

# Reflections on the American Lyceum: The Legacy of Josiah Holbrook and the Transcendental Sessions

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## **Introduction**

Josiah Holbrook formed The American Lyceum Movement and it would become a pivotal foundation for adult education in the nineteenth-century United States. The movement functioned *outside* the traditional university system in order to address expanding needs of adult learners through non-formal, community-based structures. Holbrook's legacy evokes the organization of complex social environments conducive to the transmission of applied sciences and egalitarian adult education, as well as the transcendental ethos of the time. Holbrook's actions instilled across the U.S. character a sense of liberal expressionism; he outfitted the young nation with an andragogical venue capable of articulating practical and progressive philosophies. The advancement represented in the Lyceum manifested the social and educational aims of both layman and philosopher. Herein I describe the roots, formation, and development of Holbrook's movement, discuss the imperative educational and social repercussions of the Lyceum, and shed light on the relevance of some of the brilliant lectures presented in Salem's Lyceum during the 1848–1849 season. Ultimately I establish the first scholarly connection between the American Lyceum Movement and the Morrill Land-Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890, for Justin Smith Morrill's direct involvement in the American Lyceum Movement led him to pen his watershed higher education legislation. Finally, my analysis reveals the Lyceum's inheritance as salient today.

## **Origins and Necessity**

According to Bode's (1956) comprehensive analysis of the American Lyceum, Josiah Holbrook was born in Derby, Connecticut in 1788. He was raised in a rural environment and became familiar with agricultural equipment and farm machinery. As a young man, he also grew fond of geology, mineralogy, and developed a passionate desire to learn. He became an astute scholar and at age 18 he enrolled at Yale College. Holbrook participated soundly in class and managed to attain a laboratory position under a prestigious professor named Benjamin

Sillman (Bode, 1956). Ray (2005) argues Sillman was the first professor at Yale to lecture on concrete and modern scientific subjects such as chemistry and natural history. Sillman's discourses on the physical properties of minerals, geological taxonomies, and chemical compounds represented a significant progression from Yale's antiquated custom of scientific instruction; pre-modern teachings of natural philosophy, or the general study of nature, had dominated the college's science curriculum since its founding in 1701.<sup>1</sup> Sillman was also editor of the *American Journal of Science* through which he effectively distributed applied and contemporary scientific knowledge. Holbrook drew influence from Sillman's oratory prowess and editorial capabilities (Bode, 1956).

Sillman's modern scientific teachings, however important for Holbrook, were indicative of the knowledge's peripheral role at Yale. Very much like Yale College, early-nineteenth-century higher education establishments in the U.S. remained obstinately narrow in curricular offerings. Geiger (2005) argues, in the succession of the Second Great Awakening, the vast majority of prototypical U.S. colleges were religiously affiliated institutions, concomitant with their respective Christian sects. Clerical tutelage was considered the main goal of college matriculation and the training of ministers "an integral mission of the colleges" (p. 45). Ecclesiastical scholarship and expressly the demand for fluency in the classical languages cultivated an orthodox program. As a result, the reproduction of conservative curricula within formal higher education institutions rarely provided opportunities for technical training and relegated the teaching of the mechanical and agricultural arts to an apprentice system.<sup>2</sup> The inflexibility of the early-nineteenth-century college curriculum proved at odds with emerging U.S. industries. Consequently, these changes profoundly would influence the demands of adult education.

By the 1820s, a growing number of U.S. workers strongly criticized colleges and universities for their restrictive curricula. The rapid emergence of advanced agricultural mechanics, the boom in the textile industry, and the ever-expanding construction of railways and transportation systems offered new employments requiring technical skill proficiency. This rise in U.S. industry revealed a citizenry of intellectual practitioners who yearned to be educated in the mechanical arts and applied sciences. However few civilian, U.S. higher education institutions existed to accommodate the needs of this expanding class of adult learners. Consequently, laymen insisted either upon bolstering the customary college curriculum or locating other means of education. Geiger (2005) argues that, in the first several decades of the nineteenth century, "colleges were attacked for their obsession with the dead languages" and "for neglecting practical subjects and science" (p. 46). As

modern science and technology advanced ever forward, Holbrook recognized this gap and began to develop a proposal to accommodate a new class of adult learners.

