

Kristi Martin
CAS AH 520
Professor Hall
December 8, 2009

Sacredness of Home : Literary Culture and Concord's Historic Houses

Introduction: "Places of Memory" and Creating a Tourist Mecca

Concord, Massachusetts is renowned for its rich national heritage: as the site of the first battle of the American Revolutionary War and the home-place of several nineteenth century American Renaissance writers. Today, Concord is a national heritage tourist destination, maintaining a multitude of historic places, including four historic house museums. Several of Concord's house museums have associations with the town's Revolutionary War past; all were once home to Concord's circle of nineteenth century Transcendentalist and Romantic authors. The quantity of Concord's momentous historical connections is both awe-inspiring and fortuitous. However, as historian Dona Brown maintains, "Tourism is not destiny, imposed on a community or a region by its geography or its history. Tourist industries were built by people."¹

In the late nineteenth century, Concord was already attached to its Revolutionary legacy and had built monuments commemorating the battle of Lexington and Concord. By the turn of the century, Concordians were beginning to value their literary heritage as well. Concord's literary homes were transformed into places of local, regional, and national memory and began new lives as museums. The ideology of the founding museum institutions remains with Concord's house museums today, rendering each of the museums unique, despite their

¹ Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: regional Tourism In The Nineteenth Century*, (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 205.

common devotion to nineteenth century literary families and the intimate relationships of their celebrated occupants. Founding philosophies influence the nature and sustainability of the museums' individual and collective historical legacies.

If the attraction of tourism is not inherent in the history of a place, how and why did Concord become a literary tourist Mecca? Sightseers and literary pilgrims plagued Concord's literary residents during their own lifetimes. Louisa May Alcott complained about the admirers that visited Orchard House, her family's home in Concord, following the publication of her classic children's novel *Little Women*. Her 1872 poem "Fame" satirizes the tourist invasion in Concord and pleads with social reformers to "pity author's wrongs."²

"There is a town of high repute
Where saints and sages dwell,
Who in these latter days are forced
To bid sweet peace farewell
...
So eager pilgrims penetrate
To their most private nooks,
Storm their back doors in search of news,
And interview their cooks,
Worship at ev'ry victims shrine,
See halos round their hats,
Embalm the chickweed from their yards,
And photograph their cats.
...
Their homes are homes no more..."³

Alcott herself would answer the door and turn anxious visitors away, pretending to be the maid of the famous Miss. Alcott⁴. Alcott quipped that the sightseers were fooled into thinking Concord an exceptional place worthy of reverence. In her poem she said,

"Deluded world! Your Mecca is
A sand-bank glorified."⁵

² Louisa May Alcott, "Fame," published in *The Poetry of Louisa May Alcott*, (Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association, 1997), 28.

³ Louisa May Alcott, 28 – 29.

⁴ Harriet Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009), 242.

At the time that Alcott wrote her poem disparaging the literary tourists who congregated in homage to Concord's romantic literary figures, another "romantic movement"⁶ was emerging; this one was non-literary. Confronted with the cultural and social changes wrought by industrialization, urbanization, and mass immigration, Americans began to seek refuge in the construction of a native identity, as well as to "embrace preservation of the past and amelioration of the ills of the present."⁷ Established New Englanders endorsed a mythic "Old New England," which occupied "a new geography of imagination"⁸ that allowed for an escape from undesirable aspects of a diversifying society. According to historian Dona Brown, a "new tourism was driven by a profound 'sentimentalization' of New England ... a mythic region called Old New England – rural, preindustrial, and ethnically pure..."⁹

American preservationist Charles B. Hosmer argues that "the preservation movement in New England had a distinctly regional flavor,"¹⁰ and was characterized by "... an emotional upsurge of patriotic inspiration from historic spots..."¹¹ Regional representations of New England at such national and international venues as the Chicago's World Fair, were "almost exclusive" identified "with national ideals ... constructed in symbolic means."¹² The "American-ness" of New England was asserted, as the purported "original national home."¹³ As the birthplace of national liberty in the instigation of the War of Independence and national

⁵ Louisa May Alcott, 30.

⁶ Charles B. Hosmer, *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States before Williamsburg*, (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1965), 299.

⁷ Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from The Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 215.

⁸ Joseph A. Conforti, 204.

⁹ Dona Brown, 8.

¹⁰ Charles B. Hosmer, 102.

¹¹ Charles B. Hosmer, 299.

¹² Julia B. Rosenbaum, *Visions of Belonging: New England Art and the Making of American Identity*, (Cornell University Press, 2006), 2.

¹³ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 3.

literature with the American Renaissance, New England - and Concord, Massachusetts in particular - could claim a “marked influence upon the nation’s history.”¹⁴ New Englanders believed that their region “possessed enough of genuine history to be of national value” and “stressed that character grew best on New England soil.”¹⁵ The regional imagination held “New England as the quintessential American region, a precious repository of national culture...”¹⁶

Consistent with this sentiment of regional and national pride, New Englanders held annual “Old Home Week” celebrations in each regional state. These celebrations honored local community ancestors as well as New England virtue, and “commemorated shared memories and a common past,” “generating a collective spirit.”¹⁷ Intent to “invoke a sense of history through an appeal to personal pasts,” New Englanders were simultaneously “responding to concerns about the moral and social decline of ... communities, the celebrations worked to stimulate local civic pride by venerating the town’s heritage.”¹⁸ New England was championed as “an important spiritual resource” for the nation¹⁹ and a “realization of the best ideals of *home*.”²⁰

By accentuating the home, house museums allowed early preservationists to reinforce the virtues of domesticity, as opposed to the corrupt attractions of a life outside of the home, particularly for increasingly liberated women.²¹ Restored domestic spaces represented the security of the private home space and traditional family values. These ideals were often linked to a sense of national patriotism, as well as regional pride. “Old Home Week promoted New

¹⁴ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 27.

¹⁵ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 27.

¹⁶ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 113.

¹⁷ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 95.

¹⁸ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 95.

¹⁹ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 111

²⁰ Julia B. Rosenbaum 132.

²¹ Joseph A. Conforti, 215.

England as the heart of the national body, the home to everyone."²² In response to "a search for roots, for a sense of belonging,"²³ preservationists' "work in restoring the house, cataloguing the manuscripts, and organizing the antiques was motivated by their devotion to the idea of ancestry"²⁴ - both local and national, private as well as public. The employment of local history in the national narrative formed "a bridge between the abstract concept of the nation, and local, face-to-face associations,"²⁵ that rendered national identity personal and relevant to an ever diversifying populace in an expanding nation. The home was a particularly evocative symbol for constructing a national identity because all Americans could relate to it on a personal and individual level. New Englander Wallace Nutting said that old homes "will never lose their allurements. They are drawing us back to primal sod and the earthly hearth."²⁶ Historian Allen French noted this same phenomenon of psychic transportation at work in the period rooms of the Concord Antiquarian Society. He asserted that in period interiors it is "necessary to have some [objects] from an earlier time, as choice mementoes of bygone ancestors ... the house looks the more homelike in consequence... all to make the subtle impression of ancient New England, still living and indeed permanent. The proof lies in the fact that visitors innumerable have wished that they might move into the house, and stay."²⁷ French applauded the museum professionals for so successfully creating "home" in the artificial domestic display spaces of the museum.

²² Julia B. Rosenbaum 96.

²³ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 2.

²⁴ Dona Brown, 190.

²⁵ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 132.

²⁶ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 127.

²⁷ Allen French, "The New House and Old Collection of the Concord Antiquarian Society: The Society and its House," *Old-Time New England, The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities*, April 1931), 155.

The movement toward the preservation of a homogenous colonial identity, the glorification of “Old New England” as “a model for spiritual and cultural achievement,”²⁸ and the transformation of homes into museums, was predicated on New England being imagined as a “cultural homeland” for the nation.²⁹ As the nexus of nineteenth century literature and intellectual philosophy, the homes of New England writers became popular tourist destinations³⁰ and the focus of preservation efforts. Concord, boasting the homes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Louisa May Alcott, could claim a foremost place in American literary heritage of New England prestige. Concord’s literary homes justifiably became “shrines to the spirit of Old New England,”³¹ as its battlefield secured a position of national political honor. According to a feature article entitled simply “Historic Concord” in a 1983 issue of *Colonial Homes* magazine, Concord’s celebrated nineteenth century residents - the reformers, authors, and artists - “cast a bright beacon on the independent spirit of a quintessential New England town.”³² This is ironic, considering that, with the exception of Emerson, nineteenth century Concordians depreciated their eccentric philosophical neighbors. Furthermore, the article reports that “one prominent resident of Concord ... maintains that the town’s interest in preservation began with” Emerson and Thoreau.³³ Despite its existence as a long-since established commuter suburb of the Boston metropolis, the magazine declared that Concord still “retains the spirit of a typical independent New England town.”³⁴

²⁸ Julia B. Rosenbaum, 126.

²⁹ Joseph A. Conforti, 205.

