

PH0355127

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

FEB 24 1976

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

JUL 12 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Thoreau-Alcott House

AND/OR COMMON

same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

255 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Concord

VICINITY OF

5th

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE
025COUNTY
MiddlesexCODE
017

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☒ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ MUSEUM☐ COMMERCIAL☐ PARK☐ EDUCATIONAL☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ RELIGIOUS☐ GOVERNMENT☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ MILITARY☐ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Dr. and Mrs. Paul Rich Dinsmore

STREET & NUMBER

255 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Concord

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts 01742

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Middlesex County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

STATE

Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of the Historic Assets of the Commonwealth

DATE

1968

☐ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS Massachusetts Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

___EXCELLENT
X___GOOD
___FAIR

___DETERIORATED
___RUINS
___UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

___UNALTERED
X___ALTERED

CHECK ONE

X___ORIGINAL SITE
___MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Thoreau-Alcott House, set back 20 feet from Main Street, is situated facing north on a 3/4 acre plot. It is in a residential area but is set off from the surrounding houses by large trees, and is protected from the street by a six foot hemlock hedge.

The oldest part of the house was built c. 1820 by Josiah Davis, a prominent Concord builder. This section consisted of a three bay by three bay, almost square two story clapboard structure, with two inside chimneys and four rooms on each floor. The cellar, which has not been altered, was unfinished with a foundation of giant fieldstones. The front rooms were used as reception rooms, and a kitchen, with a separate doorway, was located to the rear on the east side of the house. Each of the eight rooms had a fireplace, five of which are still in working condition.

The house was altered in 1849 when the Thoreaus acquired the property. John Thoreau and his son Henry David completely renovated and refurbished the structure, adding long side lights at the entrance and a pedimented portico supported by Doric columns over the front door; building an elegant mahogany railing for the main staircase; and constructing a two story wing to the south, with an attached shed to accomodate their pencil factory. A door on the north elevation of this wing led directly outside, and an outside staircase on the east side led upstairs. The south wing was built with a fieldstone foundation and had a finished basement.

Further alterations occurred when the house was sold in 1877 to Anna Alcott Pratt. In order to accomodate Mrs. Pratt, her children, her father and mother (Bronson Alcott and "Marmee") and her sister Louisa May, an addition was built to the west of the original portion of the house. This two story addition contained a library on the first floor, and a bedroom with an arched cathedral ceiling on the second floor. The west wing is the only part of the house without a full cellar, but it does have a crawl space to make the foundations accessible. A doorway led from the western end of the library outside to a balustraded porch which wrapped around to extend along the south wall of the addition. A columned portico with a shed roof covered the doorway, but the rest of the porch was open. The attic of the original house was converted into four bedrooms and the second floor of the 1849 wing into a bedroom and storage space at the same time that the west wing was built.

The house has been virtually unaltered since the 1880's. The two wings look now as they did when first built, except for the staircase on the outside of the south wing which has been removed. The portico built by the Thoreaus is still extant, as is the lovely porch on the west wing built by Louisa May Alcott. The major present alteration is the paint color. Painted yellow when the Thoreaus owned it, the house is now painted white, with black louvered shutters. The windows are all 6/6 sash, except for two floor length 6/9 windows on the first floor of the north facade of the original house, and a 6/9 window in the back. Most of the glass is original, except for a few panes which have had to be replaced over the years.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
☐ PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☐ RELIGION	
☐ 1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE	
☐ 1500-1599	☐ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☒ LITERATURE	☐ SCULPTURE	
☐ 1600-1699	☐ ARCHITECTURE	☒ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☒ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
☐ 1700-1799	☐ ART	☐ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER	
☒ 1800-1899	☐ COMMERCE	☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☒ PHILOSOPHY	☐ TRANSPORTATION	
☐ 1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		☐ INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES c.1820;1849;1877 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Josiah Davis

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Thoreau-Alcott House is an extremely significant house in Concord, a town which abounds in significant buildings, structures and sites. This house, which has been very little altered since the late nineteenth century, was the home of Henry David Thoreau during his most productive years, and was closely associated with Louisa May Alcott during the period in her life when she had finally achieved recognition and financial success.