### **Formation and Appeal**

William Russell's first volume of the *American Journal of Education* (1826) includes an article colorfully exploring the idea that demands for mechanical instruction were already being answered in other, industrializing nations. Social establishments such as Anderson's Institution, founded in 1796 in Glasgow, Scotland, and the London Mechanics' Institute, which opened in 1824 in England, illustrated the popularity and instrumentalism of mechanical associations (*American Journal of Education*, 1826). Furthermore, Holbrook read in this very issue between 85 and 90 mechanics institutes or similar establishments were prospering in England (Weaver, 1976). He gathered from his readings, in a sense, it was becoming necessary for adult learners to get professional training outside the traditional institutional setting. Holbrook ardently believed local communities held within themselves an intrinsic educational capacity. He theorized adults could organize themselves and provide educational means to one another without necessity for college matriculation.

As an early innovator of U.S. adult education, Holbrook broadly understood the self-directed, emancipatory learning aptitude of adults. According to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007), emancipatory learning in adult education includes "not only the examination by learners of the sociopolitical assumptions under which they learn and function" but also the "incorporation of collective action as an outcome" (p. 108). With a rendition of this theory in mind, Holbrook's aim was to uplift entire village communities through mutual adult improvement. In the early 1820s, Holbrook developed archetypal community clubs and societies in Connecticut for the mutual improvement of youth and adults. The social community clubs were founded so members might discuss applied science, history, and art. Though these first clubs were largely unsuccessful, he nevertheless gathered important experience that would later shape the construction of the American Lyceum Movement.

In October 1826, Holbrook decided to build on his directorial experience from former community efforts and published a manifesto: "The Association of Adults for the Purpose of Mutual Education." He chose to publish the outline and goals of his mutual education club anonymously in the *American Journal of Education*, since the journal's audience was well aligned with his goals. William Russell, the journal's editor and curator, supported the diffusion of applied modern science, higher education access for men and women, and community uplift

(*American Journal of Education*, 1826). One month after the publication of his manifesto, the first branch of the American Lyceum was established in Millbury, Massachusetts where, coincidentally, the *American Journal of Education* was published (Long, 1991). An expanded edition of Holbrook's proposition was published in the *American Journal* in 1829, and was entitled "American Lyceum, or Society for the Improvement of Schools and Diffusion of Useful Knowledge."

Holbrook deliberately chose the term *lyceum* for several reasons. According to records from *The New England Farmer*, the term had been assigned to an agro-mechanical institute founded in Maine as early as 1822 (Fessenden, 1823). Other educational organizations, domestic and international, had adopted the term before Holbrook. Ray (2005) suggests that, by the 1820s, "the correlation between *lyceum* and learning was anything but vague" (p. 3). It is clear Holbrook recognized the popularity of this term and adopted it, though deeper analysis suggests Holbrook's ongoing relationship with Sillman also influenced his choice of terminology. Although Sillman advocated the study and teaching of modern science, he remained rooted in Yale's conservatism. In 1828, Sillman decisively defended Yale's classical curriculum in the landmark *Yale Report*. Geiger (2005) summarizes the implications of the report:

The classical languages were championed as the ideal vehicle for instilling mental discipline as well as culture and "balance." From these premises, the report could argue that all other forms of education—for practical training or advanced learning—should be relegated to other kinds of instructions. This position rationalized the *de facto* undergraduate focus of the colleges. The cogency of the *Yale Report*, moreover, seemed to grow over time and become the principle defense of the classical course for the next sixty years. (p. 47)

Sillman's defense of the curriculum and his transparent petition for non-traditional and professional learning to occur outside the college therefore presented Holbrook with a justification to establish an extramural association. The term *lyceum* functioned as an open admiration of Aristotle's public lecture school in classical Athens. Moreover, Holbrook sagaciously recognized not only the practicality of creating an external organization but also respected the traditional system from which he advanced by legitimizing the entire presentation of the novel movement through his use of the classical style. According to Ray (2005), "Early promotional materials present the Lyceum as a return to the much-admired splendors of ancient Greece and also a herald of a new, broad-based democracy in the nineteenth century United States" (p. 5).

