

FOR NPS USE ONLY
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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC Ralph Waldo Emerson House

AND/OR COMMON  
Ralph Waldo Emerson House

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
28 Cambridge Turnpike (near intersection Lexington Road)

CITY, TOWN  
Concord

VICINITY OF  
Fifth

STATE  
Massachusetts

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
Fifth

CODE  
025

COUNTY  
Middlesex

CODE  
017

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association

STREET & NUMBER  
Box 333

CITY, TOWN  
Concord 01742

VICINITY OF  
Massachusetts

STATE

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, MIDDLESEX REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Middlesex Registry of Deeds, Southern District

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN  
Cambridge 02141

STATE  
Massachusetts

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
none

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Ralph Waldo Emerson House stands southwest of Cambridge Turnpike near its intersection with Lexington Road in Concord, Massachusetts. The house was built in 1828-29 by John T. Coolidge for his son Charles. Emerson purchased it, with some 2 acres of land, in 1835. He subsequently added to the property, bringing it to the current 9 acres. Immediately to the rear of the house are a garden (maintained much as it was in Emerson's day), the original wooden barn, and a small shed. The remainder of the property, which reaches to Walden Street, is a sloping meadow, through the center of which flows Mill Brook.

When Emerson purchased the 2-story frame and clapboard house, it consisted of an L-shaped main block with hipped roof and a rear service wing with pitched roof. In 1836, he added two rooms at the southwest corner of the main block, giving it a square shape. The upper of those rooms, known as the "Straw Carpet Chamber", was altered and enlarged (by the addition of a bay window) in 1857. At the same time, another room, lighted by a shed dormer, was created in the attic on the southwest side of the house. Named "the den", it was intended as a work area for Emerson, though he rarely used it. Entrances to the house are located at the center of the northeast (front) and southeast elevations; each is covered by a 1-story porch with Doric columns and full entablature. Windows are 6/6 double-hung sash with louvered blinds.

The interior of the house follows a center hall plan with two large, square rooms at either side. To the left of the front entrance are a guest room, which Emerson called the "Pilgrim's Chamber", and the dining room, with the kitchen in the service wing beyond. To the right are Emerson's study, in which the major part of his reading and writing was done, and the parlor. On the second floor are four bedrooms; notable features of the master bedroom are two alcoves reached through round-headed, keystone arches.

The Emerson House was seriously damaged by a fire in July, 1872. Starting in the attic, it destroyed the roof and much of the second floor. Most of the contents of the house were saved, however, and funds subscribed by Emerson's friends paid for a complete restoration of the building.

The Emerson House is now maintained in good condition. All of its rooms remain as they were after the 1872-73 restoration except the study, whose contents were removed to the Concord Antiquarian Society and replaced by duplicate pieces about 1930.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES      1828-29; 1835-82      BUILDER/ARCHITECT      not known

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This large but unpretentious frame house was the home of the noted poet, essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson from the time of his second marriage in 1835 until his death in 1882. All of his major works, including Nature (1836), "The American Scholar" (1837), the two volumes of Essays (1841, 1844), Representative Men (1850), and English Traits (1856), were prepared here. Though most famous during his lifetime as a lecturer, Emerson is now best known for his essays, most often adapted from his lectures, which express his personal transcendental philosophy of an organic universe predicated not only on the power of man to change things but on the goodness of change itself.

The house, which Emerson purchased, had been constructed in 1828-29. Seriously damaged by fire in 1872, it was immediately restored, largely by private subscriptions from Emerson's friends. Following the deaths of Emerson's wife and children, the last of them in 1930, the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association was created to administer the property. The house is furnished as it was during Emerson's lifetime with the exception of the study, the original contents of which have been removed to the Concord Antiquarian Society. The Emerson House is open to the public from April 15 to October 31, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Ralph Waldo Emerson, born in Boston on May 25, 1803, was the descendant of a long line of ministers. His father William, pastor of Boston's First Church, died in 1811, leaving Emerson's mother to bring up five sons in financial difficulty. In 1814, the family moved to Concord, where Emerson's mother and his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, raised the children with an eye to the education and vocation dictated by their ancestry.