³⁰ Joseph A. Conforti, 228.

³¹ Joseph A. Conforti, 225.

³² *Colonial Homes*, 135.

³³ *Colonial Homes*, 134.

³⁴ *Colonial Homes*, 131.

Concord has become a place of local, regional, national, and international remembering. Thousands of visitors from all over the world travel to the town annually to visit its historic sites. International tourists encounter a personification of America's national virtue, which American visitors commemorate and locals often venerate. In his introduction to *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, Pierre Nora explicates the existence of "lieux de memoire" or places of memory. A place of memory is a real spatial location where a "residual sense of continuity remains,"³⁵ that is, a place where spirit lives on in the form of memory. Places of memory, such as Concord's house museums, serve to unify an expansive community and preserve the past ideal from extinction. Memory has the power to revitalize a place, but also to shape it in a desirable form. According to Nora, "Memory, being a phenomenon of emotion and magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it."³⁶ Only those aspects of history that are useable are remembered. Old New England is "neither a fantasy nor a reality but an idea; past."³⁷ Memory is tangible within material culture, "rooted concretely in space, gesture, image, and object ... Memory is absolute, while history is always relative."³⁸ This suggests that cultural mythology, which is a form of desirable remembering, is unalterable truth in the collective popular mind, once it is established. "This history of memory is realized through the imaginary representations and historical realities that occupy the symbolic sites..."³⁹ Historic house museums then interpret a history of collective memory, which can act as a "binding national memory."⁴⁰ This memory should be adopted cautiously however, since

³⁵ Pierre Nora, 1.

³⁶ Pierre Nora, 3.

³⁷ William H. Truettner, xi.

³⁸ Pierre Nora, 3.

³⁹ Lawrence P. Knizman, in Nora, ix.

⁴⁰ Pierre Nora, ix.

“memory, which includes forgetting, should not be taken literally.”⁴¹ Historic house museums have political agendas and can “reaffirm moral and civic resources ... not just to preserve it [the historic structure] as a sentimental historical artifact of hereditary memory.”⁴²

In historic house museums an “effort to re-create accurately a complex material culture vignette coexists with concerns about interpretation, conservation, visitor access, security, and board relations... almost every ... aspect of museum operations will come to be acknowledged, explicitly or tacitly , in the selection and placement of objects.”⁴³ Aiming to inspire a sense of timelessness and an “authenticity, or intensity of experience, in their pursuit of the past,”⁴⁴ in New England “domestic scenes were artifacts themselves,”⁴⁵ evidence of virtuous cultural heritage. Historic homes and antiques were “artifacts that breathed the ‘spirit’ of the past.”⁴⁶ This sense of spiritual aura surrounding material culture remains instilled in museums today, although more self- consciously problematic. Inherent in the process of exhibiting a house as a museum is the divorcement from genuine life; it is no longer a lived-in house. Today, museological institutions, and occasionally even museum visitors, are aware of the altered nature of the museum object, removed from its functional origins of existence. “The very act of exhibiting an artifact to public view ... creates an unnatural interface between the viewer and the viewed.”⁴⁷ However, house museums, as museum artifacts, as well as museum structures, continue to be “places where objects can be displayed and stories told in

⁴¹ Lawrence P. Knitzman, in Nora, ix.

⁴² Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from The Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 215.

⁴³ Brooks in *Historic House Museums*, (Altamira Press, 2002), 128.

⁴⁴ Dona Brown, 186.

⁴⁵ Joseph A. Conforti, 226.

⁴⁶ Joseph A. Conforti, 230.

⁴⁷ James Marston Fitch, *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World*, 325.

their original *contexts*.”⁴⁸ It is “a context that incorporates a diversity of elements, including objects, interiors, architecture, and landscape ... the relationship between the elements – whether spatial, historical, or aesthetic – are of the utmost importance to the site’s achievement of its interpretive goals.”⁴⁹ House museums “turn time into space: ‘The relationships of objects in time are transposed into a spatial context, and the regrouping is imprinted in the memory of visitors.’” It becomes an “apparatus of social memory”⁵⁰ Today, “interpretive roots lay firmly in the late-nineteenth-century model of Old New England – rural, homogenous, pre-industrial.”⁵¹

Despite the power historic houses possess as “naturally evocative” spaces, which “are fully ‘immersive’” drawing visitors “into realistic, richly detailed environments,”⁵² they must resist the tendency of becoming static and irrelevant places. Pierre Nora argues that places of memory are naturally removed from the contemporary society. The separation from a no longer extant past necessitates the attachment “of memory to specific sites.”⁵³ He explains that “we feel a visceral attachment to that which made us what we are, yet at the same time we feel historically estranged from this legacy.”⁵⁴ Places of memory then are “hybrid places” created “to inhabit forgetting, to fix a state of things, to immortalize death, and to materialize the immaterial.”⁵⁵ Places of memory acquire a new secondary “level of existence”⁵⁶ associated

⁴⁸ Jessica Foy Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, (Altamira Press, 2002), 4.

⁴⁹ Bradley C. Brooks, “The Historic House Furnishings Plan: Process and Product” in *Historic House Museums*, (Altamira Press, 2002), 128.

⁵⁰ Mary Nooter Roberts and Susan Vogel, “Exhibition-ism: Museums and African Art,” (The Museum for African Art, 1994), 48.

⁵¹ Brown and Nissenbaum, 12.

⁵² Nancy E. Villa Bryk, “‘I Wish You Could Take a Peek at Us at the Present Moment:’ Infusing the Historic House with Characters and Activity,” in *Historic House Museums*, 146.

⁵³ Pierre Nora, 3.

⁵⁴ Pierre Nora, 7.

⁵⁵ Pierre Nora, 15.

⁵⁶ Pierre Nora, 22.

with the present. Notably, among others, historian Patricia West⁵⁷ has argued that house museums are fundamentally and inescapably shaped by the politics of their founding. This is no less true of Concord's historic houses, despite the fact that each memorializes individuals who were neighbors and close friends, and whose lives and domestic narratives are inseparable. Like Nora's places of memory, the myths remembered in Concord's house museums act as selected collective memory. Visual and narrative interpretation is vital to the continuance of the cultural memory, as is successful visitor interaction. Accurate, evolving, and relevant interpretation is necessary. The museum's ideology will primarily determine both the essence of the cultural memory, as well as its vitality and endurance. Historic house museums consist of a complex hierarchy of interests which affect the site's interpretation. Staff, board members, donors, and the public all have investments in the quality of interpretation.

The issue of continuing cultural resonance is presently particularly relevant to the future of Concord's house museums. In a time of economic recession, financial concerns are troubling the entire museum community in a struggle to remain solvent. Similar to the period on house museum inception in the United States, William Trettner astutely points out that "national values are again under stress, threatened by fears of a New World order ... and ethnic tribalism,"⁵⁸ as Americans negotiate their transnational identity in a globalized world. The relevance of Concord's house museums are further endangered by the decline of literary culture in a society that relates to the world through technology and increasingly grows distant from its literary heritage. In order to survive, Concord's house museums must find ways to remain useful and culturally relatable to an increasingly self-alienating and changing public.

⁵⁷ Patricia West, *Domesticating History*, (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ William Truettner, vii.

While, cultural memory wants to be pervasive, it needs to be flexible to remain relevant to an ever evolving society. This, however, may not be easy. "The strength of the museum's founding philosophy ... may hinder expanding research and for that matter, making any changes to the original interpretation."⁵⁹ Museums need an interested public to justify and sustain their existence. "Providing opportunities to interact personally and meaningfully with historic properties and artifacts is key to fostering public appreciation for places and things historical."⁶⁰ As places of memory, Concord's historic house museums need to remain "living parts of communities," relevant to "a broad spectrum of visitors representing a rich diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, interests, education, languages, learning styles, and communication preferences."⁶¹ Let us turn now to a more intimate examination of Concord's historic house museums.

Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House: Home of *Little Women*

Orchard House was the first of Concord's historic houses to officially open as a historic house museum. "After moving twenty-two times in nearly thirty years" the Alcott family lived at Orchard House from 1858 until 1877, the longest amount of time that they had occupied any one home.⁶² In 1884 the Alcott family sold Orchard House to William Torrey Harris, who was a teacher at Mr. Alcott's Concord School of Philosophy on the Orchard House grounds. In 1900 Harriet Lothrop, children's author of the popular "Five Little Peppers" book series under the pseudonym "Margaret Sydney," purchased the house from Harris. Lothrop was living next door at the time, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Wayside," also a previous home of the Alcott's.

⁵⁹ Jessica Foy Donnelly, 9.

⁶⁰ Valarie Coons McAllister, "Balancing Our Commitments: Access and Historic Preservation," *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, (Altamira Press, 2002), 168.

⁶¹ Mcallsiter in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 168-169.

⁶² "Learning About the Alcotts," Orchard House website, The Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association, 2009.