John Thoreau moved his family into the house in 1849, when his pencil-making business was successful enough for him to afford a large house. This house gave the family four bedrooms, a large kitchen, two parlours and a reception room, and was certainly the grandest they had lived in. Henry David Thoreau, 32 years old when they moved, took over the attic on the third floor. He set up his cot and simple furnishings on the east side, built bookshelves along the low walls and set aside areas for his collections of arrowheads, birds eggs and wild flowers.

The south wing, added when the Thoreaus moved in, was built to house the family pencil business. Both Henry David and his sister Sophia worked in the 'factory' and were the only business employees who were allowed to complete the manufacturing process and package the pencils. The pencils, which were completed with a secret process in the privacy of the second floor of the wing, were the best on the market, and sold for 25 cents each in Boston. Artists and draftsmen considered these pencils to be the finest available, and paid the exorbitant price, so the demand was great enough to keep the Thoreau family very comfortably. Over the years, however, other manufacturers started making inroads on the Thoreau monopoly and business declined. This left Henry David with more time on his hands, which allowed him to pursue the activities which really interested him. He was a man of many talents. He had an abiding love for and curiosity about nature, and spent a great deal of time tramping in the woods around Concord, gathering specimens for his collections. He had a garden at the back of the house, filled with flowers and vegetables, and gave festive melon parties, popular with friends and neighbors during the summers. He was a surveyor of note, and many of the property lines in Concord were drawn by Thoreau. He was also a carpenter, a mason, a teacher, a naturalist, a philosopher and an author. He wrote many works while living in this house, including Walden and Cape Cod, and published numerous articles in the leading magazines and newspapers of the day, including the Atlantic Monthly, Putnam's Magazine and the Liberator. He lectured widely, in nearby communities as well as in Philadelphia, Providence and Nantucket, and while his subject matter aroused controversy, his behavior and life style were viewed with tolerance by all those who knew him. Thoreau, an ardent abolitionist, wrote articles and lectured on the evils of slavery, and welcomed prominent abolitionists, including John Brown, in the Thoreau

(continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Cheney, ed., Life, Letters and Journals, Louisa May Alcott, 1889
Fenn, Mary R., Old Houses of Concord, 1975
French, Allen, Old Concord, 1919
Meltzer and Harding, A Thoreau Profile, 1962
Torrey and Allen, ed., The Journals of Henry David Thoreau,

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3/4 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 19 306080 4703150
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
C

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Christine Boulding, Assistant Survey Director, and Mrs. Paul Dinsmore

ORGANIZATION

Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE

February 11, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

294 Washington Street

TELEPHONE

617-727-8470

CITY OR TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts 02108

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ☒

STATE ☐

LOCAL ☐

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elizabeth Reed Amador

TITLE

Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE

2/17/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Attest:

Leslie L. Rogers
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

7/12/76

Attest: *Charles A. ...*
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

6-25-76

RBR for WJM 7/8/76

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

#8:

home. Soon after Brown's memorable visit in 1857 Thoreau wrote his well known tributes to this activist.

In 1861 Thoreau accompanied Horace Mann to Minnesota on a lecture tour, but the exertion of the trip served to accelerate Thoreau's tuberculin condition and he had to return home, to spend the last two years of his life an invalid. Thoreau's room was moved downstairs to the front parlor, and his couch was set close to the window so he could see the changing seasons. His friends and neighbors kept him company and continued the philosophical discussions which had been such an important part of his life. Shortly before Thoreau died a visitor asked if Thoreau could visualize his approaching death and his now famous reply was "one world at a time." Thoreau died on May 6, 1862, in the front parlor of this house, two months before his 45th birthday.

The house was kept by Henry David's mother and sister until 1877 when it was sold to the Alcott family for \$4,500. Louisa May Alcott, who by this time had achieved financial success through her writing, paid most of the cost of the house, but she maintained her official residence in Boston, and only came out to the house for visits. Bronson Alcott, "Marmee" who was seriously ill at the time, the widowed Ann Alcott Pratt (Meg in Little Women) and her two sons all moved into the spacious and comfortable house. This was the first time that the Alcott family had been financially secure, largely through Louisa May's substantial literary fame, so the house has especially significant associations with the family. Louisa May, in addition to making most of the original house payments, paid for the addition of the two story west wing. The library on the first floor of this wing, with its separate door to the outside, was used by the members of the School of Philosophy when they met with its founder Bronson Alcott in the very beginnings of its organizations.