Holbrook intended to accomplish two main objectives: 1) diffuse rational and useful information through the community generally; and 2)

apply the sciences and the various branches of education to the domestic and practical arts. Holbrook personally took on the challenge of circulating the idea of the Lyceum by actively lecturing and traveling in New England (Bode, 1956). His powerful, attractive personality drove the message of egalitarian education. He empowered men *and* women to take education into their own hands and to build community centers for the distribution of useful knowledge. Holbrook (1833) argues the Lyceum system, “especially in its social principle, can be applied for the benefit of both sexes, all classes, and all ages of the American Republic” (p. 4).

The American Lyceum became very attractive for an abundance of reasons. Along with its initial intent to discuss applied science, the mechanical arts, and history, village communities proved ready to discuss philosophy and progressive social developments. The Lyceum provided a venue within which social ideas such as the abolition of slavery, women’s rights, public education, unionism, and a vast array of other progressive, pertinent municipal and social causes could be explored. Furthermore, the organizational structure of the Lyceum allowed a wide range of access, local convenience, and communicative freedom. People from villages and regional centers alike could go to their homegrown Lyceum for a very reasonable price to attend weekly or annual lecture series that conferred shared issues, educational materials, and philosophies. The Lyceum structure provided a powerful outlet for free expression and intellectualism. Program and lecture topics broadened widely as communities articulated and directed their own educational endeavors. Bode (1956) summarizes the movement:

At the very beginning it was designed for artisans and farmers, but since it taught the practical application of science—which would result in better workmen and more efficient farmers—it did not threaten the higher economic groups in the way a political forum would have. Then, as the lyceum programs began to change into those heterogeneous courses of lectures on travel, history, biography, foreign affairs, and the art of living, the audience also changed. (p. 30)

By 1831, the movement had exploded like wildfire, by which time there were at least 800 town Lyceums complemented by 60 county regional centers (Weaver, 1976). The same year, Holbrook’s successes culminated in New York City where the American Lyceum Movement became a national society whose membership included interstate delegates and county officers (Long, 1991).

Notably, the role of Lyceum participants changed between the formative periods that spanned the 1820s through the 1830s and latter periods that stretched from the 1840s through the 1860s. During the initial stages, local associations would promote and read their own

lectures and scientific presentations. Later, the trend moved toward neighborhood establishments participating in sponsorship of outside lecturers. This was especially the case in larger cities such as Portland, Boston, and Salem. The expanding interests presented in main Lyceum centers began to attract prominent literary and scientific figures. Celebrated agriculturalists, poets, and even musicians began to tour and participate in lecture series across the nation. All the while, Holbrook supported public intellectualism through his prolific writing. In a letter to the editor of *The Colored American* (1839), Holbrook praised the common farmer as a scientist in his own right.

Mr. Editor,—I have, for several years, been fully convinced, that neither lawyers, nor physicians, nor clergymen, nor professors of colleges, nor any other class of the community, have so many inducements or so many facilities for becoming really intelligent, scientific men, as farmers. No class of men have an occasion for so constant, or so extensive an application of science, in their profession. Botany, mineralogy, geology, chemistry, natural philosophy, entomology, and the natural history of animals generally, are brought into use, directly or indirectly by every farmer, almost every day he is engaged in his business. (p. 4)

By 1839, there were between 4,000 and 5,000 groups spanning from New England west to the Missouri and south to Florida. The incredible growth of the American Lyceum movement incentivized celebrity lecturers to tour professionally throughout the country. Iconic presenters and professional orators enthusiastically visited multiple Lyceum societies to enlighten large crowds; financial gains and self-promotion drove these endeavors (Ray, 2005). Among those iconic lecturers who toured Lyceum circuits in later periods include the renowned transcendental philosophers of New England.