Lothrop was very interested in historic preservation and heritage associations. She founded the Children of the American Revolution, and in addition to purchasing Orchard House for the purpose of preservation, she purchased three other historic Concord homes, including her own.

Ten years after purchasing Orchard House and letting it stand empty, Lothrop began to look for a suitable owner. She approached the Concord Women's Club, offering to sell Orchard House to them for \$5,000. The following year in the spring of 1911 the Concord Women's Club formed The Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association, for the purpose of preserving Orchard House. Although a deed within Harriett Lothrop's papers records the sale for \$1, several other sources document that it was for \$3,000.⁶³ Louisa May Alcott's nephew John Pratt Alcott reportedly complained that the family "had tried many times to buy it but it was not until the club women of town brought their united efforts to bear that the price was put in within reasonable limits."⁶⁴

These facts imply that Lothrop may not have had purely altruistic intentions for the preservation of Orchard House. Although the possibly manufactured deed would indicate otherwise, it seems that Lothrop intended to earn a profit from the sale of Orchard House or at least not to lose a great deal on her investment. Patricia West suggests that Lothrop was not particularly fond of Alcott, evidenced by the fact that Lothrop would leave Alcott out of her tours of Sleepy Hollow cemetery, which included the other famous authors interred adjacent to Alcott's grave. West conjectures that this indifference may have been partly owing to literary competition between children's book authors and popular allegations that Lothrop copied

⁶³ Patricia West, 58.

⁶⁴ Patricia West, 58.

Alcott's themes.⁶⁵ Lothrop's real-estate agent claimed that she initially purchased Orchard House "to protect Wayside, her home."⁶⁶ Like other house museum founders, Lothrop may have been trying to deter "unsupervised crowds who already visited..., usually to the detriment of the property and the dismay of its owners."⁶⁷ Louisa May Alcott had complained of the sightseers while she was still living at Orchard House. Although Lothrop gave personal tours of Hawthorne's The Wayside, she also "complained about the tourists who intruded on her home."⁶⁸ Before selling Orchard House, Lothrop removed items such as the busts from Bronson Alcott's School of Philosophy, which the National Park Services' 1983 *Historic Furnishings Report* locates in Hawthorne's tower study at The Wayside.⁶⁹ The Alcott family belongings which furnish Orchard House were largely donated by family members. It is interesting that in the interest of historic preservation that Harriet Lothrop did not return the busts to the care of Orchard House's stewards after she arranged for the house's purchase.

The Concord Women's Club raised the money to purchase and restore Orchard House by public subscription, evidencing a community interest in the historic home and the institution's place in a national narrative. To raise money for the costly restoration the Women's Club organized a "Story of our Flag" fundraiser⁷⁰. When the museum opened in the spring of 1912, Alcott descendent John Pratt Alcott and Edward Emerson, the son of Ralph Waldo Emerson, were in attendance as representatives of the community's elite and familial ties to the past. Remotely like Caroline Emmerton's restoration of The House of Seven Gables in Salem, Massachusetts, the restored Orchard House "transformed literary romance into an

⁶⁵ Patricia West, 60.

⁶⁶ Patricia West, 60.

⁶⁷ Patricia West, 3.

⁶⁸ Patricia West, 59.

⁶⁹ National Park Service, "Historic Furnishing Report," (1983), 160.

⁷⁰ Patricia West, 67.

architectural assertion of realism,”⁷¹ in that the history of Orchard House and the Alcott family became inflated with their fictional counterparts the Marches, of *Little Women*, who were “emblems of the virtuous and ostentatiously traditional domesticity.”⁷² The Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association’s stated purpose in preserving the house was “as a memorial to Louisa May Alcott, not alone on a count of the worth of Miss Alcott’s life and writing, but also to bring to increasing public notice the value of standards of living of her generation.”⁷³ Like Emmerton’s settlement house at the House of Seven Gables, the founding of the Orchard House museum had a very ostensible political goal of social improvement. The domestic virtues embodied by the *Little Women* myth in the context of the house museum “inexorably linked love of home and love of country.”⁷⁴

According to Patricia West, *Little Women* is a “powerful brew of fact and fiction, autobiography and imagination, Alcott’s own experience and the experience of women generally”⁷⁵ that allows the museum to employ a “telling blend of fantasy and reality,”⁷⁶ without being untruthful or inauthentic. Orchard House exhibited dioramas of scenes from the book⁷⁷ and the house became physical “proof” that “the story was true” and functioned as a “second home to half the girls in the world.”⁷⁸ Orchard House was the New England “home” and place of belonging for everyone. This is significant considering that by 1927 many American women thought that the novel *Little Women* was more influential than the Bible.⁷⁹ The poignant association of Orchard House as the home of *Little Women* continues today, evidenced by the

⁷¹ Conforti, 255.

⁷² Patricia West, 65.

⁷³ Patricia West, 51.

⁷⁴ Patricia West, 43.

⁷⁵ Patricia West, 65.

⁷⁶ Patricia West, 69.

⁷⁷ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, C.Pam.73, Item A1.

⁷⁸ Patricia West, 68.

⁷⁹ Patricia West, 72.

museum's full name (Louisa' May Alcott's Orchard House: Home of Little Women) and a quotation from a visitor on the museum website, "A visit to Orchard House is like a walk through *Little Women!*" Orchard House is in many ways a shrine to Jo March, rather than to her real life alter-ego Louisa May Alcott⁸⁰. The popularity of *Little Women* is in fact responsible for Orchard Houses existence as a museum. Of the four homes in Concord lived in by the Alcott family, Orchard House is one of two open to the public as a museum, and the second was preserved primarily for its associations with Nathaniel Hawthorne rather than the Alcotts.

With literary allusion, however, the similarity between The House of Seven Gables and Orchard House ends. Unlike Emmerton's fabricated literary fantasy, Orchard House is very much the home that the real Alcott family lived in. Although *Little Women* is always present at Orchard House the reality of the Alcott's personalities and the true circumstances of their lives is acknowledged in the oral interpretation delivered during regular tours, witnessed in the scholarly publications sold in the museum shop, and celebrated in a myriad of educational programs. These educational programs and special events are one key to the success of Orchard House. Special programming is an excellent resource for institutions wishing to liberate their museum from a static existence, and can be critical to the life of a historic house museum, which often has no extra space for changing exhibits.⁸¹ Orchard House has a long-standing tradition of special programs, including theatrical and artistic programs for children, living history programs, such as "An Afternoon with the Alcotts," and adult educational "conversations" in the tradition of Bronson Alcott's school in the Concord School of Philosophy. Although special programs may have existed at Orchard House since its early years as a museum, they have been continuous since the 1970s, when it seems that many of them were

⁸⁰ Patricia West, 72

⁸¹ Rex M. Ellis, "Interpreting the Whole House," in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, (Altamira Press, 2002).

implemented. According to Jamie Credle in an assessment of “Programs that Work”, Orchard House’s girl-scout programs fill a need in the community, allowing girl scouts to “become familiar with *Little Women*.”⁸²

Particularly noteworthy are the living history programs at Orchard House. In 1981 Jan Turnquist was active in theatrically portraying members of the Alcott family. Today, she is director of Orchard House and continues to play Louisa May Alcott at a variety of events both at Orchard House and in the Concord community. Living history can be an exceptional educational tool, capable of presenting a multiplicity of voices in a captivating and entertaining approach. When done well, living history can make the house and inhabitants come alive in the imagination and virtual experiences of the visitor. This can be crucial since “the house infused with character and activity moves the historic house from a memorial.”⁸³ It has a humanizing effect on what might otherwise be a detached collection of objects in an old house. “Because it can be so captivating,” living history “is often extremely effective pedagogically.”⁸⁴ However it also presents a real danger of “fictionalizing” history. It is also a form of “fantasy” or “illusion” which may deter or even offend visitors looking for a more authentic experience⁸⁵.

Orchard House is very proactive regarding its future. They have a rich history of community outreach, providing engaging visitor experience, and responsible preservation, embracing “an imperative duty to take intelligent and effective care of the building and its contents ... to preserve the tangible for posterity.”⁸⁶ The house was in poor condition and restoration was required immediately following acquisition by the Concord Women’s Club.

⁸² Jamie Credle, “Endless Possibilities: Historic House Museum Programs That Make Educators Sing,” in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, (Altamira Press, 2002), 282.

⁸³ Nancy Bryk, in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 149.

⁸⁴ Barbara Abramoff Levy, “Historic House Tours That Succeed: Choosing the Best Tour Approach,” in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, (Altamira Press, 2002), 206.

⁸⁵ Barbara Abramof Levy in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 206.

⁸⁶ Doug Baker in Concord Fre Public Library Special Collections, C PAM.37, Item 77.