Emerson was sent to Boston Latin School and then, by means of scholarships and part-time teaching, was able to attend Harvard College, graduating in 1821. In order to save money for attending Harvard Divinity School and to help pay for the education of his younger brothers, he taught for the next four years in the girls' school established by his older brother William. Emerson entered the Divinity School in 1825 and was licensed for the ministry the following year. However, family circumstances and his own poor health as well as financial difficulty delayed his career. In 1829, Emerson was

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Cabot, James E. A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1887).  
 Emerson, Edward W., ed. The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1903-04).  
 Emerson, Edward W. and W.E. Forbes, ed. The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1909-14).  
 Rusk, Ralph L. ed. The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1939).  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1949).

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 9.0

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 9	3 0 7 2 5 0	4 7 0 3 0 1 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (indicated in red on the attached assessors map):  
 beginning at the intersection of the southern curbline of Cambridge Turnpike and the eastern line of Parcel 239, owned by the Town of Concord; thence, along the eastern lines of Parcels 239, 238, and 240, owned by the Town of Concord, to the northern curbline of Walden Street; thence, along said northern curbline to the western line of Parcel 246; thence, along said western line to its intersection with the southern line of Parcel 242; thence, along the southern and western (continued)

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 Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by J. Walter Coleman, Historian, 10/19/61

ORGANIZATION Historic Sites Survey, NPS	DATE 2/18/75
STREET & NUMBER 1100 L. Street, N.W.	TELEPHONE 202-523-5464
CITY OR TOWN Washington 20240	STATE District of Columbia

## 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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE N/A National Historic Landmark

Landmark Designated: Dec 29, 1962

TITLE

DATE: 11-3-75

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
 ((NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS))

Chief Hist. & Archeol. Officer  
 DATE: Survey

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 ATTEST:

DATE: 11/12/95

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Acting

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

1

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

ordained as minister of the Second Church in Boston. That same year, he married Ellen Tucker of New Hampshire.

Though Emerson rapidly won a reputation for his eloquence in the pulpit, he was unable to cope with routine pastoral demands and, more significantly, began to repudiate the restricting character of Christianity in general, which, in his view, failed to nurture the moral nature of man. Emerson's own sermons were unusually free of traditional doctrine; he divested Christianity of all external and historical supports, making its basis the individual's private intuition of moral law and its test a life of virtue and character. An opponent of all forms, he wanted a freer and larger sphere of influence and, following his wife's death in 1831, abruptly resigned his pastorate.

In 1832 Emerson traveled to Europe where he became more closely acquainted with the philosophy of German idealism and talked with Landor, Mill, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle; his meeting with the latter led to a correspondence which lasted almost forty years. At home again in 1833, he established himself as a lyceum lecturer, beginning with courses in natural history and biography. In 1834 he returned to Concord and the following year, in preparation for his marriage to Lydia Jackson of Plymouth, Massachusetts, purchased the house in which he would live for the rest of his life. There he settled into a quiet domestic routine of writing in the morning, walking alone in the afternoon, and talking with his family and friends in the evening-- a pattern interrupted only by travel and lecture engagements.

