

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:	Massachusetts
COUNTY:	Worcester
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY DATE:	

1. NAME

COMMON:
Fruitlands

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Fruitlands

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
Prospect Hill

CITY OR TOWN:
Harvard

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

STATE: Massachusetts 01451

CODE: Worcester

COUNTY: Worcester

CODE:

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious		
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Fruitlands Museums, Inc.

STREET AND NUMBER:
Prospect Hill

CITY OR TOWN:
Harvard

STATE:
Massachusetts 01451

CODE:

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Worcester County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Worcester

STATE:
Massachusetts

CODE:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Massachusetts Historic Landmarks

DATE OF SURVEY:
 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Massachusetts Historical Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:
40 Beacon Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Boston

STATE:
Massachusetts 02108

CODE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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DATE:

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

A typical New England farmhouse of the late 18th century, Fruitlands overlooks the Nashua Valley in Central Massachusetts, and commands a vista as far west as Mount Wachusett, 10 miles away. It is a simple two-story rectangle with a five-bay facade, sheathed in red weatherboarding. It rests on a low stone foundation and there is a large central chimney. The windows are 6 over 9, and the gable roof is slate. The front door is surmounted by a three-pane transom. On either side of the entranceway, there is a small room, with a large community-sized room to the rear. Each has a fireplace. A pantry which opens off the rear room is not original, nor is the granary attached to the right rear corner of the house sometime during the latter half of the 19th century. (This now houses a display of documentary material relating to the Transcendental movement.) A single-flight staircase leads to the second floor, where there are two bedrooms, those of Lane and Alcott, as well as an exhibit of Thoreau materials in what was once probably a third bedroom. The attic, reached by a short stairway with winders, served as sleeping quarters for the children.

The house is in excellent condition, and many of the furnishings would be stylistically correct for the period of Alcott's occupancy. It might be questioned, though, whether the Fruitlands residents ever enjoyed such comfortable surroundings. The integrity of the structure is impeccable as one views it from the front. As already noted, however, several additions have been made to the rear--not only the granary and kitchen, but also several storage sheds. Unfortunately, the kitchen features a false fireplace and colonial furnishings not contemporary with Fruitlands. Yet, aside from the granary, the additions are not apparent from the front, and visitors do not normally see the house from the rear.

The home of the Fruitlands experiment is located on its original site and surrounding buildings--other components of the Fruitlands Museum Group--are sufficiently removed so that the feeling and atmosphere of the old Fruitlands Farm is remarkably well preserved.

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6. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

1843-1844

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fruitlands served as the site of Bronson Alcott's "new Eden," an experiment in communal living modeled on the ideas of this leading educational reformer, Transcendentalist and social philosopher. In the words of Henry Steele Commager, it stands as "one of the more characteristic chapters in the history of American Utopianism."¹

A modest two-story building, Fruitlands still stands in its idyllic, rural setting. It is a simple late 18th-century farmhouse with weatherboard siding painted red, and looks much the way it did at the time of the Alcott experiment.

History

In 1842 Bronson Alcott departed on a trip to England to visit the Alcott School, an experimental boarding school near London whose director, Charles Lane, had enthusiastically adopted many of Alcott's radical concepts regarding the care and instruction of children. Alcott and Lane immediately discovered that they shared much the same Utopian vision, and soon they left together for America, determined to found an ideal community there, a "new Eden." Alcott called it "Fruitlands."

Bronson Alcott had a vision of a peaceful society, far removed from the conventional way of life, which he regarded as false, selfish and discordant. Although Transcendentalism was at its height, and the experiment at Brook Farm (1841-47) was then in operation, Alcott still felt the need to found a community that would expostulate his own ideas of reform: for Alcott, the evils of life were not so much social or political as personal;² therefore, personal reform was needed and self-denial was the means he chose to effect that reform.

¹The Era of Reform, 1830-1860 (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1960) p. 42.

²Clara Endicott Sears, Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915) p. 38.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Commager, Henry Steele. The Era of Reform, 1830-1860.
 Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1960.

Francis, Richard. "Circumstances and Slavation: The Ideology of the
 Fruitlands Utopia." American Quarterly, XXV (May 1973).

The Journals of Bronson Alcott. Ed. by Odell Shepard. Boston: Little,
 Brown and Co., 1938.