Restorations were again undertaken in the late 1970s and again in the early 1980s. According to the 1981 campaign to raise \$200,000 in restoration funds and \$100,000 for an endowment, The Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association had been “self-sustaining” for 70 years, operating the museum on the annual average income of \$70,000 earned through admission fees and gift shop purchases.⁸⁷ During the 1981 restoration, visitors reportedly commented that they were “intrigued by the fact that they could see the ‘insides’ of the house and be here at a time when so many exciting discoveries were being made.”⁸⁸ Restoration served as a creative, and perhaps unexpected, opportunity for visitor engagement, providing education, entertainment, and a meaningful unique experience. Orchard House continued to diligently pursue restoration efforts. In 1996 the Annual Report, President Christopher Davies expressed that the museum’s objective was “first and foremost to preserve.”⁸⁹ Restoration and conservation efforts continue today. In 2001, Director Jan Turnquist issued an appeal to raise \$600,000 in six months as part of a 1.2 million dollar preservation project to repair the structural damage cause by powder post beetles. In 2009 the Orchard House website announced that “on-going preservation efforts adhere to the highest standards of authenticity.” Today, Orchard House utilizes a variety of fund-raising events including grants, grant competitions (in which historical institutions vie for online popularity votes for funds), and 5k marathons. These methods of fund-raising reinforce Orchard House’s relationship to a local, as well as a virtual global community.

A visitor to Orchard House in 1938 remarked that the door was opened by a friendly hostess.⁹⁰ In 1981 there still existed a “hostessing” committee at Orchard House. Then director Jayne Gordon was concerned with the museum’s ability “to communicate the warm homelike

⁸⁷ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, C PAM.37, Item 77

⁸⁸ Annual Report of Orchard House Director, 1981. Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, C PAM.37, Item 77.

⁸⁹ C PAM.37, Item 77.

⁹⁰ Henry Curtis Ahl, “Visit to Orchard House”, 4 in Concord Free Public Library, Special Collections, C PAM.37, Item 76.

atmosphere of the Alcott family home.”⁹¹ She wrote in November of 1981, “We should present the Orchard House not as a cold, formal, lifeless museum, but as a home which reflects the energy, enthusiasm, and open-mindedness that was so characteristic of the Alcott occupants.”⁹² It was important for Orchard House to feel like an authentic home. The 1983 *Colonial Homes* article described Orchard House in a way that was as reminiscent of the language surrounding the “Old Home Week” celebrations that honored New England as the home of the nation. The magazine described Orchard House as “the home of a remarkable 19th century New England family.”⁹³ Through the lens of Orchard House the Alcott’s were seen as the exemplary ideal family. Significantly the article states that Orchard House was a “permanent home” and a place of “joyful living.”⁹⁴ The magazine also honored Orchard House with the reputation of being “one of the most frequently visited”⁹⁵ homes in Concord, a fact that remains true today with thousands of visitors arriving at Orchard House annually from all over the world. It is the only Concord house museum to remain open daily throughout the calendar year. Orchard House’s institutional ability to evolve with society promises it a secure future. Its large quantity of and variety of special programming, its creative solutions to fund raising, and its utilization of technology with the maintenance of a competitive website offering accessible information, online shopping, and virtual tours, allows Orchard House to possess a vital and active community presence, essential to the future of any museum.

⁹¹ Annual Report, 1981, Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, C.PAM.37, Item 77/

⁹² Jayne Gordon, Orchard House Director, November 10, 1981, Concord Free Public Library Special Collections C.PAM.37, Item 77

⁹³ *Colonial Homes*,130.

⁹⁴ *Colonial Homes*,78.

⁹⁵ *Colonial Homes*,78.

The Wayside: Home of Authors

Neighboring Orchard House, The Wayside is an 18th century structure with a long history of occupations including the Concord muster-master during the Revolutionary War, the Alcott family, the Nathaniel Hawthorne family, and the Lothrop family. The Lothrop's purchased the house as their summer home because of their love and enthusiasm for Hawthorne. The history of The Wayside – the name Nathaniel Hawthorne gave the only house he ever owned – was, according to the Lothrop's, important to their lives. They tried to preserve the Hawthorne elements of their home as much as comfort and necessity allowed them to. Their daughter Margaret wrote,

“They felt it a duty to preserve the physical structure as well as the fine traditions of the past, and they decided to repair, but not to change unless absolutely necessary. All that dated from the Hawthorne era was carefully saved, especially the wallpaper and the graining of the woodwork”⁹⁶

However, she remarked, that her parents “were not slavish in their devotion. They believed that a home should be comfortable...”⁹⁷ The *Colonial Homes* article implies that the Lothrop's preserved Hawthorne's tower study only,⁹⁸ yet the Lothrop's dedication to Hawthorne's memory should not be depreciated. Harriet Lothrop even purchased Hawthorne family furniture from Hawthorne's daughter, Rose Lathrop. A Boston socialite, Harriet Lothrop held many elaborate parties to showcase the house, some lasting days. Following the death of both her parents, Margret Lothrop assumed responsibility for The Wayside's future.

⁹⁶ Margaret Lothrop. *The Wayside" Home of Authors*, (New York: American Book Company, 1940), 5.

⁹⁷ Margaret Lothrop, 161.

⁹⁸ *Colonial Homes*, 74.

Margaret Lothrop conducted extensive research about the history of The Wayside, to enhance her childhood understanding of the home. It had long seemed unlikely that the house could exist solely as a private residence. When Hawthorne's daughter Rose and her husband occupied the house they were troubled with unwelcome visitors. When they posted no trespassing announcements tourists "expressed considerable indignation and resentment when the Lathrops tried 'to insinuate the idea that the house may 'even be a private dwelling;'"⁹⁹ because of its literary associations, The Wayside was already possessed by a sense of public entitlement. The house in the public imagination was not a private home, but a national one belonging to anyone who wished to be there. Margaret officially opened the house, in the tradition of English Country estates, to public tours in 1927, even though she was still living there. Tours were first conducted under the supervision of a committee from the Concord Antiquarian Society in 1928 for a season in Margaret's absence. Later, in 1932 tours were conducted by Margaret personally. To finance the upkeep, she charged admission fees and in 1940 she published a book that was a product of her research and made it available for sale in the front hall of her home. To increase revenue, she began hosting a weekend bed and breakfast, allowing tourists the opportunity to sleep in Hawthorne's bedroom. Sadly, in 1958, Margaret issued an announcement that The Wayside "will close its doors to the public, at the end of the coming season, unless arrangements for permanent care are under way within the next twelve months."¹⁰⁰ She wanted to find an agency to continue the preservation efforts her family had begun and desired "some educational or literary organization or group, who would

⁹⁹National Park Service "Historic Grounds Report," (1970), 74.

¹⁰⁰Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, CPAM. 76, Item E9

carry on the type of educational work which I have tried to do.”¹⁰¹ Margaret felt that preserving the home’s history for future generations of children was of particular importance.

The Minute Man National Historical Park had been established in 1959, to preserve sites associated with the battle of Lexington and Concord at the start of the American Revolutionary War. Although the National Park Service, which was founded in 1916, had owned few historic structures until the 1930s, they were interested in acquiring The Wayside. According to National Park histories, Margaret was hesitant to sell The Wayside to the National Park Service in the early 1960s when historian Robert Ronshiem expressed interest in acquiring it, because “she had ‘very definite ideas about the proper treatment of the house.’”¹⁰² “She believed that the house showed the history of the country,” inhabited by the patriotic virtue of “thoughtful living” and “the history of the best of our country and its development.”¹⁰³

Despite her uncertainty, Margaret Lothrop sold The Wayside to the National Park Service in June 1965 for \$56,800. The Minute Man National Historical Park “accepted the added challenge of incorporating this history into its interpretive and preservation actions.”¹⁰⁴ The park was able to rationalize the addition of The Wayside because of the houses associations with muster-master Samuel Whitney and the house’s role in the British soldiers search for hidden gunpowder. The Wayside is a “witness structure”¹⁰⁵ to the battle, and therefore was worthy of preservation as part of the 1775 landscape. Further justification was found, in the layers of successive architectural alterations, which park ideology claims

¹⁰¹ National Park Service, “Historic Grounds Report,” (1970), p44.

¹⁰² Joan M. Zenzen, *Bridging The Past: A History of Minute Man National Historical Park*, (National Park Service, 2007), 103.

¹⁰³ Joan M. Zenzen, 103.

¹⁰⁴ Joan M. Zenzen, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Joan M. Zenzen, 9.

“represents in physical form the changing landscape of the town.”¹⁰⁶ This is an interesting argument considering that the park has razed many elements of changed landscape in favor of a restored park setting. In 1992 Congress passed an amendment to the Minute Man National Historical Park Act recognizing the literary associations that are valuable to The Wayside’s historical identity, interpreting the author’s lives and work as fulfillments of Revolutionary promises. Nonetheless, The Wayside continues to present the National Park Service with “challenges not originally envisioned”¹⁰⁷ when they acquired the house.