The house was inherited by Anna Pratt's sons, passed to their sons, and finally to Louisa Alcott Pratt Kussin in the early years of this century. It then passed out of the Alcott-Pratt family, and was owned by Donald Forte and Judge Herbert Wilkins before the present owners acquired the property. The house had been well maintained through the years and has retained a strong sense of the associations that make the building so significant.

Property

Thoreau - Alcott House

Middlesex

State

Mass

Working Number

2.24.76.2592

TECHNICAL

Photos

Maps

CONTROL

cm

OK 3.9.76

HISTORIAN

Accept

E. Smith

5-24-76

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

Accept

W Cole

5.26.76

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER

Inventory

Review

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

Accept

K Cole

6.16.76

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

Hunting

6.25.76

National Register Write-up

Send-back

Entered

JUL 12 1976

Federal Register Entry

8-3-76

Re-submit

INT:2106-74



THE THOREAU - ALCOTT HOUSE
255 MAIN ST. CONCORD, MA.

EAST & NORTH FACADES

SPRING - 1975

NPS Number 7/12/76
Title: Thoreau - Alcott House
Middlesex Co., Ma.
Loc. North facade and
east elevation

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

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FEB 24 1976

RECEIVED

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JUL 12 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Thoreau-Alcott House

AND/OR COMMON

same

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN

Concord

____ VICINITY OF

COUNTY

Middlesex

STATE

MA

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT

Caroline C. Dinsmore

DATE OF PHOTO

1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT

255 Main Street, Concord, MA

4 IDENTIFICATION

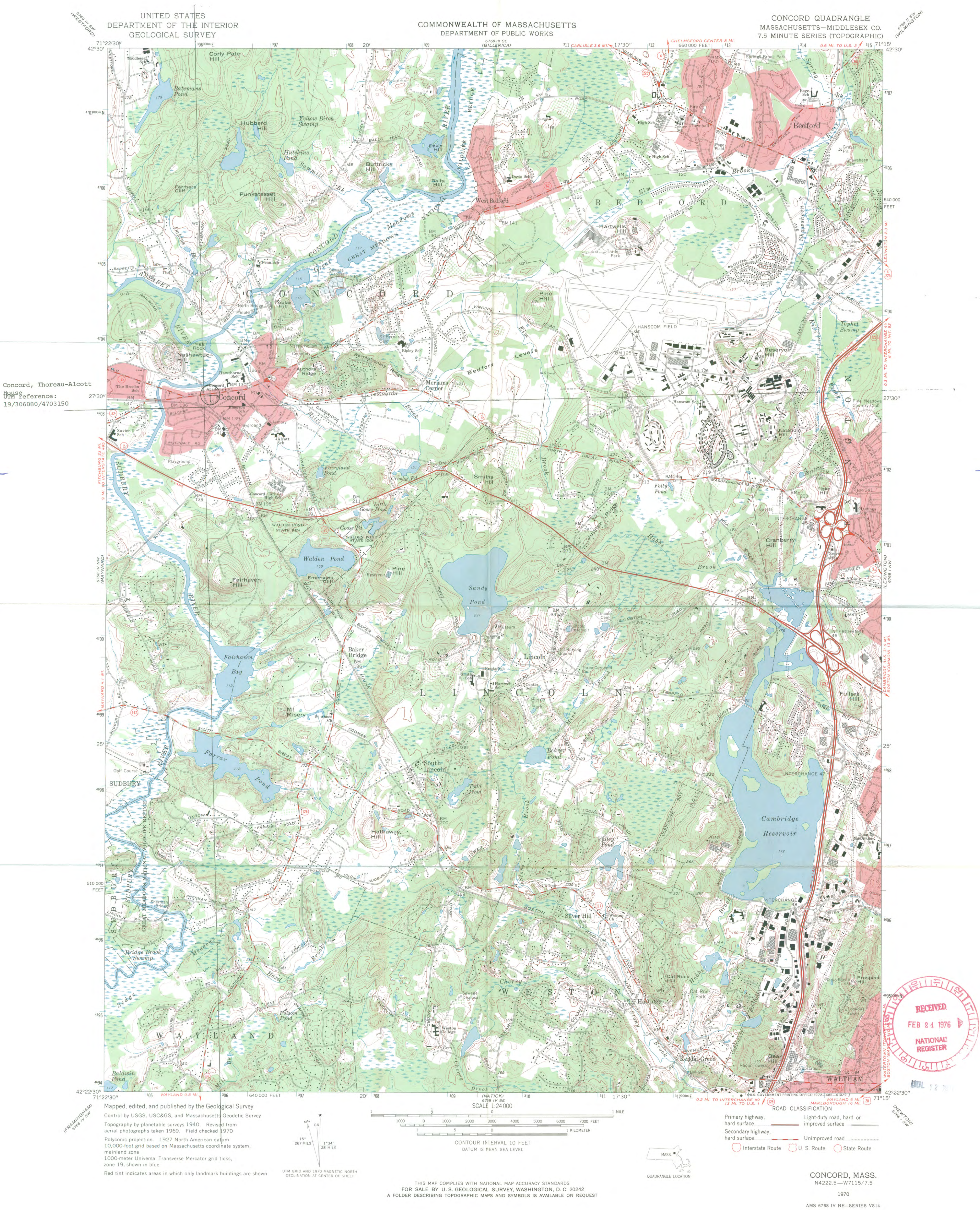
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

