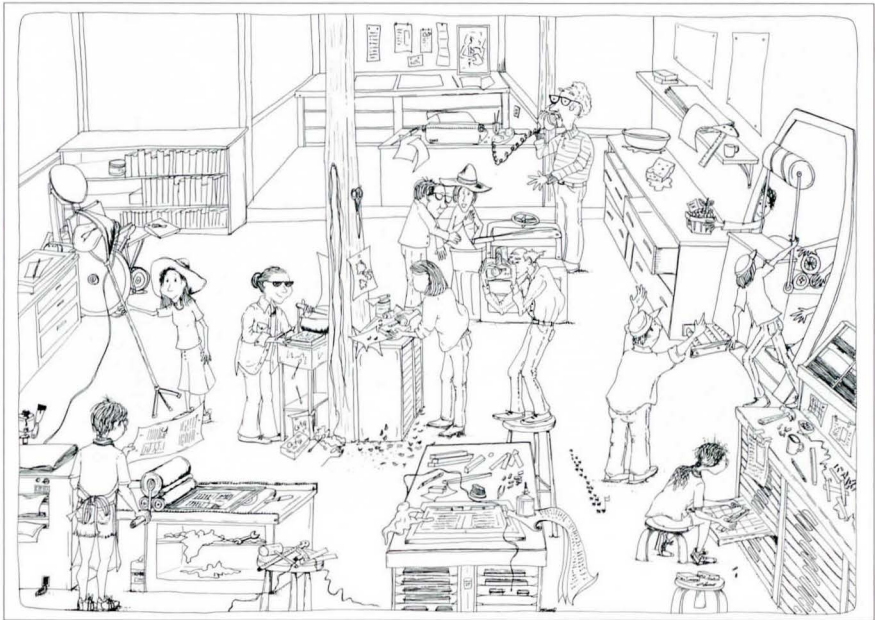
The Heckscher family

The Heckschers rented Dr. Mabel Satterlee Ingalls's house in Seal Harbor for a number of years. In the early 1970s they purchased a ledgy parcel of land from Mary "Tod" Rockefeller not far from where they had been renting. Heckscher commissioned architect Edward Larrabee Barnes (who, himself, had a summer home in Somesville) to design the house. The striking configuration of intimate gray shingle cottages connected by wooden decks recalls Barnes's award-winning design for Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle.⁸ The Heckscher house was completed in late summer 1973.

August and Claude Heckscher would arrive on Mount Desert Island

toward the end of June and generally stay through September. Their social life on the island was a busy one, with frequent dinners and evenings at friends'. They belonged to the Harbor Club in Seal Harbor. Heckscher, who served on the club's board, wrote a history of the club for its 65th anniversary in 1992, offering a lively account of the individuals involved in making this tennis and swimming complex a special island retreat.⁹

A self-described "printer by avocation," Heckscher had brought his press to Maine. He was soon producing a wide range of fine limited edition letterpress publications, orchestrating the substantial talents of family and friends, including a passel of young apprentices, in the printing of poetry and other literature, past and present. At one point there were three presses running at High Loft.



A busy moment at the High Loft Press

As his son Philip Heckscher has related, the press "built networks and friendships among many people who had never before worked together, united by the archaic but deeply engaging process of building a book piece by piece."¹⁰ Among notable productions were *Poems for Sutton Island* by Hortense Flexner with photographic illustrations by Claude Huston; Christopher Smart's classic *Jubilate Agno*, with woodcuts by Philip Heckscher; Marguerite Yourcenar's *Suite d'estampes pour Kou-*

Kou-Hai featuring prints by Seal Harbor artist Nancy McCormick; and several books illustrated by Karen McDonald, an artist and graduate of Mount Desert Island High School. The press also produced a wonderful assortment of invitations, gallery announcements, tributes to friends – even an address change notification.¹¹

Heckscher's passion for typeface had started in his high school days and it lasted till his death.¹² "To print in this manner," he once wrote, "is to risk being seized by an obsession and to have one's whole life monopolized by the quest for perfection." He noted that he restricted his printing to the summer months, "and even then to days when fog or storms at sea make sailing a dubious pleasure."¹³



Mercie Hinton, August & Charles Heckscher

Heckscher also found time to write poetry. "The muse who visited me," he wrote in an introductory note to *The Rhyming Mood*, a selection of his verse self-published in 1992, "...was a very modest and traditional muse" – and a discerning one, it could be said, who lent her subject the rare gift of mastery of formal prosody, a superb wit and an empathetic voice. Heckscher wrote much of his poetry for family and friends. Many poems carry a dedication, and many were written for an occasion: a wedding, a birthday, a visit – even the return of a borrowed pot.¹⁴