Today The Wayside remains the secondary focus of the Minute Man National Park, which cares for “139 historic structures”, “sixty-six archeological sites” “over 1,000 acres of land.”¹⁰⁸ The park also operates two visitor centers. In 1996 a staff member admitted that The Wayside was “treated as an orphan”¹⁰⁹ in the park. More than a decade later that has not changed. In 2009, Curator Terrie Wallace said, “you must remember that The Wayside is not the main focus of the park. The Battle of April 19, 1775 and the causes and consequences of that event are the primary story the park wishes to share with visitors. A million visitors come to the park each year but only approximately 5,000-6,000 go to the Wayside.”¹¹⁰ However, it could be argued that were more attention given to the care and promotion of The Wayside its visitor numbers might increase to resemble those of Orchard House.

The Wayside is desperately in need of conservation and restoration, both externally and internally. Over the last twenty years it has been slowly decaying. Today the interiors are dark and dank, stained wallpaper is peeling from the walls, paint and plaster crumbling. The

¹⁰⁶ Joan M. Zensen, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Joan M. Zensen, 129.

¹⁰⁸ Minute Man National Park curator Terrie Wallace, Interview, Fall 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Joan M. Zensen, 247.

¹¹⁰ Terrie Wallace, Interview.

exterior is as dilapidated with clipped paint, missing window panes and shutters. Tours in recent years have been affected by water damage due to roof leaks. More extensive water damage has been caused by frozen pipes in the winter when the house is closed.¹¹¹ Additional damage resulted from leaks in cooling and dehumidification units. Yet, curator Terrie Wallace claims that "The structure is sound."¹¹² However, it is a basic principle of preservation that "a building must be made and kept water tight if it is to survive."¹¹³ Of course, preservation projects require funding.

In response to a question regarding funding allocation, park curator Terrie Wallace, said in a written interview,

"All of these resources, programs and events require funds. ... The furnishings in The Wayside are a small component of the park museum collection which has over 530,000 objects of which over 260,000 are archeological artifact with another almost 260,000 items which are archives. The museum technician and I are responsible for the whole collection not just The Wayside furnishings. My work includes not only the collection but also ensuring that park projects are in compliance with the National Historical Preservation Act. The park library is also my responsibility. All of these details are more information that you probably need but I included them so that you are aware that the park has more responsibilities than just the maintenance of The Wayside and the programs offered there."¹¹⁴

While it is undeniably true that the park has a myriad of responsibilities, The Wayside remains part of their responsibility as historical stewards. The park has requested funding in 2008 for the appropriation of nearly \$800,000 for the preservation maintenance of The Wayside.

However, funding is not expected until 2011 and 2012. Even then the allocation of funds is not guaranteed. In the meantime, The Wayside continues to deteriorate.

¹¹¹ Terrie Wallace, Interview

¹¹² Interview Terrie Wallace, Interview.

¹¹³ James Marston Fitch, *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World*, (University Press of Virginia, 2001), 318.

¹¹⁴ Terrie Wallace, Interview.

It should be wondered why the Minute Man National Park has not pursued other fundraising opportunities. Federal ownership of The Wayside does not restrict the fundraising activities of the Friends of Minute Man Park, which accepts donations in addition to fundraising.¹¹⁵ Interest-based fundraisers such as special public events and scholarly educational forums could be organized for the purpose of raising funds for The Wayside restoration. In the first decades after acquisition the park held children's hours and musical events in the tradition of the Lothrop women. Such public activities have been successful at the neighboring Orchard House, and Concord, Massachusetts is a prosperous community that places a high value on their historical heritage; it is likely that The Wayside would find patronage. Special programming and the more welcoming aspect of a house in good repair could do a great deal toward increasing the number of visitors to The Wayside. A few years ago, the house was open so seldom that it turned away potential visitors. Surely, some low-cost initiative could be taken in an effort to intercede on behalf of The Wayside. However, "park management works with the group to determine which park priorities should be funded."¹¹⁶ The issue surrounding the restoration of The Wayside then remains the priority the house is granted within the larger park superstructure. The Wayside seems to be hurting because it is subsumed in the larger park structure, and yet the National Park Service has provided the public vital access to its adopted home.

The Wayside's complex and rich history has proved another problematic tension for the Minute Man National Historical Park. Beyond the fact that the greater value of the house's history is unrelated to the Revolutionary War, the layers of interpretation required by the different eras of literary occupancy provide a challenge. Although park visitors vary from the

¹¹⁵ Terrie Wallace, Interview.

¹¹⁶ Terrie Wallace, Interview.

indifferent individual who happened upon the house, to visitors interested in literature, architecture, or old homes, the author that most visitors will recognize by name is Nathaniel Hawthorne. This familiarity will encourage an interest in the years of the Hawthorne occupancy that surpasses the curiosity related to the other residents. The Lothrop, whom the majority of visitors fail to recognize even by her penname "Margaret Sydney," will naturally be of the least interest to most visitors. This is not to say that they cannot acquire an appreciation for the Lothrop's through the agency of the tour, but to acknowledge that visitors do not come to The Wayside to visit the Lothrop house. Ronshiem was conscious of this reality when he purchased the house. He wrote, "The fact remains that if no historic family but the Lothrop had lived in the house, it would not be part of the National Park Service. Nor will the visitor be coming to visit the Lothrop house. ..."¹¹⁷ He surmised that "the fact that Mrs. Lothrop consciously presented an historic house, especially a Hawthorne house, helps meet this challenge."¹¹⁸ Somewhat curiously, Ronshiem made the assumption that "in order to present a house rather than museum, the house must be refurnished to the Lothrop period instead of refurnishing to several periods."¹¹⁹ This conception has since remained firmly ingrained in park's interpretation of The Wayside. In 1983 the park stated in an official report, "We are doing more than interpreting lifestyles of individuals at a particular point in time; we are interpreting to visitors an interpretation of history. We are seeing the Hawthornes and Alcotts through the eyes of Harriet and Margaret Lothrop, and showing the public an important stage in the development of historic site management."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Richard Ronshiem, "Draft of Evidence of Historic Furnishings," (Minute Man National Park Service Archives), 1

¹¹⁸ Richard Ronshiem, 1.

¹¹⁹ Richard Ronshiem, 1.

¹²⁰ National Park Service, "Cultural Landscape Report" (2008), 248.

In one sense the museum is working within the physical constraints of its collections, and even responsibly exhibiting its own problematic history as a museum, confined by the vision of its donors and the limited representativeness of the collection. In another sense it is consciously limiting the visual story it tells. Although the museum claims that Harriet Lothrop “was interested in and proud of her heritage” and that “the Concord and Hawthorne pieces show this,”¹²¹ few of the pieces Lothrop purposely purchased for their historical connections to the house are currently displayed in The Wayside’s rooms. Until 2000, a tour of The Wayside included twelve of the house’s fourteen rooms, and exhibited several artifacts that the Lothrop’s had believed belonged to the Hawthornes. Prior to 2000, the house was visually interpreted through 1924, the year of Harriet Lothrop’s death. Although the house was primarily furnished with Lothrop furniture, artifacts associated with other occupants were displayed as well. This lent itself to interpreting The Wayside “not as a house but rather as home, a family home, altered by the needs of successive family occupations.”¹²² It was Margaret Lothrop’s wish that the Wayside would retain a home-like atmosphere and that interpretation would allow the “influences of each author to shine.”¹²³ She wrote, “It is my hope that the old house may never become merely a museum, but rather that it may remain as it is today with its home life of past still about it. The Wayside as long as it is unchanged, has much to tell those who, with the ears and the eyes of imagination can hear the murmurs of the pines and spruces on the terraces, the sound of children at play, and the gentle voices of its honored authors.”¹²⁴

Margaret believed that by preserving The Wayside her parents were “closely connected with ... intelligent patriotism” illustrated by “their respect for the memorials of the past and their

¹²¹ Robert Ronshiem, “Draft of Evidence of Historic Furnishings,” 10.

¹²² “Cultural Landscape Report”, (2008), 141.

¹²³ Joan M. Zenzen, 145.

¹²⁴ “Cultural Landscape Report”, (2008), 187.

desire to preserve them.”¹²⁵ After purchasing the house, The National Park Service maintained the patriotic rhetoric, claiming that The Wayside was a national monument because it “it tells America’s story” and represents “American history in the making.”¹²⁶ The house had “witnessed more than 250 years of Concord’s and America’s history”¹²⁷ and was to be maintained “for the benefit of the people of the United States”¹²⁸ Further associated with the nationalist virtue of domesticity, “The Wayside is more than a museum it was their home.”¹²⁹

In 2000, The Wayside’s furnishing plan changed to the year 1904 and based the visual interpretation on extant photographs of the rooms taken during that year. 1904 was chosen not only because of the documentary evidence available for artifact placement, but “because it was seen as a way for park rangers to discuss Hawthorne, that most important author who lived in the house, while surrounded by Lothrop furnishings.” In 1904 Harriet Lothrop had thrown an elaborate three-day-long celebration in honor of the centennial of Hawthorne’s birth, by framing the house’s interpretation to this year it theoretically, “offered a unique way to bring Hawthorne to life amid the Lothrop furnishings and to understand what Hawthorne meant to the Lothrop’s and why Harriet would undertake an elaborate celebration of his life.”¹³⁰ Curator Terrie Wallace admits, “The house has a complex history with existing furnishings from the family that is least important historically. One challenge is to tell the stories of all the occupants amidst the Lothrop furnishings. The other challenge is to realize that Harriet and Margaret, unlike the other occupants of the house and unlike the occupants of other historic house museums, thought about how to present to the public the stories of those who had lived in the

¹²⁵ Margaret Lothrop, 160.