north facade and east elevation

PHOTO NO.

1

Concord, Thoreau-Alcott
House
UTM Reference:
19/306080/4703150



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey
Topography by planetable surveys 1940. Revised from
aerial photographs taken 1969. Field checked 1970
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Massachusetts coordinate system,
mainland zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 19, shown in blue
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

SCALE 1:24,000
CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL
UTM GRID AND 1970 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, hard surface
Secondary highway, hard surface
Unimproved road
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Interstate Route
U.S. Route
State Route
CONCORD, MASS.
N4222.5—W7115.7.5
1970
AMS 6768 IV NE—SERIES V814



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY MAP FORM**

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- ENCLOSE WITH MAP

1 NAME

HISTORIC Thoreau-Alcott House

AND/OR COMMON
same

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Concord VICINITY OF COUNTY Middlesex STATE MA

3 MAP REFERENCE

SOURCE U.S.G.S., Concord, Mass quadrangle

SCALE 1:24,000 DATE 1970

4 REQUIREMENTS

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS

1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES
2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE **MASSACHUSETTS**

Date Entered **JUL 12 1976**

Name

Location

Thoreau-Alcott House

**Concord
Middlesex County**

Telegraph Hill

**Hull
Plymouth County**

Also Notified

**Hon. Edward M. Kennedy
Hon. Edward W. Brooke
Hon. Paul Tsongas
Hon. Gerry E. Studds
Regional Director, North
Atlantic Region**

**State Historic Preservation Officer
Mrs. Elizabeth R. Amadon
Executive Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission
294 Washington Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108**