For his regular columns in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Heckscher often drew upon his seasonal visits to Mount Desert Island. These

beautifully written reflective essays touch on a variety of island activities. In one column he describes a tour of the Great Heath led by “a young botanist,” Patrick Chassé. Looking back on what he and his companions had seen and learned, Heckscher concludes: “We participated in a great drama of time.... We were one with the eternal flux.”¹⁵

Like Peabody and his roster of present-day saints, Heckscher sometimes focused on an islander of distinction. A column titled “The lady from Maine,” for example, reports on Marguerite Yourcenar’s installation as the first woman member of the Académie Française (which was founded in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu). Heckscher highlights her transformation from a “recluse as the inhabitant of a northern isle; as a searcher after mysteries; as the faithful guardian of a long-stricken friend” into a world figure turning heads in Paris. (According to Heckscher, Yourcenar’s outfit for the occasion, conceived by French designer Yves Saint-Laurent, included a white shawl that “subtly evoked the scarf she wears against the cold of Maine winter.”)¹⁶

In a poetic piece on the coming of the first frost to Mount Desert Island, Heckscher describes its beauty – “a visible stroke” – but also the sadness this seasonal benchmark evokes of “another summer gone.” Wishing to know about the effect of frost on his flowers, he consults Roy Barrette, who wrote a gardening column for *The Ellsworth American* (“a paper known for its fine typography and its excellent literary qualities”). The knowledge he gains leads him to appreciate the roses “splendidly full-blown” at the post office in Seal Harbor. “How many post offices,” he asks in a parenthetical aside, “have flowers of any kind regularly displayed on a long wooden writing-desk?”¹⁷

Heckscher also appreciates elements of the landscape of his seasonal home, be it the Bear Island Light or Peabody Drive. On the latter subject, he describes the range of vistas encountered on this road that winds through Northeast and Seal Harbors, including “repeated glimpses of the encircling sea,” “a view of the offshore islands” and “a pond of considerable size” that invites one “to pause and to explore its shores on foot.”

In this same essay, Heckscher casts a critical eye on less pleasing views, places where “shops and parking lots, used-car lots and gas stations, grow up in what is sometimes obscenely referred to as a ‘miracle mile.’” In such a case, he continues, “the road has become, as it were, an open wound in the side of the community. The precious lifeblood pours out

to coagulate in hideous parodies of community existence.”¹⁸ Such a sentiment, formed from decades of looking at all manner of man-made landscapes, is perhaps even more relevant today than it was more than a quarter century ago.

Another essay, “Alone around the world” (the title taken from the famous book by sailor Joshua Slocum, *Sailing Alone Around the World*, 1900), describes the pleasures, and trials and tribulations, of sailing solo in the waters around Mount Desert Island. Heckscher points out the landmarks on the way, adding a bit of history: “Here is Bunker’s Ledge where an old sea captain, in dalliance it is said with a lady of the town, came scandalously to grief.” Passing the juncture “of the great bay and our only American fjord,” he conjures the slaughter of the French Jesuit colony by the British that took place there centuries before, “a massacre that still seems to leave its stain upon the landscape.”¹⁹

In a column published in September 1982, Heckscher waxes poetic on “the friends of summer.” He captures the bittersweet end-of-summer moment when seasonal visitors disperse. “If they were to accompany me on my own journeys or abide with me at home,” he muses, “I should undoubtedly be delighted.” Yet as his island friends embraced him every summer upon his arrival from New York, so he gave them special place:

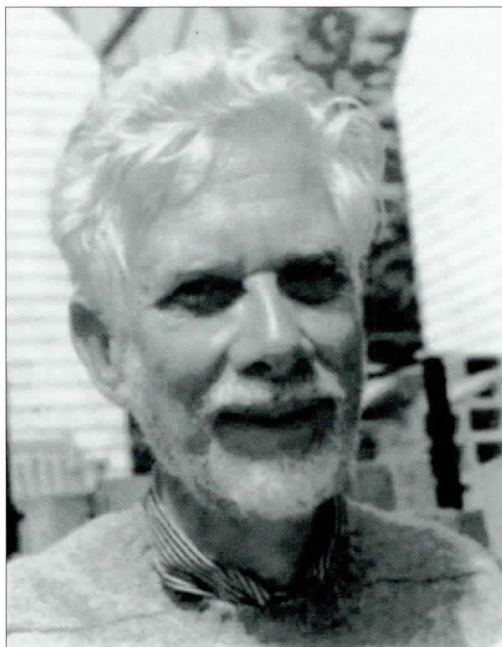


August Heckscher at the helm of Acushla

“they have their own chamber in my heart of hearts – the proverbial lamb that is found again, the bird of rare plumage returning from its migrations.”²⁰