### **Transcendental Harmony**

A profound compatibility is evidenced between the American Lyceum Movement and transcendentalism. First, the philosophical foundation of both crusades developed as a refutatory reaction to conservative societal and religious norms. The groups' ideas on adult education closely mirrored Brookfield's (2001) argument: "critical theory of adult learning should have at its core an understanding of how adults learn to recognize the predominance of ideology in their everyday thoughts and actions and in the institutions of civil society" (p. 20). Accordingly, both assemblages were comprised of adults who contested hegemonic ideas and practices and challenged traditional ideologies by operating largely outside the conventional higher education structure. Second, each movement had roots firmly positioned in New England

and therefore the main leadership parties were often in close communicative proximity. Frothingham (1876) emphasizes, “New England furnished the only plot of ground on the planet, where the transcendental philosophy had a chance to show what it was and what it proposed” (p. 105). Bode (1956) offers similar commentary on the Lyceum’s location: “It was in New England that the lyceum developed best, and Massachusetts was clearly pre-eminent within New England” (p. 41). Lastly, major theorizations of transcendental thought resonated roundly within Lyceum lectures. The expansion of the Lyceum Movement’s diverse, progressive properties appealed to the most influential transcendental minds of New England. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and other notable figures utilized the Lyceum podium to broadcast free discussion of liberally motivated ideas. Along with its technical and scientific applications, Holbrook’s lectern became a social stage for the dissemination of enlightened and reformist philosophy. The result was an inextricable and undeniable melding of institutional pragmatism and groundbreaking philosophical inquiry. My subsequent analysis of the Salem Lyceum Chapter verifies the harmony between transcendentalist and American Lyceum movements.

### **The Salem Lyceum**

The Massachusetts Lyceum, most notably the Salem chapter, conceptualized a series of consortial, enlightening lectures that eventually attracted some of the nineteenth century’s most influential thinkers, mechanics, and progressives. Each year’s roster proved more exciting than the last. The season of 1848–1849 was particularly extraordinary. The remarkable lineup is chronicled in Cameron’s (1969) *The Massachusetts Lyceum during the American Renaissance*. Among the year’s lecturers were Henry Thoreau, author of *Walden*; Ralph Waldo Emerson, renowned transcendentalist and author; Horace Mann, educational reformer; Edwin Whipple; James T. Fields; and many other prominent minds (Cameron, 1969). The Salem Lyceum of Massachusetts became an extraordinary example of Holbrook’s legacy. This Lyceum’s historical depth, richness of lecture quality, and forward-looking agenda marked a notable episode in the American Lyceum Movement.

According to the *Salem Gazette Press* (1879), the Salem Lyceum chapter was established by the town’s local citizenry in January 1830. Opening lectures began the following February. The first lectures were delivered in the Universalist Meeting House due to a lack of space in the Town Hall.<sup>3</sup> That summer, plans were drafted by local leaders to construct a Lyceum hall. The structure was erected and made ready for occupancy in January 1831. The overwhelming support of the community and the triumph of the lectures accounted for the expense of the building. In fact, “The cost of the lectures were so small, and the

income of the Lyceum was so large, that in a very few years the debt of the building was extinguished, and it has since been the property of the members of the Lyceum” (*Salem Gazette Press*, 1879, p. 5).