PR MMott/row 7/16/76

NATIONAL REGISTER DATA SHEET

1 NAME as it appears on federal register: Thoreau-Alcott House		2 OTHER NAMES:		3 date of entry: 7-12-76		4 county code: 017	
5 LOCATION street & number 255 Main St.		city / town Concord		vicinity of		state MA	
				county Middlesex		6 NPS REGION: No. Atlantic	
7 OWNER ☒ PRIVATE ☐ STATE ☐ MUNICIPAL ☐ COUNTY ☐ MULTIPLE ☐ FEDERAL (agency name)						8 ADMINISTRATOR:	
9 EXISTING SURVEYS ☐ HABS ☐ HAER ☐ NHL		10 FUNDED? ☐ YES ☒ NO		11 CONGRESS. DISTRICT 5		12 SOURCE of NOMINATION ☒ STATE ☐ FEDERAL	
13 WITHIN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT? ☐ YES, NAME ☒ NO		14 WITHIN NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK? ☐ YES, NAME ☒ NO		15 ACREAGE .75		if state who prepared form? ☐ LOCAL ☐ PRIVATE ORGANIZATION	
16 CONDITION ☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ fair ☐ deteriorated ☐ ruins ☐ unexposed ☐ unexcavated ☐ altered ☐ unaltered ☐ reconstructed ☐ excavated ☐ original site ☐ moved ☐ unknown		17 features: INTERIOR ☐ SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-1 ☐ NOT INTACT-0 ☐ UNKNOWN-4 ☐ NOT APPLICABLE-7 EXTERIOR ☐ SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-2 ☐ NOT INTACT-0 ☐ UNKNOWN-5 ☐ NOT APPLICABLE-8 ENVIRONS ☐ SUBSTANTIALLY INTACT-3 ☐ NOT INTACT-0 ☐ UNKNOWN-6 ☐ NOT APPLICABLE-9					
18 ACCESS ☐ YES-Restricted ☐ YES-Unrestricted ☒ No Access ☐ Unknown		19 ADAPTIVE USE ☐ YES ☒ NO		20 SAVED? ☐ YES ☒ NO		21 IS PROPERTY A HISTORIC DISTRICT? ☐ yes ☒ no	
22 AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: ☐ ARCHEOLOGY-prehistoric-2 ☐ COMMERCE-6 ☐ ARCHEOLOGY-historic-1 ☐ COMMUNICATIONS-7 ☐ AGRICULTURE-3 ☐ CONSERVATION-8 ☒ ARCHITECTURE-4 ☐ ECONOMICS-9 ☐ ART-5 ☐ EDUCATION-10		☐ ENGINEERING-11 ☐ ENTERTAINMENT-26 ☐ EXPLORATION-12 ☐ HEALTH-27 ☒ INDUSTRY-13 ☐ INVENTION-14		☐ LANDSCAPE ARCH.-15 ☐ LAW-16 ☒ LITERATURE-17 ☐ MILITARY-18 ☐ MUSIC-19 ☐ PHILOSOPHY-20		23 CLAIMS: explain 'first' ☐ 'oldest' ☐ 'only' ☐	
24 functions WHEN HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT: HOUSE, FACTORY CURRENTLY: HOUSE		25 dates of initial construction: c. 1820 major alterations: 1844, c. 1877 historic events:		26 ETHNIC GROUP ASSOCIATION			
27 architectural style(s): GREEK REVIVAL		28 architect:		29 master builder:		30 engineer:	
31 landscape architect / garden designer:		32 interior decorator:		33 artist:		34 artisan:	
						35 builder/contractor: 2 Josiah Davis	
36 NAMES give role & date Josiah Davis, builder, prominent in Concord area							
PERSONAL: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), naturalist, essayist ("Civil Disobedience," 1849), lecturer and author (including Walden, 1854).							
EVENTS: Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), author of Little Women (1869).							
AMOS BRONSON ALCOTT (1799-1888), philosopher and educator, organized the Transcendental Club (1836) with Ralph							
INSTITUTIONAL: Waldo Emerson and George Ripley, established short-lived Fruitlands commune (1844) near Harvard, MA							
37 NATIONAL REGISTER WRITE-UP FRAME, CLAPBOARDING; 2nd 2 1/2-STORY SECTIONS, MODIFIED L-SHAPED, GABLED ROOF SECTIONS, INTERIOR CHIMNEYS, FRONT CENTER ENTRANCE WITH SIDELIGHTS, 1-STORY GABLED DISTYLE PORTICO, SIDE ENTRANCES AND ENTRANCE VESTIBULE; ALTERATIONS. Greek Revival.							
38 Home of Henry David Thoreau, 1849-1862, when he wrote Walden and Cape Cod, and his family's pencil-making business; purchased in 1877 from Thoreau's family by Louisa May Alcott, author of Little Women, and her widowed sister, Ann Pratt, as a residence for their parents, Bronson and "Marmee" Alcott, and the Pratt family.							