¹²⁶ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, CPAM.76, Item E9.

¹²⁷ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, CPAM.76, Item E7, page 2

¹²⁸ Concord Free Public Library special Collections, CPAM.76, Item E7, page 5

¹²⁹ Concord Free Public Library, CPAM.76 Item E7, page 5.

¹³⁰ “Cultural Landscape Report,” (2008), p 141.

house.”¹³¹ She continues, “The intent always was that the rangers would discuss Hawthorne and even the Alcotts.”¹³² This, however, does not adequately explain the rationale of no longer exhibiting Hawthorne artifacts owned by the Lothrop’s, even if the provenance of some of the items is uncertain. Henry Curtis Ahl visited the “literary shrine”¹³³ while Margaret Lothrop was still in residence. He wrote enthusiastically about seeing the inkstand that Hawthorne used to write *The Marble Faun*, and various pieces of furniture belonging to the Hawthorne’s. In the 1990s Hawthorne’s shaving stand was prominently highlighted in the Hawthorne bedroom. It remains significant that the Lothrop’s believed these to be Hawthorne possessions.

The visual element of house museum interpretation should not be undervalued. It is often the visual that makes a lasting impression on the memory of the visitor, and it is in the tangible objects of history that memory lives, connecting us to history. Tour guides tell history in the third person, it is “the space itself that speaks in the first person.”¹³⁴ At The Wayside the curatorial visual arrangement of artifacts is conceived of and managed independently from the oral narrative interpretation. The former illuminates a fixed moment in history, while the latter tells a broader history encompassing various phases of residence. Only the architecture of The Wayside lends itself to a visual consistency for the narrative’s phases. “Interpretation goals and furnishing plans cannot be considered independent of one another,”¹³⁵ each must reinforce the other. Although the visual and oral interpretations at The Wayside theoretically supplement one another, the reality of the visitor experience can be quite different. The precision of the visual moment risks distancing the visitor from the historical narrative.

¹³¹ Terrie Wallace, Interview

¹³² Terrie Wallace, Interview

¹³³ Henry Curtis Ahl, “Visit to the Wayside,”(1929). Concord Public Library Special Collections, CPAM.76, Item E1 9

¹³⁴ Levy in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 193.

¹³⁵ Brooks in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 133.

Museum professional Bradley Brooks cautions, "If the interpretation plan focuses on change over a long period of time ... it would be very difficult to choose one moment in the house's history of habitation that can adequately illuminate the complexities of change"¹³⁶ Evocative spaces, "infused with things that can help interpret the variety of characters ... help bring the historical characters alive."¹³⁷ Nancy E. Villa Bryk agrees that "a house with a rich and deep story that encompasses many periods and characters, and whose message must reflect change over time, may not be well suited to the relatively confining nature of the interpretation of a single era."¹³⁸ She explains, "visuals may sway visitors to set themselves within a period that detracts from the interpretative message."¹³⁹ Instead museums "may utilize material culture from a variety of periods ... juxtaposing it in a way that helps visitors understand the message."¹⁴⁰

Caroline Emmerton's interpretation of Salem's The House of Seven Gables has justifiably been criticized for being invented and contrived. However, Emmerton was unquestionably successful in creating the evocative space. Perhaps there is something to be borrowed from her aesthetic method if not her historical approach. "To create a 'homelikeness instead of the deadness of a museum,' Emmerton allowed that the house's furnishings required a 'blending of periods."¹⁴¹ This technique performs a function similar to the Concord Antiquarian Society's period rooms commented on by Allen French. Cliveden, a historic house museum in Philadelphia, is similar to The Wayside in that it wishes to interpret both the eighteenth and nineteenth century phases of its existence. At Cliveden "interspersed among

¹³⁶ Bryk in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 151.

¹³⁷ Bryk in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 144.

¹³⁸ Bryk in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 151.

¹³⁹ Bryk in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 151.

¹⁴⁰ Bryk in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 151.

¹⁴¹ Joseph A. Conforti, 245-255.

the eighteenth century furnishings are groups of artifacts, photographs, and prints that enable interpreters to tell stories ... make it possible for interpreters and visitors to slip comfortably back and forth¹⁴² between time periods. Curators at Cliveden preferred "clustering objects so they told a story visually ... Though these exact objects were never together at any point in Cliveden's history, the overall appearance is similar to that of... photographs. This compromise favored the interpretive potential of objects over curatorial purity."¹⁴³

This approach could bridge the dichotomy between the visual and auditory narratives employed at The Wayside, and enhance visitor experiences by providing "visual reinforcement"¹⁴⁴ of the verbal presentation. Objects or images can act as personal points of connection for the visitor. At The Wayside Una Hawthorne's portrait used to hang in her bedroom, despite the fact that it is furnished as the Lothrop guest room. The painting gave guides and visitors a visual referent to contextualize the account of Una's invalidism that guides deliver in her bedroom. The portrait of Una is no longer exhibited, eliminating the opportunity to make a visual point of connection with her. Other objects could function similarly throughout The Wayside. Interpretive ranger Margie Hicks has said that Margaret Lothrop "always wanted to see [The Wayside] as living, a continually living history, giving people the feeling that Hawthorne ... had just put down his cigar and left."¹⁴⁵ While the decaying condition of the Wayside diminishes the potentials for atmospheric vivacity, a creative and visually integrated interpretation would help visitors relate to the various individuals who inhabited the space. This could be affected without fictionalizing or behaving irresponsibly toward the authentic space.

¹⁴² Levy in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 196.

¹⁴³ Lloyd in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 226.

¹⁴⁴ Lloyd in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 226.

¹⁴⁵ Joan M. Zenzen, 145.

Interpretive plans should not be “simply a compilation of research,” but “a carefully crafted narrative.”¹⁴⁶ The visual interpretation at The Wayside betrays itself as slavish conformity to archival record and a resolute commitment to conservative assumptions about authenticity. In 2000, when the interpretation changed focus to 1904, items that were not explicitly documented in rooms not only disappeared from view, entire rooms were removed from the tour. A visitor to The Wayside no longer has access to several rooms on the second floor of the house that were included on the tour in the mid-1990s. The Terrace Room (where President Franklin Pierce was a frequent guest during the Hawthorne years), the East Chamber (where the Alcott sisters played and where Margaret Lothrop was born), The West Chamber (master bedroom to the Alcott and Hawthorne’s), and the maid’s room, were excluded from the tour because “there is not sufficient documentation to support a 1904 interpretation of the room.” Pieces of history and life of the house are lost from the interpretation because they could not be visually documented in one year particular of the house’s existence. “Rigid adherence to furnishing plans can risk creating a sterile environment that speaks more to curators than the general public,”¹⁴⁷ when the emphasis should be placed instead on “communicating life as it was lived, not interiors as they were decorated.”¹⁴⁸ While imaginative visual interpretation and partial period integration necessarily “involves some risk taking ... most curatorial training emphasizes following documentation precisely and literally ... requires the curator to possess a *disciplined imagination* and an *intuition* about the characters whose lives are being interpreted,”¹⁴⁹ the park could chose to integrate Hawthorne attributed objects, for example, into the Lothrop interiors without violating authenticity. The furnishings

¹⁴⁶ Brooks in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*,132.

¹⁴⁷ Lloyd in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 225.

¹⁴⁸ Byrk in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*,167.

¹⁴⁹ Byrk in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*,163.

changed many times throughout the Lothrop occupancy and the documentary photos were somewhat posed, the same object appearing in more than one room in several photos.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore the Lothrop's owned the objects expressly for the purpose of evocative association; they are an integral piece of the Lothrop's historical imagination. Although the curators are commendably striving for accuracy and authenticity, including objects belonging to the Hawthorne's would remain true to the Lothrop vision and spirit of preservation, while simultaneously enhancing the visitor's experience, making The Wayside a more evocative place of memory.

The Old Manse

The Old Manse, owned and operated by The Trustees of Reservations, is similar to The Wayside with its long, complex, rich history, associated prominently with both the Battle of Lexington and Concord and the town's literary figures. The Old Manse is adjacent to the battlefield itself, which is owned and operated by the Minute Man National Historic Park of which Wayside is a part. Both houses also received their name from resident Nathaniel Hawthorne, who lived at the Manse during his honeymoon years from 1842 -1846. Of Concord's house museums, The Old Manse perhaps inspires the most genuine impression that it is a living presence. *Colonial Homes* magazine claimed that "The Old Manse has the most romantic history of all the houses in Concord."¹⁵¹

A Trustees of Reservations pamphlet states: "People are mortal – The Old Manse lives on."¹⁵² This idea that The Old Manse is an immortal living entity is persistently intertwined in the museum's literature and documents related to the historic house. The life of The Old

¹⁵⁰ "Historic furnishing Report", (1983), 179.