Lyceum Hall became an admired center for adult education in Salem, providing opportunities for average citizens to seek and gain knowledge of such topics as farm mechanics, art, and philosophy. Men from varying occupations attended the lectures (Bode, 1956). Women, too, were properly represented in Salem; they were expected to contribute to the intellectual symposia. Egalitarian access to the Salem Lyceum’s lectern provided a powerful tool for educated women to express their intellectual capability and to represent their ideas freely on behalf of their underrepresented constituency. The *Salem Gazette Press* (1879) expressed that, “for many years ladies have not only attended the lectures upon equal terms with the gentlemen, but have assisted to deliver them, until it has come to be thought that a course is incomplete without a lady lecturer or reader” (p. 6). The grand role of the American Lyceum continued to empower women well into the 1870s and beyond. In 1833, Holbrook is quoted as saying, “ladies have in many instances used the accommodations provided by Lyceums, for their own benefit and the benefit of the community” (p. 4). Furthermore, Ray (2005) asserts, “With women’s access to formal education and the traditional professions severely restricted, the lecture circuits—particularly after the Civil War—provided the opportunity for a remunerative public career” (p. 36). As the prestige of the Salem Lyceum evolved, so did the quality of its lecturers.

In 1848, the distinguished 20<sup>th</sup> course of the Salem Lyceum’s symposium was comprised of an all-star cast. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who authored *The Scarlet Letter*, became the official secretary of the Salem Lyceum that year. During his term, he worked tirelessly to bring in the utmost in fascinating lecturers in order to provide eloquent, educative uplift for his community (Bode, 1956). As per standard national Lyceum procedures, Hawthorne corresponded with lecturers to determine a presentation date and negotiate a speaker’s fee accordingly (Ray, 2005). The following list marks those dynamic topics discussed at the apex of the American Lyceum Movement in Salem. Cameron (1969) chronicles Salem’s presenter repertoire in the season spanning 1848–1849:

- Daniel Webster—History of the *Constitution of the United States*
- James T. Fields—A Poem, “Post of Honor”
- Henry D. Thoreau—Student Life in New England, its Economy
- Henry Colman—Philanthropic [*sic*] Institutions of England
- John S. Holmes—Self-Possession
- Louis Agassiz (three lectures)—Vegetable Kingdom



- Edwin P. Whipple—Genius
- Theodore Parker—Transcendentalism
- Ralph Waldo Emerson—England and the English
- Charles Sumner—Law of Progress
- Edwin P. Whipple—Authors
- Samuel Osgood—Poetry of Mechanism
- Henry Colman—A Conversation about England
- Henry Giles—*Don Quixote*, Woman
- Henry D. Thoreau—Student Life, its Aims and Employments
- Henry Giles—European Revolutions
- Henry Giles—*Don Quixote*, Human Life
- Horace Mann (two lectures)—Knowledge (p. 19)

The lecturers in this list are easily recognizable by scholars today. Thoreau, Emerson, Whipple, Mann, Fields, and others had a significant impact on both U.S. character and culture. Education, history, philosophy, agriculture, technological trends, poetry, social commentary, economics, and a vast variety of other subjects were represented. This roster well illustrates the breadth of subject matter covered in the Salem Lyceum, and its extensiveness is descriptive of the fervor of adult learning pursuits inherent in the American Lyceum Movement.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, many great Americans were influenced by the entirety of the movement. One such was U.S. Senator Justin Smith Morrill.

### **The Connection: Morrill Land-Grants Acts and the American Lyceum Movement**

The American Lyceum Movement and the Morrill land-grant colleges share striking structural and symbolic similarities. Justin Smith Morrill's direct involvement in the Lyceum led him to author watershed education bills. Much like Holbrook, Morrill expanded upon his understanding of adult education societies and established progressive institutions that aimed to administer the teaching of applied sciences and an expanded curriculum. Further, Morrill's land-grant colleges effectively broadened educative access for adult women and working-class men. They operated independent of established, traditional colleges and aspired to provide vocational opportunities to an expansive, Western frontier.

