



# FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 32, November 2015

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### **Annual General Meeting**

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016 at 7:00pm  
Community Room, Dunbar Town House Museum



## **Notice of Annual General Meeting**

**Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016  
at 6.45pm for 7.00pm  
Dunbar Town House Museum,  
High Street, Dunbar**

### **Agenda**

- (i) Report on year's activities
- (ii) Filling any vacancies on Council\*
- (iii) Other competent business\*

*Non-members will be warmly welcomed*

**Following the AGM there will be showing of the video**

### ***Mile, Mile & A Half Hike, Laugh & Inspire on the John Muir Trail***

In an epic snow year, five friends leave their daily lives behind to hike California's historic John Muir Trail: from Yosemite to Mt. Whitney (the highest peak in the contiguous U.S.). Their goal – complete the journey in 25 days while capturing the amazing sights & sounds they encounter along the way. Inspired by their bond, humour, artistry & dedication, the group continues to grow: to include other artists, musicians & adventure seekers. Before they all reach the summit, hiker and viewers alike affirm the old adage – it's about the journey, not the destination. Come walk with us.

\* Please note that nominations for Council accompanied with the nominee's agreement in writing and items for consideration under other competent business should be lodged with the Secretary, c/o John Muir's Birthplace Museum, 126 High Street, Dunbar, EH42 1JJ by Monday 11th January 2016.

# **Annual Sand Sculpture Competition**

## **Sunday, 23rd August, 13:00 to 15:00, East Beach**

The competition was held on the East beach under totally blue skies and a warm easterly breeze. The entrants got busy after 1 pm. and four castles, two whales, and a small figure were made before the entrants cast their votes at 2.45 pm. The winning sculpture was a very large whale, with a pebble-labelled Edinburgh castle coming second. The winners were awarded Birthplace vouchers by Liz McLean, who also announced the results aided by Jo Moulin.



**The Winner!**



# **The Poet Painter and Nature's Prophet**

Over the summer a number of phone calls were received by Pauline Smeed, David Anderson and other staff at John Muir's Birthplace from an enthusiastic caller from Aberdeen. She was Anne Malcolm, the chairwoman of the Thomas Blake Glover Foundation in Fraserburgh. Her reason for phoning had nothing to do with Glover, the 'Scottish Samurai', but rather with the "dean of California's landscape painters", William Keith. Keith had been born in Aberdeenshire but was virtually unknown there, even in Oldmeldrum, his birthplace. Anne knew of the close friendship between Keith and John Muir and was promoting the idea of a Scottish exhibition of Keith's painting along with the story of the friendship.

The upshot was a meeting in the Birthplace on 12 August attended by Anne, David Anderson, Jo Moulin and Will Collin, along with Lorraine Forbes and David Cotto, Aberdeenshire Library Service, and Dr Alex Sutherland, Honorary Senior Teaching Fellow at the University of Aberdeen. The meeting was a productive one with general agreement that Keith's importance in the USA was such that Scotland should be made aware through an exhibition of his paintings. The friendship between Muir and Keith was a story worth telling and the more general public awareness of Muir would be helpful in promoting the exhibition. The target date, if efforts to mount a Keith and Muir exhibition are successful, would be 2017.

Will Collin

## **Kindred Spirits?**

Nature's apostle John Muir and William Keith, "poet painter" a Muir dubbed him enjoyed a friendship which spanned almost four decades. This short article tells how they first met.

Both were born in 1838, Muir in Dunbar and Keith in Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire. Both had birthdays on the 21st day of the month, Muir in April and Keith in November. Both were brought up in a strict Presbyterian family with maternal grandparents playing key roles. Both were taken to the United States before they reached their teens, Muir in 1849 and Keith in 1850.