¹⁵¹ *Colonial Homes*, 68.

¹⁵² Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, C.PAm.76, Item D10.

Manse is idealized and envisioned as consistent with the virtues of the colonial origins of the structure. A booklet on Massachusetts historic sites said, "The Old Manse is historically important, not only as a literary landmark, but as an example of a way of life remarkably unchanged from 1769 until the last Ripley owner sold it to the Trustees of Reservations in 1939."¹⁵³ The Old Manse was built for the Reverend William Emerson, who died while serving as militia chaplain during the Revolutionary War. His wife and children purportedly watched the Battle of Lexington and Concord from the windows of The Old Manse. His grandson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the nineteenth century poet and philosopher wrote his masterpiece essay "Nature" while looking out of the same windows at more peaceful scenes. The Emerson-Ripley families had a long association with the Unitarian ministry and often boarded young theologians, lending an aura of piety to the house. The house absorbed an intellectual mystique as well from the literary figures Emerson and Hawthorne who wrote there, as well as from the brilliant self-educated scholar, Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley and the tenets from Harvard University when it was quartered in Concord in 1775, during the Revolutionary War. Many of the Emerson-Ripley descendents who lived at The Old Manse were intellectually or artistically distinguished during their lifetimes. The Old Manse's history endowed the house with virtue and distinction in the public imagination. The Old Manse became fixed as a place of memory. Ephemera claimed: "there has been practically no change in the house nor in its surroundings since it was built,"¹⁵⁴ "the house remains as it was when first used."¹⁵⁵ The Old Manse embodies a principle inherent in the construction of regional identity, by which "New England's past is presumed to be a continuous past, a repository of ideas and values that have

¹⁵³ Kevin H. White. "Massachusetts Historic Landmarks," Concord Free Public Library, C.PAM.76 Item D2.

¹⁵⁴ Concord Free Library Special Collections, CPAM.76 D12.

¹⁵⁵ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, CPAM.76, Item DC.

endured, unbroken, for almost four centuries.”¹⁵⁶ This ideology preserved The Old Manse in imagined time, and sought to prevent progress.

The Old Manse was sold to The Trustee of Reservations in 1939 by the Ames family, descendents of the Emerson-Ripley family. The family had opened the house to the public in 1934 on a limited basis,¹⁵⁷ but a more permanent and secure means of public access was desired to “save it from possible commercial exploitation.”¹⁵⁸ and “from going the way of overnight tourist cabin camp and roadside inn”¹⁵⁹ – a possible sneer at Margaret Lothrop, who was then operating The Wayside as weekend bed and breakfast, and could have been perceived as an additional threat to community stability, since her family was not native to Concord. Having been the home of a prominent family for 170 years, The Old Manse was revered as an important ancestral home, with direct ties to national republican and literary heritage. Historic Preservation in New England “... always included a recognition of ... ancestral pioneers,”¹⁶⁰ a quality also essential to the region’s places of memory. The Trustees of Reservations sustained the ancestral associations of the house, even publishing a booklet written by family member Amelia Forbes Emerson entitled “Diaries and Letters of William Emerson.” Early board members were individual’s named Emerson, Keyes, Channing, Greeley, Pierce, Agassiz, Buttrick, Endicott, Forbes – all of which were prominent families in Concord and Massachusetts cultural circles, if not also Emerson-Ripley family members; they represented a personal, dynastic, and community interest. Famous American landscape architects Fletcher Steele and Frederick Law Olmstead were also members, representing the national community.

¹⁵⁶ William Truettner, xi.

¹⁵⁷ Concord Free Public Library, C. Pam.76, Item DC.

¹⁵⁸ Concord Free Public library, C.PAM.76, Item D12.

¹⁵⁹ Concord Free Public Library, C.Pam.76, Item D3.

¹⁶⁰ Charles B. Hosmer, 102.

Advertisements allayed fears of foreign interlopers, assuring that “The Old Manse is under the supervision of an able local committee ... all of Concord.”¹⁶¹

In 1845 the Trustees of Reservations issued a campaign to raise an endowment fund of \$25,000. Campaign literature stated, “an endowment fund must be established for the permanent maintenance of one of the most historical literary shrines in this country... property consists of 8 ½ acres of the sacred battle ground.”¹⁶² According to Pierre Nora, “memory situates remembrance in a sacred context ... Memory wells up from groups that it welds together... collective and plural yet individual.”¹⁶³ “It is to be understood in its ‘sacred context’ ... through which cultural communities imagine themselves.”¹⁶⁴ The Old Manse was imagined as a sacred place, destined to be “a permanent shrine,”¹⁶⁵ a “public shrine”¹⁶⁶ distinguished by “reminiscences of literary, historical, and ... homelike associations.”¹⁶⁷ Donations to the Endowment Fund testified to the significance of The Old Manse as a place of memory. The Trustees could boast “sums ranging from the pennies of enthusiastic school children in the mountain districts, to the thousands cordially donated by philanthropic millionaires.”¹⁶⁸

The Trustees of Reservations were likewise characterized as virtuous citizens of Old New England. Smithsonian magazine praised The Trustees of Reservations for a “combination of Yankee ingenuity, access to wealth and power, and an almost religious desire to pursue worthwhile causes and make them into successful enterprises created a wide range of

¹⁶¹ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, CPAM.76, Item D12.

¹⁶² Concord Free Public Library, CPAM.76, Item D12.

¹⁶³ Pierre Nora, 3.

¹⁶⁴ Pierre Nora, ix.

¹⁶⁵ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, C Pam.76 Item D1.

¹⁶⁶ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, CPAM.76, Item DC.

¹⁶⁷ Concord Free Public Library Special Collections, CPAM.76, Item DC.

¹⁶⁸ *Boston Sunday Post*, March 21, 1939.

remarkable institutions with continue to thrive and to serve the public weal."¹⁶⁹ Founded in 1890, The Trustees is a non-profit land conservation and historic preservation organization, currently with over 1000,000 members. The Trustees of Reservations oversees more than 100 properties. Although established by the Massachusetts State Legislature, the organization is funded by membership fees, admission fees, and special event programs, in addition to grants and endowments. Although membership was democratically open to all who could afford to donate a small sum, The Trustees of Reservations was male dominated and shaped by the shift from volunteerism to the professionalization of historic preservation,¹⁷⁰ in the upper echelons the old Yankee Brahmin influence continues to be felt strongly."¹⁷¹ Like the historical residents of The Old Manse, the new stewards were considered "paragons of culture."¹⁷²

Unlike the Wayside, The Old Manse displays the more antiquated and chronologically original of its artifacts, with later artifacts and furniture interspersed as relevant to the story the museum wants to tell. The Old Manse is able to effectively combine artifacts from various historical periods of the house's existence without losing a consistency of appearance, because curators and guides alike possess an informed knowledge based on "extensive research and deep understanding of the historical characters."¹⁷³ In recent years the staff of The Old Manse has been very proactive in terms of offering a variety of special programming from themes tours and living history, to musical concerts, and even hosting outdoor weddings. The living history programs appeal to a sense of excitement and a love of fun, while simultaneously functioning educationally, with a serious desire to share the history of the Old

¹⁶⁹ F.J. Pratson, "Yankee Heritage Is Secured Without Government Aid," (*Smithsonian*, June 1977), 94.

¹⁷⁰ Patricia West, 47 and 49

¹⁷¹ F.J. Pratson, 98.

¹⁷² F.J. Pratson, 94.

¹⁷³ Bryk in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 146.

Manse's inhabitants. While a planned Halloween event "Ghosts in the Attic" risked an element of tacky amusement, it employed a form of *living on* in the tradition of ghosts at the Manse. The program was also didactically based, allowing costumed interpreters to relate theatrical first-person accounts of the home's history. When the actors unexpectedly become ill, the museum director Tom Beardsley personally led a "behind-the-scene" tour that was filled with enthusiasm, charismatic amusement, and a detailed dissemination of knowledge that betrayed a genuine devotion to life of The Old Manse figuratively and as a museological institution. The event included a special tour of the Attic, which the museum hopes in the future to include regularly on the house tour. Containing four rooms, including the famous Saints Chamber and original in-situ artwork by a young Edward Emerson Simmons, the attic seems to have been included on the tour in 1970s, and was probably removed because of public building code restrictions. While some house museums, like The Wayside, are shortening their tours and their hours, The Old Manse is working towards lengthening theirs. Currently The Old Manse has several special attic tours scheduled weekends through the winter, a season during which they traditionally closed. Like Orchard House, The Old Manse continues to serve relevant purposes for a living and present community, while paying homage to the persons of its past. Visitors to The Old Manse truly can leave with the feeling that the house does have a living presence.