Justin Smith Morrill was born in Strafford, Vermont, in 1810. He attended Thetford Academy, now the oldest secondary school in Vermont. However, Morrill did not attend college due to his family's financial limitations. By age 18, Morrill was well-versed in literature and interested in politics. To utilize his skills, he moved to Portland, Maine, in search of work. Morrill quickly found a job as a merchant's clerk in

Portland and continued to practice his composition proficiencies. In 1828, he was actively involved in a mutual-improvement society called "The Club." His colleagues gathered to discuss "ideas and hear lectures" (Cross, 1999, p. 8). Talks of modern science and ancient history were common and encouraged among Morrill and his peers. Morrill's early life participation in a scientific and lecture-based society is noteworthy because he would likely have been conscious of the presence of community-based organizations such as the Lyceum and other agro-mechanical societies within the Portland region. Bode (1956) notes, outside Massachusetts, "Augusta, Belfast, and Portland were the other cities that usually supported lyceums," and the Lyceums in Maine "showed more activity than that of any other New England state aside from Massachusetts" (p. 58). The eminent concentration of Holbrook's organizational activity within the Portland region was finely complemented by the first vocational trade school in the United States. Gardiner, Maine, situated roughly 50 miles northeast of Portland, was the home to the Gardiner Lyceum which, according to Cooper (1895), was designed to enable "mechanics and farmers to become skillful in their respective pursuits" (p. 276). Launched in 1822 by Robert Hallowell Gardiner, the Gardiner Lyceum institutionally implemented a curriculum that emphasized a blend of the mechanical, technical, and agricultural arts (Lang, 2002). It represented a valuable center of industry and knowledge for the regional community. An impressive report on roads published in 1830 by the Gardiner Lyceum Committee demonstrates the instrumental, cooperative, and physically far-reaching nature of the organization (Gardiner Lyceum, 1830). The assumption is Morrill probably attended some Lyceum lectures during his stay in Portland, or at least he was well aware of the Lyceum's place in the community.

After his three-year stay in Portland, Morrill moved back to Strafford, Vermont where he formed a business partnership with a general store owner and continued his self-directed studies. Wikof (1985) states Morrill "read extensively, started a subscription for a town library in 1827, and in 1831 helped found a lyceum" (p. 132). Morrill was eager to raise public intellectualism through community learning. He, like many working class people around him, did not have the opportunity to attend college. It is assumed that, during this time, Morrill recognized the practicality of learning through channels outside the traditional higher education system. Parker (1924), Morrill's biographer, also supports the idea Morrill visited the Lyceum. "In all customary interests and diversions he took his part; he attended church in the bare, square meeting-house on Sundays and the infrequent meetings of the Lyceum, when they came, at the same place" (p. 32). As Morrill's business ventures became successful, he invested time and energy into an array of

Lyceum activities. He even had the opportunity to give a lecture at Thetford Academy, where he received his secondary schooling. Hiram Orcutt (1898), former headmaster of Thetford, explains:

While in charge of Thetford Academy, I was accustomed to invite distinguished lecturers from abroad to address my school. I had invited Mr. Justin Smith Morrill—then a bright young man living in Strafford, but since, for thirty-seven years and now at the age of eighty-eight, an able and honored member of the United States Senate from Vermont—to deliver a lecture. In this case, it was an exchange. In compensation for his lecture, I lectured before his village Lyceum. (p. 109)