Then their lives headed in different directions. Muir's took him from a Wisconsin frontier farm via University, Canada and his epic thousand-mile walk to San Francisco and Yosemite Valley at age 30. Keith had arrived in

California nine years earlier. On finishing school in New York, he was apprenticed to a wood engraver and in 1859 moved to San Francisco where he went into partnership with a fellow engraver. He began art lessons and married Elizabeth Emerson, one of his teachers and an accomplished watercolourist, in 1864. Their second child was born in January 1868 a few months before the arrival of the footloose Muir. However, Keith was about to move again. He had been in Yosemite in 1866, two years before Muir, and had been building up a portfolio of paintings. An exhibition and auction in August 1869 resulted in 33 being sold, raising over \$1,500. In September 1869 the Keiths left for Europe. On their return to the USA in 1870, the Keiths first lived in with Lizzie's parents in Maine and then took a studio with painter William Hahn in Boston, MA, only returning to San Francisco in May 1872. In September Keith was on his way to Yosemite with artist-friends Benoni Irwin and Thomas Ross and a letter of introduction to Muir from Mrs Jean Carr, Muir's mentor who had befriended him when at the University of Wisconsin. So how did that come about?

Since attending university, Muir had kept up a correspondence with Jeanne Carr who with husband Professor Ezra Carr had moved to Oakland, CA, in 1869. The Carrs were acquainted with writer Ralph Waldo Emerson and when he visited them in 1871 Jeanne Carr had given him a letter of introduction to John Muir. Emerson had been fascinated by the scenery and even more so by the young Scot. He returned to Concord and added Muir's name to his list of the most impressive men he knew. 'My Men' was short – only 18 names. It began and ended with two Scots, Thomas Carlyle and John Muir. Emerson was Lizzie Keith's fourth cousin and while in Boston, the Keiths had visited him in Concord, MA. Emerson told his young visitors about his visit to Yosemite Valley and the young Scot he had met there. He advised Keith to contact Jeanne Carr on his return to California and on 2 October 1872 she wrote a letter for Keith to give to Muir. It began, "My dear Muir, When you know Mr Irwin and Mr Keith to whom this will introduce you, do not accuse me of intentionally keeping the best wine of kindred spirits till the last of your season's feast..." It finished, "Goodbye. Love these good and true souls, and artists as well, as does your Friend, Jeanne C Carr".

It was as Emerson had described and Muir and Keith became instant friends. The friendship was to last nearly four decades until Keith's death on 13 April 1911.

Will Collin

## Yosemite National Park – 125 years old

Yosemite National park was ‘born’ on 1 October 1890. The same legislation had created Sequoia National Park, Yosemite’s near neighbour to the south, six days previously. They had been preceded in 1872 by Yellowstone National Park that many claim as the first national park in the world.

Key to the campaign for the area around Yosemite Valley to be given national park status were the articles John Muir wrote for ‘The Century Magazine’. In 1889, Robert Underwood Johnson, one of that magazine’s editors, journeyed with Muir to see the wonders of Yosemite Valley and the surrounding Sierra for himself. The two men were horrified at the destruction being caused by the “hoofed locusts” using the high pastures as summer grazing. Johnson persuaded Muir to write of the area’s outstanding beauty and the urgent need for its protection. ‘Treasures of Yosemite’ and ‘Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park’ appeared in ‘Century’ the following year and contributed greatly to the campaign Johnson and others were conducting in Washington. The passage of the required legislation was swift.

Paradoxically, the most vulnerable parts of the area, Yosemite Valley and the nearby Mariposa Grove of giant redwoods, were not included. Their control had already been ceded to the State of California by Act of Congress in 1864. Criticism of their management by John Muir and others, reinforced by Muir during his meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, led to the necessary legislation being enacted by the Californian State Legislature and US Congress in 1906. That year Yosemite Valley took its rightful place at the heart of Yosemite National Park.