Sears, Clara Endicott. Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands. New York:
 Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	0 ' "	0 ' "	42° 30 ' 34 "	71 ° 36 ' 45 "		
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: approximately 5 acres.

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
 Robert C. Post and Carol Ann Poh, Survey Historians

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology and
 Historic Preservation, National Park Service

DATE: 7/20/73

STREET AND NUMBER:
 1100 L Street, N. W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: D.C.

CODE: _____

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION **NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

<p>As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>Date _____</p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>_____ Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date _____</p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p>_____ Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date _____</p>
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8. Significance (page 1) Fruitlands

Charles Lane, the Englishman from Alcott School, purchased the two-story house and 90 acres of land which was to be the home of the Fruitlands group. In a letter to Isaac T. Hecker (who later founded the Paulist Fathers), Alcott outlined the purposes of the community: " ... to live independently of foreign aids by being sufficiently elevated to procure all articles for subsistence in the production of the spot, under a regimen of healthful labor and recreation; with benignity toward all creatures, human and inferior; with beauty and refinement in all economics; and the purest charity throughout our demeanor."³

The original residents at Fruitlands came there in June 1843. They included Alcott, his wife and four daughters (including Louisa May), Lane and his son William, Isaac Hecker, and eight others. The community never exceeded 16 members, but did entertain such guests as Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau and William Henry Channing. The Fruitlands family practiced an extreme asceticism, eating nothing but fruits, vegetables and grain, drinking nothing but water. Animal food--indeed, all animal products--Alcott regarded as an abomination which corrupted both body and soul. He allowed only linen clothing to be worn, and permitted no oil lamps with the exception of one, which Mrs. Alcott insisted she needed in order to do her evening mending. All private property was forbidden. Ralph Waldo Emerson, after a visit to the community, wrote that:

"The sun and evening sky do not look calmer than Alcott and his family at Fruitlands. They seem to have arrived at the fact, to have got rid of the show, and so to be serene. Their manners and behaviour in the house and in the field were those of superior men, men at rest."⁴

Yet, from the first, certain ideological conflicts were apparent. At the time Charles Lane joined Fruitlands, he viewed the family as the primary--indeed, the only--effective instrument for the improvement of

³Quoted in Sears, p. 12

⁴Quoted in Richard Francis, "Circumstances and Salvation: The Ideology of the Fruitlands Utopia," American Quarterly, XXV (May 1973), p. 226.

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8. Significance (page 2)

Fruitlands

society. By "family" Lane meant the "consociate family," a group of people held together not by biological ties, but rather by intellectual harmony, a group of like-minded individuals. Lane preached celibacy and thought of the Shakers, who had a community near Fruitlands, as philosophical allies. Interestingly, Lane was also an early proponent of women's rights, contending that woman's sexual role prevented her from wielding influence in the larger social issues. He felt that the consociate family, devoid of all sexual relations, could serve as an instrument of women's liberation. Alcott, on the other hand, paid only lip service to Lane's ideas and remained convinced that the biological family could still be a little society all by itself, "Heaven and Earth in substance."⁵

These philosophical disagreements were one debilitating influence on the Fruitlands community. In addition, it was apparent from the beginning that Mrs. Alcott had agreed to participate in the experiment simply to indulge her husband's wishes. Moreover, Lane and other members of the group came to regard Bronson Alcott as demanding, and sometimes despotic, a leader who insisted on rigid austerity and self-denial.

Tilling their fields proved to be virtually impossible, since Alcott forbade the use of ploughs requiring animal labor, and the members had to rely on spades to break the ground. Crop failure and the onset of winter signaled the doom of the Fruitlands experiment. Many of the members departed as provisions dwindled. Charles Lane left to join the nearby Shaker community, but stayed there only a few months before returning to England and the allurements of the biological family. On January 16, 1844, the Alcotts themselves left Fruitlands for Concord. Bronson Alcott was undaunted by the failure of his Eden:

"I think I may say that my defeats have proved victories. I did not plant the Paradise geographically as I fancied I might, but entered spiritually into a fairer Eden than I sought"⁶

⁵Francis, p. 222.

⁶The Journals of Bronson Alcott, ed. by Odell Shepard (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1938) p. 395.