Moreover, Morrill drew influence from his participation in the community-based agro-mechanical societies of the 1820s and 1830s in order to develop the core arguments of the 1862 and 1890 American Agricultural College Acts, commonly known as the Morrill Land-Grant Acts. Morrill served in Congress from 1855 until 1898, and his most lasting contributions were his 1862 and 1890 American Agricultural College bills creating and supporting U.S. land-grant colleges. The 1862 bill is extensively considered to be one of the great pieces of higher education legislation in U.S. history. Much like the intensions of the American Lyceum Movement, the bills were passed to provide “practical education for working people” and to expand curricula “to include all branches of engineering, agricultural sciences, veterinary medicine, and the vast majority of other subjects” (Cross, 1999, p. xiii). According to The Morrill Act (1862), the purpose of land-grant colleges was “to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life” (U.S. Code, 1862). This mission statement closely mirrors Holbrook’s summation on the establishment of agricultural seminaries in his manifesto “American Lyceum or Society for the Improvement of Schools and the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge” in 1829: “The importance of institutions which shall at once present opportunities for a *liberal*, a *practical*, and an *economical* education, is extensively and sensibly felt” (p. 12, emphasis in original). Akin to the American Lyceum Movement, the establishment of land-grant institutions opened educational opportunities for traditionally marginalized U.S. populations such as women and the working classes. Cross (1999) articulates: “Since 1862, more than 20 million Americans, men and women of every race, ethnicity, religion, and economic background have been educated by Land-Grant colleges and universities” (p. x).

Because Morrill had developed a political lens, as opposed to Holbrook’s academic lens, he petitioned the U.S. government to appropriate land and funding for the development of institutions that would cater to the diversifying needs of U.S. working class citizens and

women. President Abraham Lincoln, a Lyceum lecturer, signed the first landmark education bill in 1862.<sup>5</sup> As a result, Morrill succeeded in developing 69 land-grant institutions, forever changing the U.S.' history of adult and higher education.

### **Extensions to the Modern Day**

Today, there are still barriers to many U.S. citizens entering traditional universities. Economic, racial, and gender discrimination is still pervasive and commonplace in higher education. Granted, although these hindrances are less inhibiting than during the nineteenth century, historically marginalized people remain restricted from freely accessing enrollment. The authors of *Learning in Adulthood* recognize the “democratic ideals of equal opportunity and open access make the current reality of uneven and unequal participation in formal adult learning particularly worrisome” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 75). Although attaining a liberal arts education from a traditional, four-year institution is important, it does not guarantee an individual a career in a technologically driven economy.. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of educational movements that evolve outside formal systems for what they reveal about society, education, and the needs of learners.

The landscape of U.S. labor and industry is changing. The ways that people work, interact, and even seek entertainment have dramatically changed in the last fifteen years. Communication and connection are becoming increasingly important factors in a rapidly globalizing economy. U.S. workers must now have the skills to compete locally, regionally, *and* globally. As technological trends change, many adults must return to school in order to get advanced degrees or certifications in order to stay competitive. However, traditional universities continue to increase their tuition rates well beyond the reach of the average U.S. worker, and the total student debt has recently climbed to over a trillion dollars. In order to combat high tuition rates and institutional inflexibility, alternative channels of higher education have emerged through online learning communities. The Lyceum opened its podiums and halls to women and laymen; it fundamentally democratized lecture-based learning in some of the same ways scholarly online communities are democratizing higher education today. Educators who facilitate online learning communities will likely expand their influence and mirror Holbrook’s attempt to raise public intellectualism. In the present day, leaders create informal, online learning platforms that attempt to address the modern, diversifying needs of adult learners.

Online access to social networks allows adults to disassociate technical, scientific, and professional learning from customary higher education institutions. Each year, a greater number of legitimate, adult