Heckscher took part in the community wherever and whenever he could. He provided testimony for a Mount Desert Island Hospital brochure, was a supporter of the Northeast Harbor Library, and once led a sunset service at the head of Somes Sound. Part of his island legacy is the scholarship established in his name at College of the Atlantic, awarded annually to students whose work focuses on public lands, government, or the arts.

At Heckscher’s memorial service, held on July 5, 1997, at St. Mary’s-by-the-Sea in Northeast Harbor, friends and family paid homage to this remarkable man, highlighting his accomplishments, but mainly



remembering his geniality and warmth. Master framer Paul Monfredo described him as “a man devoid of cynicism, in love with life, one who was willing and able to share it with all who entered his charmed circle.” Reflecting on the public funeral service given Heckscher in New York City earlier that year, Monfredo noted that “here, on his beloved island, at this time of year, his death becomes an all-too-real hole in the fabric of our lives.”²¹

The Reverend Peabody had characterized his “present-day saints” as those “men and women of the world who could interpret its transient incidents with the serenity and insight of spiritual minds.”²² Several residents of Mount Desert Island, including Louisa Lee and Georgina Schuyler, Charles W. Eliot and Frederic Illsley Phillips, numbered among Peabody’s candidates for this special designation.

August Heckscher would certainly blush to be nominated for sainthood, yet I would argue that the breadth of his public service and the empathy and passion he showed for everyone he came in contact with add up to a man of vision, one who was, in turn, saintly, worldly-wise and altogether extraordinary.

Meetings with a Remarkable Man

My acquaintance with August Heckscher began sometime in the early 1980s while I was working for Lucien Goldschmidt, a dealer of rare books and old and modern master prints and drawings (the shop was near the corner of 84th Street and Madison Avenue in New York City). The first time I was introduced, Heckscher was in the company of his brother-in-law, Philip Hofer, a renowned bibliophile and a major benefactor of the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

One day in 1982 Heckscher came into Goldschmidt's bearing under his arm an exquisite book he had published, *The Shyp of Fooles* by Sebastian Brandt, with facsimile reproductions of the original text and the illustrations by Albrecht Dürer. Heckscher commissioned artist Robert S. Neuman (a long-time Northeast Harbor summer resident) to bring a temporary interpretation to the 16th-century text by way of a separate suite of etchings.²³

Although Goldschmidt's stock was limited to books published before 1950, he could not resist taking on this remarkable work. Thus it was that I learned of Heckscher's press at High Loft, in Seal Harbor, and of his connections to Maine, territory that at the time I had just begun to explore myself.

When my family moved to Somesville in 1988, I was reacquainted with Heckscher through his friends, the Renaissance scholar John Olin and his wife, Marian, a painter of exquisite pen and ink and wash drawings.²⁴ At a luncheon party at their home on Little Cranberry Island, I had the opportunity to sit and talk with Heckscher, fulfilling a wish born at Goldschmidt's years before.

Some time later I started addressing Mr. Heckscher as Augie and looked forward with pleasure to meeting up with the family every summer. My wife, Peggy, and I were invited to dinner at the Heckschers' on several occasions (we also attended his 80th birthday celebration in August 1993). I remember those evenings as wonderfully

convivial, marked by fine spirits and fine cuisine. Heckscher and I also corresponded from time to time, about poetry, art and other matters. Inevitably he would respond with good cheer and encouragement. The year his Woodrow Wilson biography appeared, I did the introductory honors for a presentation he gave at Port in a Storm Bookstore.

Heckscher epitomized the adjective “distinguished,” yet he was not one to put on airs. He was, if you will, both August and Augie, able to carry on the most erudite of conversations, but also quite capable of letting down his hair and joining in the amusement – if not creating it himself.



Carl Little’s most recent book is *Paintings of Maine: A New Collection* (Down East Books). He is director of communications and marketing at the Maine Community Foundation.