Emerson had begun in 1833 to work on an explanation of his personal philosophy, which he published anonymously in 1836 in the form of a short book entitled Nature; this was his essential statement and all of his subsequent work was an extension, amplification or amendment of the ideas it affirmed. The heart of Emerson's philosophy, as the title of his book suggests, was the organic concept, a belief in a living nature still in the process of becoming, a nature immanent with spirit, fulfilling the ideas of God and also capable of fulfilling the ideas of man. In this Emersonian conception, man was not estranged from nature, but intimate with her, sharing the flow of her spiritual tides, and able, by means of his own creative powers of perception, to grasp her law and, thereby, with his ideas, to be himself a creator of the as-yet-unformed future. The essential and liberating idea of Nature, to be applied in Emerson's later work to all aspects of human life, was that by his own constitution and by the corresponding constitution of the universe, man was not the victim of his environment. Mind, not matter, was supreme. Ideas were sovereign, and with them as his instruments man could shape the universe to his needs.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

2

ITEM NUMBER

8

PAGE

3

Emerson translated Nature into specific terms in 1837 with his Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard, "The American Scholar", which Oliver Wendell Holmes called "our intellectual Declaration of Independence". In that address, Emerson described the duties and resources of the liberated intellectual in America, who would fulfill his own genius by abandoning the traditional institutions of culture and in nature exploring the possibilities of his own new world. In effect, he put the scholar above the priest, making him the servant of truth whose duty was the "conversion of the world".

In 1836, Emerson had been instrumental in forming the group known as the Transcendental Club, which continued to meet regularly for discussion until 1843; its members included Bronson Alcott, Orestes Bronson, Theodore Parker, and James Freeman Clarke, and Henry David Thoreau was a frequent guest. When the group began to publish its magazine, The Dial, under the editorship of Margaret Fuller in July, 1840, Emerson became a major contributor. Between 1842 and the final appearance of The Dial in 1844, Emerson himself was its editor, though he was far more interested in the poetry and metaphysics which appeared in the magazine than in the practical aspects of the various reform programs it proposed.

Emerson consolidated his reputation with the publication of his two series of Essays in 1841, becoming for much of mid-century America the spokesman for a new religion which squared with the times even while supplying a method for criticizing them. In 1845 Emerson delivered the series of lectures which he published in 1850 as Representative Men and the next year issued his Poems. Though Emerson thought poetry the highest form of utterance and always referred to himself as a poet, he did not publish another volume of verse until 1867, when May-Day and Other Pieces appeared. On a lecture tour of England in 1847, Emerson visited Carlyle again and met Macaulay, Thackeray, Dickens, and Tenneyson; the trip provided the basis for a series of lectures delivered the next season and published in 1856 as English Traits.

Emerson's chief occupation during the 1850's was politics. He had opposed the annexation of Texas and the Fugitive-Slave Law and now filled his journal with comments on the great issue rapidly dividing the country. He advocated sending arms to the anti-slavery faction in Kansas, made a number of anti-slavery speeches, and championed John Brown when the latter arrived at Concord in 1857.

Emerson continued with his lecturing and, to some extent, his writing after 1860 but, with the exception of May-Day, his work was marked by waning powers. He acknowledged this in "Terminus", written in 1866: "It is time

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET 3 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

to be old/ To take in sail...Contract thy firament/ To compass of a tent". When his home was seriously damaged by fire in July, 1872, James Russell Lowell and other friends provided funds to make good the loss and to allow Emerson a vacation while work on the house was completed. He visited Europe, satisfied an old desire to see the Valley of the Nile, and then retired to Concord where he spent his remaining years. Emerson attempted some further writing--Letters and Social Aims was published in 1876, but only after James Elliot Cabot had been called in to sort out the muddled manuscripts--but in general he slid into a serene and dignified senility, which ended with his death in April, 1882.

Following the deaths of Emerson's wife and children, the last of which occurred in 1930, the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association was formed to preserve the poet's house at Concord. Concern for the safety of the contents of Emerson's study prompted their removal to the nearby headquarters of the Concord Antiquarian Society. With that exception, the house and its furnishings remain as they were after the restoration of 1872-73.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10

PAGE

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Ralph Waldo Emerson House, Concord, Massachusetts

Verbal Boundary Description (continued)

lines of Parcel 242 to the southern curbline of Cambridge Turnpike; thence, along  
said southern curbline to the point of beginning.