educational alternatives are becoming available. Minimally restrictive, social websites also allow U.S. adult learners to assemble and lead educational enterprises without the consent of traditional university organizations. Such interactive, online establishments permit the convenience of local and immediate access to higher education, free or cheap enrollment, and even the ability to create societies intended for the discussion and enrichment of specific educational interests. The advance and rapid dissemination of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), online vocational schools, and free, web-based lecture series such as TED talks can be construed as modern day echoes of the nineteenth century American Lyceum associations. Although the teaching methodologies of distance learning are constantly being refined, MOOCs and other self-directed educational options will continue to provide exceptional learning opportunities for people from different backgrounds. They can now pursue higher education, gain social mobility, and develop a life-long desire to learn with the aid of these technologies. Entire communities of scholars from around the world are able to communicate in real-time, collaborate, and access an unparalleled wealth of knowledge. Collectively and through online networking, engaged students can form local cohorts and blend online experiences with corporeal social interactions. For the cost of internet access or travel to one's local, public library, people from various socioeconomic backgrounds can view riveting lectures, connect with academic experts, and even enroll in free classes that aim to improve the individual and society. Currently, an immense array of online learning resources are available and the digitization and liberation of information through open access projects is unarguably expanding every year. It is indeed possible to consider that MOOCs, like the lyceums, may one day fundamentally change the way that people think and learn. With time, I envision MOOCs as able to transcend the blueprint of their original design. In light of the example set by the American Lyceum Movement, future renditions have the potential to encapsulate entire philosophical crusades, inspire watershed legislation, and generally benefit the lives of students and practitioners.

### **Conclusion**

By critically reflecting on the American Lyceum Movement's history, one can begin to appreciate the importance of informal education, how it evolves in a specific context, and how educational professionals can apply this knowledge to their practice. Just as the American Lyceum Movement was formed to address expanding demands of adult learners during the Industrial Revolution, online learning communities are addressing the demands of adult learners during today's digital revolution. Instructional technology is ubiquitous, dynamic, and inseparably tied to higher education. Undoubtedly,

globalization, access to technology, and the democratization of higher learning will affect the way people approach education in the next 50 years. In order to do so, we can look into the past and gain valuable insights from the American Lyceum Movement and Josiah Holbrook's legacy.

The American Lyceum Movement became a pivotal foundation of U.S. adult education during the nineteenth-century. Holbrook recognized adult learners' educational demands diversified during the rise of industrialism. Thus, he ingeniously fashioned an adult learning complex outside restrictions commonly found in denominational higher education institutions. He did so in a fashion appealing to higher education standards of the time in both presentation and practicality. What began as an effort to create a network of community associations, designed for the promotion of applied sciences and mechanical arts, soon evolved into a massive national undertaking that encapsulated the emergent transcendental and reformist assertiveness of a young nation. The sheer expansiveness of the Lyceum Movement also set an influential groundwork that predisposed Justin Morrill to write the decisive legislation of the American Agricultural College Acts. Over the course of many years, Morrill was actively engaged in Lyceum activity. His direct interaction with the Lyceum helped him form rationalizations about the expanding demands of adult learners during the Industrial Revolution and the potential for westward expansion. This rationale eventually contributed to the formation of land-grant colleges. Morrill's progressive institutions paralleled Holbrook's undertaking and became part of the formal structure of U.S. higher education. As a result, access to higher education was expanded on an unprecedented scale. Examining this history sheds light on how advances in science and technology change the needs and demographics of adult learners fundamentally historically and in the modern day.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Yale's official website exhibits the college's original charter statement with a reference to "science," or natural philosophy. Refer to <http://www.yale.edu/about/history.html> for details.
- <sup>2</sup> This view has been counter-argued by scholars in recent decades. For examples of alternative positions and a validation of certain opposing points, please see *The Education of Engineers in America before the Morrill Act of 1862*, T. S. Reynolds, 1992, pp. 459–482.
- <sup>3</sup> Although many church leaders inevitably participated in and supported the Lyceum Movement, and church space was frequently used as a place of meeting, the statutes of the Lyceum effectively banned any religious lectures or affiliations. Refer to Bode (1956) for details.
- <sup>4</sup> Though no women are represented in this specific list, female lecturers such as Sarah Lippincott, Mary Livermore, and Lucett Webster presented lectures at the Salem Lyceum in following years. Refer to Cameron's (1969) list of Salem Lyceum presentations for more details.
- <sup>5</sup> Abraham Lincoln lectured on "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions" at the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield, IL in 1838. See p. 97 in Bode's chapter on the Midwest Lyceum.