PHOTOGRAPHS & DRAWING

The photograph of Parks Commissioner Heckscher welcoming the Mexican Rodeo to New York City (page 66) was taken by Linn Sage and is used with her permission.

All other photographs have been provided by the Heckscher family. The photograph of August and Charles Heckscher with President Kennedy was taken in the summer of 1963. Pictured in the Heckscher family photograph on page 70: (front row l-r) Fiona, Lavinia, Timothy, Augie, Alexander, Claude, Laurence, Olivia; (back row l-r) Benjamin, Charles, Philip, Stef.

“A busy moment at the High Loft Press” in the summer of 1980 was drawn by Karen McDonald, who is seated at the type trays, lower right corner. Tommy Coleman works the Vandercook press (lower left corner), while August Heckscher, top right, orders new supplies by phone. Other figures include Claude Huston, the photographer, assisted by his wife, Hilda, Claude Heckscher at an etching press, Nancy McCormick cutting a woodblock, and workmen delivering a new press as Mrs. Charles Savage slips a box of raspberries through the door.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Reminiscences of Present-Day Saints*. New York and Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927, pp. 254-255.

² Heckscher’s grandfather, August Heckscher, Sr. (Hamburg, Germany, 1848-

Mountain Lake, Florida, 1941) was a real estate magnate, financier and philanthropist. The family lost its considerable fortune in the Great Depression.

³ Paul Cummings' "Oral History Interview with August Heckscher at his Office in the Parks Department, New York City, May 1970" conducted on behalf of the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art (<http://archivesofamericanart.si.edu/oralhist/hecksc70.htm>) offers a fascinating overview of his life. His wife, Claude Heckscher, gave his papers to the Library of Congress in 2000.

⁴ Heckscher's work led to the creation of the National Council on the Arts in 1964, which later morphed and multiplied into the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities.

⁵ "He was a kindly leader," Henry Stern, New York Parks Commissioner said at the time of Heckscher's death. "If you think of parks commissioners, you think of the imperial Robert Moses and the mercurial Hoving – and here you had the Good King Augie, who reigned for six happy years." "August Heckscher, 83, Dies; Advocate for Parks and Arts," *The New York Times*, April 7, 1997.

As if to prime himself for the Parks Commissioner's post, Heckscher wrote *The Public Happiness* in 1962. He also authored *These Are the Days* (1936) and *A Pattern of Politics* (1947) and co-authored, with Raymond Aron, *A Diversity of Worlds: France and the United States Look at Their Common Problems* (1957). In the writing of two other books, *Open Spaces: The Life of American Cities* (1977) and *When LaGuardia Was Mayor: New York's Legendary Years* (1978), Heckscher was assisted by Phyllis Robinson.

⁶ August Heckscher, *Woodrow Wilson*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991, p. 137.

⁷ From conversations with Charles and Philip Heckscher, February 2007. Charles remembers his father rising early each morning to work on writing projects, then turning to the press. In the afternoon, if the weather were fair, he went sailing.

⁸ Barnes, who died in 2004 at age 89, was awarded posthumously the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal in 2007. The Heckscher residence is featured in *The House Book*, 2001, by the editors at Phaidon Press, a presentation of 500 iconic dwellings from around the world, ranging from Hadrian's villa to a Hutu hut.

⁹ *The Harbor Club: A History* came out in 1995, three years after the 65th anniversary. The 56-page booklet was designed by Heckscher and printed by J.S. McCarthy in Augusta; it included a preface by R. Anderson Pew.

¹⁰ High Loft Press publications were highlighted in an exhibition in the Ethel H. Blum Gallery at College of the Atlantic (November 1, 2006-January 4, 2007) as part of the statewide "The Maine Print Project: Celebrating 200 Years of Printmaking in Maine." The Northeast Harbor Library also mounted an exhibition in August 1997 (as a memorial to Heckscher).

¹¹ Heckscher shared his passion with Jane Pierce, whose home on Indian Point Road featured a marvelous library of fine print books, many with unique bindings, which included a near complete set of High Loft books. A collection of Pierce's books was bequeathed to the Special Collections Library at Bowdoin College in 2005. She also helped establish the bookbinding program at Wells College, her alma mater.

¹² Heckscher established the Ashlar Press (1930-1937) with his younger brother Maury (the press was given to the Jonathan Edwards College at Yale; his brother later died in World War II). His second printing enterprise, The Uphill Press, was active from 1964 to around 1973 when it was moved to Mount Desert Island and became the Press at High Loft.