The contribution of John Muir to the creation of Yosemite National Park and others, and to the formation of the National Park Service, celebrating its centenary next year, is recognised by America calling Muir the “father of America’s national parks”. Friends, with the support of the Birthplace Trust and East Lothian’s Museums Service, intend to put on a temporary exhibition in the Birthplace over the coming months. If you have any Yosemite National Park images or memorabilia that you are willing for us to include, please get in touch.

Will Collin

## Where To Now?

Following the John Muir Association delegation's visit from Martinez to Dunbar, 21-22 May 2015, a number of meetings have taken place. A meeting of the full JMA board took place on 12 June when after discussion the members drew up a list of 14 desirable outcomes. They included setting up a programme of staff exchanges; improving website/social media connections; exchanging newsletters; and links aimed at sharing music cultures. There were educational outcomes aiming to establish ongoing connections between schools and a number of outcomes designed to increase tourist links and making visits easier.

The list was sent by JMA secretary George Turnbull to Friends and was discussed at the JMBT trustees meeting in July and Friends Council meeting on 12 August as well as being copied to other participants in the May get-together. Scottish responses were pulled together and a copy sent to George. One suggestion that seemed an essential condition was that individuals from both sides should be identified as the persons responsible for particular areas and the main points of contact between Martinez and Dunbar in those areas. However they would need to ensure that their committees and members were kept informed and consulted when necessary.

Presently Friends council presently consists of eight members most of whom have a day job and all of whom have other commitments. If the potential connections between Martinez and Dunbar are to be developed we need help. So if you would like to find out more, please contact Will Collin via the Friends' e-mail address<sup>1</sup>

## More from Martinez

On 10 August Friends welcomed four more visitors from Martinez. Tim and Eileen Farley and friends Eric and Denise Miller were in the UK for a motoring holiday and drove to Dunbar from Stirling. Tim had already been in touch by e-mail and were met at the Birthplace by Friends' Duncan Smeed and Will Collin. After introductions and front door photos, the four had a tour of the building and a visit to Dunbar Town House before Will took them round part of John Muir's Dunbar. Eileen, as a 6th grade teacher in Concord, CA, was particularly interested in the Dunbar Primary School art on display as part

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<sup>1</sup> info [at] muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

of the ‘Picturing Dunbar’ exhibition in the Town House. All four were fascinated by Dunbar’s lengthy military and social history.



**Tim & Eileen Farley, Denise & Eric Miller, Will Collin**

During the walkabout, Tim Farley told Will that he had served two terms as a member of Martinez City Council and was currently an elected board member of the Contra Cost Community College District. His ‘day job’ is as the community and government relations director at Saint Mary’s College in Moraga, CA, only 10 miles from Martinez. Now that was

a coincidence for St Mary’s College houses the world’s largest collection of Willam Keith paintings – over 180 of them. And two days later there was to be a meeting in the Birthplace to discuss the feasibility of mounting an exhibition of Keith’s paintings over here in Scotland. Tim offered to do what he could to help.

There was no deadline to complete the tour of Dunbar as the four had booked in to the ‘Royal Mac’ Hotel but 6 o’clock brought the parting of the ways. The next morning they traveled south to see parts of Hadrian’s Wall and then on to York before returning to Martinez.



## ***The John Muir Concert*** **by the andante Chamber Choir**



Late last year the choir director of the **andante Chamber Choir**<sup>2</sup>, John Stone, made contact with Friends' and very kindly offered to help organise a charity fundraising concert in support of the Birthplace. The date arranged for this year was Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October and *The John Muir Concert* in Belhaven Parish Church with song and the spoken words of John Muir was a truly inspirational evening. John Stone had obviously chosen works where the lyrics reflected the life of John Muir.

Muir, in his visit to Dunbar in 1893, stayed with his cousin, Maggie Lunam, in Belhaven Road not too far from the church but whether he visited it I do not know as the Lunams were members of Dunbar Parish Church. Immediately after the interval, the choir sang three parts of a new work, *The John Muir Suite*, by Professor Peter Bird of Los Angeles, California. Professor Bird put the words of John Muir to music. Absolutely magical. We were told that our concert was the European premier performance of the work. The choir, who all hail from the border lands of Scotland and England, are a most talented group of choristers.

