

For immediate release
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Community reading of Burroughs' essays marks naturalist's birthday

More than a dozen area residents will gather Saturday, April 4 to read essay selections and journal entries written by John Burroughs at a public celebration of the literary naturalist's 172nd birthday.

This free community event, sponsored by Woodchuck Lodge Inc. and Writers in the Mountains, will take place from 2:30 to 4:30 at Cassie's Café on Main Street in Burroughs' home town of Roxbury. Birthday cake will be served. Those who attend will have the first opportunity to sign up for a free nature writing workshop to be held May 30 at Burroughs' Woodchuck Lodge.

Everyone is welcome to come hear friends and neighbors in the April 4 dramatic reading, a story of sorts, told from boyhood to old age and meant to highlight the things and thoughts any observant person would note of a life lived in the Catskills.

There is also a nod to our seasons, starting with Burroughs' observations on April, his favorite month in these hills. Listen for how his Delaware County upbringing shaped his writing and his fame. Burroughs' self-schooled approach to scientific study had its origins in these mountains. The emotional attachment to his family, and his changing interests and preoccupations that came with age, will all be highlighted in the hour-long reading.

The readers range in age from 11 to 89 and come from many surrounding communities: Ben, Terry and Nelson Bradshaw of Stamford, Julian Rauter of Halcott, Christian Schorr, and Brian and Tristan Mulder of Roxbury, Peter Manning and David Hendricks of Bovina, Sally Fairbairn of Arkville, Mike Finberg and Ben Murdock of Margaretville, Dora Fowler of Grand Gorge, Bill Birns of Fleischmanns and others.

Also expected to attend are Vassar College Professor Jeff Walker, who edited the recently republished Burroughs collection *Signs and Seasons*; and Charlotte Zoe Walker of SUNY Oneonta who edited an anthology of Burroughs essays titled *The Art of Seeing Things*. Both books will be available for purchase.

"Burroughs is Delaware County's most famous resident. One of the finest museums in the world (the American Museum of Natural History in New York) has only five permanent exhibits dedicated to individuals and Burroughs is one of them," said Frank Carbone, a New Kingston resident and Writer's in the Mountains board member who conceptualized the event.

"Burroughs was shaped by everything he learned on that farm in Roxbury and he mentions it often in his essays. He describes things we've seen from our porch hundreds of times in such simple and eloquent terms. And I'm struck by how much has not changed, and how lucky I am to live in a place where that is the case. It gives me a feeling of hope. I disagreed with him once though. He found the soil 'of decent quality.' I'm not certain where he was digging at the time, but I still think we should celebrate his birthday!"

Joining in the celebration will be several local libraries (Roxbury, Andes, Bovina, Canon in Delhi, Fairview in Margaretville, and Skene in Fleischmanns), which will have their John Burroughs collections on exhibit. Some of the books are beautiful early editions and do not circulate.

Writing workshop planned

Those who attend the celebration will have the first opportunity to sign up for a very special nature writing workshop to be offered by Helene Levine-Keating on May 30 at Woodchuck Lodge in Roxbury, where Burroughs wrote several of his most famous essays during the last ten years of his life (1910-20).

During "In Burroughs' Footsteps," Levine-Keating, poet, photographer and professor of literature at Pace University, will encourage participants to slow down, engage all of their senses, and absorb nature's extraordinary details before conveying those sensory impressions to paper. Attendance at this

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free workshop is limited to the first ten people to sign up.

There is no fee; donations will be gratefully received by Woodchuck Lodge Inc. and Writers in the Mountains (WIM).

Who was John Burroughs?

John Burroughs popularized the nature essay and influenced the conservation ethic by prompting readers to observe the ways of nature right outside their door. More than a million and a half copies of his 27 books were sold during his lifetime.

A much-pursued celebrity, highly regarded by the movers and shakers of the age, Burroughs nonetheless returned often to the farm where he was born “under happy stars” on April 3, 1837, the seventh of nine children of Chauncey and Amy Kelly Burroughs.

After an eventful life in which he became friends with the likes of Walt Whitman and Teddy Roosevelt, Burroughs spent his final summers enjoying the flora and fauna he’d come to appreciate as a boy walking this same ground, which visitors to his summer retreat, Woodchuck Lodge, can still explore. The Lodge is open for tours the first weekend of each month, May to October, from 11 to 3 p.m.

The upcoming birthday celebration ushers in a new season of events and activities spotlighting Burroughs. On May 2, a new outdoor exhibit will be unveiled at Burroughs Memorial Field near Woodchuck Lodge, where the writer was buried on his 84th birthday, April 3, 1921.

On June 13, Peter Forbes, executive director of the Center for Whole Communities in Vermont, will be the featured speaker at John Burroughs Community Day, to be held at the Roxbury Arts Group, sponsored by Woodchuck Lodge, Inc., the Watershed Agricultural Council and others.

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