¹³ August Heckscher, "Return to an island." *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 25, 1980.

¹⁴ Charles Heckscher recalls his father leaping onto a bench on the porch at High Loft at his 81st birthday celebration to recite a poem, "O, To Be 80 Again," that he had written for the occasion.

¹⁵ August Heckscher, "On the great heath." *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 11, 1981. Today, Chassé is curator of landscape at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. In 2004 he helped found the Beatrix Farrand Society to preserve Garland Farm, the landscape architect's final home on Mount Desert Island.

¹⁶ Heckscher, "The lady from Maine." *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 27, 1981. The "long-stricken friend" Heckscher mentioned was Yourcenar's companion and translator, Grace Frick. Both women are buried in Brookside Cemetery in Somesville.

¹⁷ Heckscher, "The first frost." *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 24, 1980.

¹⁸ Heckscher, "Peabody Drive." *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 29, 1980.

¹⁹ Heckscher, "Alone around the world." *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 16, 1983. Sailing alone inspired one of Heckscher's wittiest poems, "After a Rough Sail, Solo," published in *The Rhyming Mood* (1992). The first stanza sets the stage: "I'll go no more a-sailing—/A-sailing no more./My windward eye is failing./I nearly hit the shore."

²⁰ Heckscher, "The friends of summer." *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 17, 1982.

²¹ In their eulogies Monfredo and Charles Heckscher both recounted the famous incident surrounding a sea pageant August Heckscher organized on the shoreline near his house that brought the town police.

²² Peabody, p. viii.

²³ *The Shyp of Fooles* by Sebastian Brandt, translated by Alexander Barclay, 1509. Edited by Phyllis C. Robinson, published by High Loft, Seal Harbor, Maine, 1982. With *Ship to Paradise*, a portfolio of six etchings by Robert S. Neuman, with an introductory essay by John C. Olin, 1983.

²⁴ A picnic at the Olins' house on Little Cranberry Island was the subject of the essay "The islanders" in *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 19, 1983.



August Heckscher

from *The Rhyming Mood*
High Loft, Seal Harbor, 1992

Behold This Isle

BEHOLD this favored and bedeviled isle;
The farmer's bane, the mariner's despair;
'Tis Whittier's "grey and thunder-smitten pile,"
'Tis seven mountains rising gaunt and bare.
Yet seen in June 'neath nature's fleeting smile
A first explorer gives his thankful prayer:
"There comes a scent from off those shores," he wrote
"Like that which fills a garden" – end the quote.

The earliest settlers vanished, none knows why –
The Red Paint People with their tools of slate;
No doubt they found it easier to die
Than face the darksome winters lying in wait;
And even the gentle Indian would fly –
The first, historians say, to rusticate.
Wise folk, like summer visitors today,
Know when to come and when to go away.

These visitors – they carved themselves a niche,
Artists for joy and poets for inspiration;
They entertained a style of living which
(I hate to say it being a poor relation)
Was best experienced by the very rich,

Or by professors with a long vacation.
They climbed, they sailed, they bathed in frigid cold,
And lived with health to grow exceeding old –

Great giants among them. Eliot the seer,
And Curtis who made poetry of trees;
Old Bishop Doane, and Huntington, his peer,
Who on the mount in burning images
Prayed to a God who could not but give ear;
Happy sojourners, pious pilgrims, these –
And others, too. I once on rocky strand
Saw Walter Lippman talk with Learned Hand.

Here in the summers Drury of St. Paul's
Brooded on sermons mighty to declaim;
Pusey of Harvard felt the epoch's squalls
And held the young most grievously to blame.
Meanwhile in grand retreats and pleasure halls
Across the mountainside an age-old game
The wealthy and the worldly-wise pursued –
'Til flames devoured their palaces of wood.

What of the Natives? They are not alarming,
Just mad, perhaps – what's wrong with being mad?
Miss Walls at the P. O. is always charming;
At Jerry's store the liveliest gossip's had.
In fishing, trade, or handiwork, or farming,
There's many a merry maid and stalwart lad.
Their one defect: they don't observe the season –
They stay right on for no sufficient reason.

Compare the eiders – their inane impression
Is that the waters off my point are mild;
They fly in autumn in a staid procession
From northern countries by our coasts beguiled.
Compare the tourist – like the hated Hessian
Vainly enjoying the land he has defiled.
At least these two, whatever their intents,
Don't make the place an all-year residence.

