

Herbert Wendell Gleason's Rambles in West Concord

Herbert Wendell Gleason was a major American landscape photographer. His work took him to locations in Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Minnesota, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, California, Washington State, Alaska, and north to Canada. Born in Malden, Massachusetts on June 5, 1855, he was educated at Williams College (Class of 1877) and the Union and Andover Theological Seminaries. His first career was in the Congregational ministry, to which he was ordained in 1887. He served as pastor at the Como Avenue Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and then, for eleven years, as a supply minister. He edited the *Northwest Congregationalist* (later known as *The Kingdom*). In 1899, he made a major life change, permanently retiring from the ministry and taking up photography as his livelihood. He practiced this second vocation almost until his death on October 4, 1937. Gleason's wife, Lulu Rounds Gleason, was his frequent traveling companion, as well as acting as his colorist. The couple had no children.

Upon changing careers, Gleason moved back to Massachusetts and in the fall of 1899 began making photographic trips to Concord. A pioneer environmentalist, he was drawn to the writings of Henry David Thoreau. In his photographs of the place, taken over a period of thirty-eight years, Gleason purposefully captured the locations, the wildlife, and the plants that Thoreau had known and about which he had written. Gleason returned repeatedly over the years to the same locations in Concord, shooting familiar subjects from different angles, in different seasons, at various times of day. The collection consequently includes multiple images of particular landscape features taken at different times.

The Boston publishing firm of Houghton Mifflin asked Gleason to provide photographs for its twenty-volume 1906 *Walden and Manuscript Editions* of Thoreau's writings. Gleason's work also illustrated Houghton Mifflin's 1917 *Through the Year with Thoreau*.

Gleason was an important figure in the national park movement. Appointed Interior Department Inspector by Stephen Mather (first Director of the National Park Service, Gleason's close friend, and the subject of some of his photographs), he made expeditions to photograph the nation's established national parks and also areas under consideration as possible national park lands. Loaded down by the quantity of heavy equipment and supplies that necessarily accompanied an early twentieth century photographer, Gleason travelled to the Rockies, the Sierras, Yellowstone, Bryce and Zion Canyons, the Grand Canyon, the Pacific coast, Mount Rainier, Alaska and the Canadian Rockies.



The Photographs

Top Shelf, left to right:

H.W. Gleason at Thoreau's cairn, Walden Pond, Concord, Massachusetts, May 19, 1908.

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *Trees Reflected in River* (at Concord Junction). June 24, 1916. (From a slide lecture).

Second Shelf, left to right:

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *Second Division Brook in woods above Old Mill Road*. April 15, 1918.

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *Large hemlock, Derby Farm*. Nov. 8, 1899.

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *Second Division Brook below Old Mill Road*. April 15, 1918.

Third Shelf, left to right:

Herbert Wendell Gleason. Assabet River, grasses on bank, near Reformatory. (*Panicum agrostoides*). June 28, 1920.

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *Mill brook at Concord Junction*. Aug. 19, 1900.

Fourth Shelf, left to right:

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *Old Causeway from below, at Hayward's mill pond*. April 15, 1918.

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *Second Division Brook and large pine*. May 9, 1905.

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *The Assabet by Tarbell's bank*. April 15, 1918.

Bottom Shelf, left to right:

Gleason map of Concord, prepared for 1906 editions of Thoreau's writings.

Herbert Wendell Gleason. *Cloud effects, Second Division Brook*. November 14, 1903.

Some of Gleason's photographs appeared in *National Geographic*, some illustrated the writings of John Muir. Gleason was a friend of Luther Burbank, whose horticultural experiments he photographed and presented in an illustrated lecture. During the 1920s and 1930s, he was photographer for the Arnold Arboretum in Boston.