Jim Thompson

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<sup>2</sup> <http://andantechamberchoir.webs.com>

## John Muir's Birthplace Museum – News

The countdown to Christmas has begun in Dunbar with everyone looking forward to the switching on of Christmas Lights switch on 29th November. The Birthplace will be taking part in events with a photographic display by the Christmas Lights team (until the end of the year) and storytelling!

Meanwhile, images of Christmas cards designed by Dunbar Primary School pupils will be projected on to the front of the Birthplace, for the night of the switch on only, between 5pm and 7pm!

When Christmas shopping, don't forget that we have a wide range of gifts, including books, stationery and, new this year, John Muir Way tartan items and Woodland Trust diaries and calendars! And of course there is still time to purchase a copy of Dunbar Primary School's wonderful book, *'A Celebration of John Muir's Life'*!

The JMB will once again take part in Shop Local scheme between 1 November and 24 December. Anyone who spends £20 or more will receive an entry card for a prize draw to win a share of a £2000 prize fund.

### In the Footsteps of John Muir by Jim Fowler



An exhibition of paintings and drawings to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Yosemite National Park.

This is a selling exhibition with prints also available for sale, and will run until 20th November

## JMB Retains 5 Star VisitScotland Status



Once again, staff at JMB were delighted to receive their 5 star award from the Visit Scotland Inspector who visited at the beginning of September. In particular he commented on the warm welcome received by visitors and on the decor that had been freshened this year.

### A Selection of Visitor comments

- *'Will be happy reading the Quotations book!'*
- *'Mecca for us Conservationists'*
- *'Very Very cool'*
- *'Merci pour ce formidable muse! Belle reconnaissance!'*
- *'Just finished the Walk – fabby!'*
- *'Amazing, perfect for students!'*
- *'Excellent, & lovely staff'*

### Meaford, Ontario - Update

[Since the last newsletter Friends' have received the following (August) update from Jody Seeley of Meaford Museum. Thanks Jody. Ed.]

- John Muir Day is happening in September and are pleased to have a Scottish gentleman who moved to Meaford organizing our entertainment for the day. He was a drummer at Atholl Palace hotel in Pitlochry as well as in a Scottish Folk band...whose band name I just forgot!
- We have also been running a contest all year with a scavenger hunt within the museum to learn more about John Muir with a prize to be drawn for in November.
- We also are working with the local schools to apply for the John Muir Award in the Fall.
- I have been asked to speak on John Muir in our Area at the Bruce County Museum Wednesday, Feb. 24, at 10am. As well as at the Grey County Historical Society meeting in March at the Meaford Museum.
- A new addition to our Little Green Apples Education kits is a John Muir box showcasing his time in Meaford and his life.

# **Membership News**

## **Online Delivery of Newsletters**

A significant number of Friends have opted out of receiving paper copies of the Newsletter and now read the online version<sup>3</sup> instead. This is a significant saving since the production and delivery cost of the Newsletter is now a substantial proportion of the membership subscription. If you still receive paper copies of the newsletter and would like to opt out of receiving paper copies in the future then please do let us know.

## **Membership Renewal Reminders**

Friends' Council hopes that the initiatives, events and publications that are produced to help promote Muir's life and work and that support John Muir's Birthplace have been of interest to the membership. If our records show that your membership is due for renewal then a subscription form will be included in this newsletter mailing.

### **FRIENDS CONTACTS**

**Official address:** Friends of John Muir's Birthplace, John Muir's Birthplace, 126 High Street, Dunbar EH42 1JJ: tel: 01368 865899

**Friends Email:** [info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk](mailto:info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)

**Friends Website:** [www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk](http://www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)

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<sup>3</sup> <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>