And yet there may be something, I'll confess it,
Nor I nor the first Indians ever knew;

Though fierce the winters and as cold as Cressid
Some days there are that shine exceeding blue.
That drifting snows make even crags seem blessed
And fireside joys can ageing hearts renew,
Some men do swear. I cannot quite deny it.
Indeed one day I'd greatly like to try it.

O Come Down to the Harbor

I'VE sympathy with those who don't like sailing –
One half the time they broil, and half they freeze;
A squall of thirty knots seems never-failing
Or doldrums stall the vessel by degrees.
They're bored, they're scared, they grab the windward railing
And find the head a font of mysteries.
This form of pleasure they judge most uneven;
But for the rest of mortals, sailing's heaven.

*O come down to the harbor, come away!
The breezes waken with advancing noon.
The little yawl tugs at her line in play
And all the wavelets 'round are silver-strewn.
O come down to the harbor, come away!
At touch, in a miraculous festoon,
White sails unfurl, the eager boat takes wing,
And in her wake the cloven waters sing.*

These fabled waters, arctic in their clime,
Lifted by tides a fathom at the neap,
Hold rocks that wait in immemorial slime
A gory harvest of the main to reap.
Champlain, the first, cleared Schoodic Point on time,
Hastening his rendez-vous with fame to keep.
He made for Otter Cliff in his panache
And struck the ledge in an historic crash.

How many others have found journey's end –
The homing ships seduced by Bunker's Whore?
A bell, a gong, severe idly to portend

When dalliance lures the captain from his chore.
And when the ever-threatening fogs descend
 (I knew I'd have to mention fog once more!)
The best of mariners is hard put to it
To strike the passage and sail safely through it.

Yet other days – in a translucent span
 Wide waters mirror the blue dome above;
A thousand moorings tempt the heart of man,
 A thousand inlets each on scented grove.
It's East we'll go to the Petit Manan,
 It's West to Buckle and to Christmas Cove,
While backward glance still happily confirms
Our island's ancient, bare-backed pachyderms.

Yes, other days – and such a day as this!
 Ocean's all smiles and delicate affections.
Lightly the yawl, like any willing Miss,
 Answers to even the subtlest of suggestions,
'Twixt pliant hand and sea's mute emphasis
 Holding her own by pleasing indirections.
Sweet lady, fickle and ingenuous rover,
The sea's your immortal – I your mortal – lover.

High Loft Sketches

i.

MAN of affairs and *pater familias*
He comes with wife and burgeoning sons to pass
Les grands vacances upon this foreign isle.
He knows the world, its subtleties, its guile,
Yet here, somehow, reverts to youth's first dream.
He feasts on peanut butter and ice cream;
He boasts of tennis, yet at last resort
Assents reluctantly to try the court.
With flash of temper and the gentler charm
Of natural feelings innocent and warm —
With mix of rude and of the courteous —
Good God, he can stir up an awful fuss!

ii.

She strides our deck in high Parisian heels
Followed by Timothée, with knowing squeals,
With pointed forefinger and booted tread.
She carries old-world pictures in her head.
Queen of romance and singer of faint ditties,
Author and actress more at home in cities
Than on our rock-bound fog-infested shore;
Like fairy drudge condemned to some odd chore
Weaving an antique pattern stitch by stitch
In her closed garret dim – forsaking which
She with bold stroke and with unerring eye
Swats royally the unoffending fly.

iii.

As one in thought, words, love, these two abide
In their small cottage by the water-side;
It being their aim to journey down the years
With separate surnames and in twin careers
They study daily, secret and apart.
They delve in hidden sources of their art
Whilst Alexander, sporting at their knees,

Ponders in silence future victories.
Their friends from far and near on dainty dish
They entertain with pasta or with fish,
The whiles we note in their retreat below
Mute mysterious strangers come and go.

iv.

On our far point his early martins sound,
Faint African drum-beats through the forest 'round,
Where Fluke, the prowler of the midnight eyes
Brings home, fresh-killed, the morning sacrifice.
Here with the rocks in careless splendor piled
He meditates on nature undefiled;
He toils long hours like a mystic scribe,
Or 'round the campfire feeds the hungry tribe.
Perchance seen floating on a boat of air.
Perchance he joins us, blithe and debonair;
And yet anon, ere pleasures 'gin to pall,
Withdraws to tented clearing, past recall.