

Charles Dickens In America

By the year 1842, Charles Dickens was well on his way to becoming the most prolific English-writer since William Shakespeare. By age 30, his novels were well-known on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

In that Year, he decided to embark upon a tour of the North American "Eden" as the United States had become known to would-be emigrants from the British Isles and Europe.

His ostensible mission was to collect information about the beatitudes of America for a Travel Book to be published eventually as AMERICAN NOTES.

Dickens' true intent was to drum up support for enactment of an International Copyright

Law for the protection of Authors such as himself whose works were regularly published and sold in countries other than their place of origin with no revenues accruing to their creators.

In accordance with his "Primary

Assignment" Dickens explored Institutions such as Prisons, Asylums and a School for the Blind as well as Sites where social experiments were progressing. His travel itinerary included the Industries of Lowell, Massachusetts, and the Shaker Colony at New Lebanon, New York

He also journeyed south to Washington D.C. and Richmond, Virginia before heading west to St. Louis, Missouri. His return to New York City via Quebec, Canada, included a visitation to Niagara Falls which later emerged as the "highlight" of this 1842 tour.

By the latter natural geological formation he was awed while by the institution of Slavery he was appalled. Through his American Notes and a Novel entitled Martin Chuzzlewit, both written soon after his return to England, Dickens vented his feelings about lifestyles he had observed during his travels abroad and did his best to explode what he termed "the Myth" of

America as an "Eden".

Such critiques in addition to his advocacy of International Copyright Laws and the abolition of Slavery did little to endear him to Americans. He subsequently decided to entertain no thoughts of returning to a Land where as he observed, there was so little tolerance for unpopular opinions or in other words "Freedom of Thought".

Fifteen years later however, at the urging of an American Publisher named James Fields, the creator of David Copperfield, Oliver Twist and A Christmas Carol did return across the Atlantic Ocean. The Year was 1867 and the objective this time was to effect a "Reading Tour" similar to the ventures throughout England and the Continent which had brought Dickens considerable Fame as well as Fortune.

The only real link between these two visits was the Issue of International Copyright. Though his advocacy of this Issue in 1842 had been in vain - as would

remain the case for nearly the entirety of the Nineteenth Century - Publisher Fields had proposed a scheme which would in effect accomplish the same results translated as financial aggrandizement for both Author and Publisher.

As a lad of fourteen years, James Thomas Fields relocated to Boston, Massachusetts, to clerk for a bookseller. Subsequently he began contributing Articles to newspapers. His affinity for the printed word, especially his capacity for recognizing saleable literature eventually led to a partnership in the Publishing Firm established by William Ticknor. Through this position he came to personally know the preeminent Authors of New England including Emerson, Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes as well as British literati such as Wordsworth, Carlyle and Charles Dickens.

His affinity for the latter was reinforced

by similarity of backgrounds. Dickens, who had started "working for a living" at an early age was largely self-educated.

Having experienced a bare minimum of formal schooling it was his voracious appetite for Reading combined with a career in Newspaper work which laid the foundation for his success as a Novelist. His penchant for theatrical productions led ultimately to a series of Reading Tours which ensured his financial success.

Fields spent his Early Years reading whatever literature he could access at the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Athenaeum. Though eventually becoming a semi-successful Poet, his experience was principally in the Marketing of Literature. He began his career as a Bookseller; moved into Journalism and while still working as a Publisher became Editor of The Atlantic, a magazine established by New England writers to highlight their works. This was

the Role he was primarily concerned with
when he persuaded Dickens to return to
America for a Reading Tour.

Scene 1: Boston, Massachusetts 1867
James T. Fields
Charles Dickens

Fields: IT IS WITH GREAT PLEASURE
THAT I WELCOME YOU
BACK TO America
AND ESPECIALLY
TO MY HOME.
I HAVE SPENT CONSIDERABLE TIME
AT Your Home IN England
SO I FEEL IT
A LONG PAST-DUE DEBT
AS AN HONOR
TO HAVE You
AND Your Amanuensis, Mr. Dolby,
AS MEMBERS OF OUR HOUSEHOLD
DURING Your STAY
IN OUR COUNTRY!