The Ralph Waldo Emerson House

The Ralph Waldo Emerson House differs from the other three Concord house museums in many ways. Significantly it is the only Concord house museum that remains a private home. The museum was home of Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, who also lived at various times in his life at his family's home The Old Manse, but spent most of his adult life at his home

on the Cambridge Turnpike in Concord. Like many early house museums in New England, the house was opened to the public by an association of family members.¹⁷⁴ It continues to be privately owned by the Emerson family, and is operated by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association, whose members are all descendents, with the exception of two Emerson scholars who currently sit on the board.

The Association formed in the 1930s after the decease of Emerson's children, it then decided to place the contents of Emerson's study on perpetual loan to the Concord Antiquarian Society, now the Concord Museum, where it still can be seen today. The family felt that Emerson's study would be safer in the Concord Museum, which is housed in a brick structure and has means of fire prevention that the house does not.¹⁷⁵ The study would also be more accessible to tourists at the Concord Museum, which welcomed visitors year round. According to the Concord Museum, "In 1930 the R.W. Emerson Memorial Association determined that the year-long demand for visitation by pilgrims to Emerson's doorstep was better met at the Concord Museum than at the home."¹⁷⁶ Emerson's study resides in an exact reproduction of his study, and fittingly the museum is located across the street from the Emerson House on land once owned by Emerson. However, the Concord Museum's statement draws an interesting, even if subtle allusion to the differentiation between house and museum. Transferring the study to the Concord Museum would make it accessible to the pilgrims and tourists coming to see it, without disturbing the privacy of the house.

While the current Emerson House director Marie Gordinier could not be certain precisely when the house was opened for public tour, she surmises that it was probably

¹⁷⁴ Charles B. Hosmer, 115.

¹⁷⁵ Allen French, 154; Marie Gordinier, Interview, Fall 2009.

¹⁷⁶ Concord Museum website, www.concordmuseum.org/explore/emerson.study.html

opened in the 1930s on a limited basis. Until this time, the house had been perpetually occupied by the Emerson family. Emerson's eldest daughter Ellen lived there until her death in 1909, and she left lifetime rights of use to two female school teachers, Helen Legate and Grace Heard, who were boarding with her at the time of her death. The Emerson House has always been lived in, and it continues to be today. Onsite caretakers reside in the rear portion of the house, which is closed to the public. Caretakers John Dempsey and his wife lived in house more than 50 years, from the 1930s to the 1980s.¹⁷⁷

The Emerson house remains a private home for the Emerson family as well. They consider the house their home place, and frequently return to it several times a year for family gatherings. In the summer of 2009 a great granddaughter held her wedding in Lidian Emerson's rose garden and the bridal party dressed in the master bedroom, regularly part of the public house tour. This speaks to a profound emotional attachment to the house as an ancestral home, as a personal place of memory to return to and inhabit.

Visitors to the Emerson House may also feel like they are calling on a private home rather than a museum. At Concord's other house museum's visitors enter into a transitory gift shop space, where they purchase their tickets and wait for their tour to begin. When visiting the Emerson house, guests ring the doorbell and wait to be welcomed by a friendly hostess, who invites them into the house. Visitors are encouraged to sit in the study. This is an atypical experience in most museums, but not when visiting someone's home. The space of the house itself is very transformative and atmospheric. It gets wonderful light and the arrangement of artifacts lends itself to the imagination that the family is momentarily away from home. While the other Concord house museums, Orchard House and The Wayside in particular, make a

¹⁷⁷ *Colonial Homes*, 126.

rhetorical point to emphasize the “home” in the museum, at the Emerson House it is perhaps more genuinely felt by the visitor. This is not to imply that the Emerson House is without its interpretive problems, because there are several.

The interpretation at the Emerson house is fairly static. On multiple occasions the guides are not knowledgeable beyond a memorized script, which at times is more complete than others. The oral interpretation is as important as, and perhaps more important than the visual interpretation, since guides provide visitors with the historical context for their visual experience; “because they do the story-telling interpreters must always possess the most up-to-date information available”¹⁷⁸ The emphasis of oral interpretation at The Emerson House tends to be on basic family history and objects in the room that have a particular biographical interest. There exists an assumption that visitors know who Ralph Waldo Emerson is and why his life should be interesting to them as a tourist. In a society where literature is not mainstream and popular, there is a good possibility that visitors will not be familiar with Emerson’s work. If they are it will likely not be beyond a brief acquaintance and faint remembering from a high school English class. This is particularly true of nineteenth century Transcendentalist philosophy. For the more knowledgeable visitors the perfunctory tour can be dissatisfying, particularly when tour guides are not able to answer their questions. The continuous tour run at The Emerson House, which aims to please hurried tourists who may not have an invested interest in visiting The Emerson House, is disruptive and distracting for guests already on the tour, as well as confusing for the people joining the tour in the middle. Visitors entering the tour at the middle of the narrative have questions about the information other visitors have learned in previously viewed rooms of the house. With admirable aims and

¹⁷⁸ Ellis in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 70.

perhaps logistical success, the continuous tour depreciates the quality of visitor experience. To enhance visitor experience “house museums must reflect in their interpretations not only knowledge of historic facts, but also knowledge of their audiences – who visits, what they expect, why they come, how they learn, what they think about their experience, and who doesn’t come and why.”¹⁷⁹ Otherwise, the museum risks the danger of become irrelevant to public. When a museum becomes irrelevant there is little justification for its continued existence. This is perhaps less of a concern for the Emerson House, which functions as a private family home place and is supported by the endowed wealth of the Forbes family.

There also exists an essential assumption that Ralph Waldo Emerson will be the reason visitor’s come to the house. It neglects to acknowledge the possibility that tourists may be interested in another Emerson family member, or in old houses, or may be visiting on a whim. The notion of moving Emerson’s study to the Concord Museum assumed that visitors were coming to the house to see the study. Yet visitors are still coming to the house, without its original study, indicating that there may be another motivation for their interest. The guest bedroom, where Margaret Fuller stayed for long periods of time and where Lidian Emerson gave birth to some of her children, is a silent stop on the tour, in that no oral interpretation is given. The room serves the primary function of gift shop and ticket sales. This perhaps unconscious decision tacitly places the male Ralph Waldo Emerson at a hierarchal advantage over his equally intellectual female counterparts, ignoring the fact that “as new historical evidence is uncovered and public curiosity increases, change becomes necessary in all institutions of history.”¹⁸⁰ Emerson’s study, which is furnished with authentic family artifacts not original to the room, as well as facsimiles to create the impression of Emerson’s study,

¹⁷⁹ Donnelly, 9

¹⁸⁰ Ellis in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 63.

receives a privileged place on the tour above the guest room, which, unlike the study, retains its original furnishings. Emerson's study, at least from an interpretive perspective, is the public place of memory in the Emerson house.

Although Director Marie Gordinier participates in The Concord Collaborative, an association of Concord's cultural institutions, she has no autonomy to make decisions for the Emerson House. Gordinier expresses a feeling of being "an outcast"¹⁸¹ in the Concord museum community. All decisive power remains with the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association board members, that is, with the Emerson-Forbes family. Gordinier explains that the family is "very private" and does not share information regarding the care or interpretation of the house with her. She emphasizes it is "*their home*."¹⁸² When descendents are involved in museological institutions, as they often are in the case of historic house museum boards, they "may be highly sensitive to implication of furnishing choices" which can have "intimate personal meanings" for them.¹⁸³ Gordinier's responsibilities as director revolve around the hiring and training of interpretive staff, the day to day functional operations of the museum, and supplying the gift shop within the parameters set by the Association board. Maintenance and care is administered by the onsite caretaker, and according to Gordinier no conservation work is pursued and the house is equipped with few preventative measures. In his discussion of the American Historical Preservation movement, Charles B. Hosmer explained that "the most radical approach to the problem of restoration was the idea that buildings did not need

¹⁸¹ Marie Gordinier, Interview.

¹⁸² Marie Gordinier, Interview.

¹⁸³ Brooks in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 130.

restoration at all."¹⁸⁴ This approach, while not disturbing the authenticity of the structure, leaves it vulnerable to destruction.

The Emerson's House's identity as an everyday lived in house and as a home-place for the Emerson family, ensures that The Emerson House lives in a genuine sense that is impossible for the other house museums to imitate. It is also potentially detrimental not only to preservation of the material culture that is the physical sustenance of The Emerson House, but also to its continuance existence as a *public* place of memory. Relying solely on the supremacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson's place in cultural memory, The Emerson House neglects the reality of the diminishing cultural accessibility and popular appreciation of scholarly literature, in favor of more interactive or technological forms of entertainment and education. Unless The Emerson House aims toward progress and re-imagines itself in terms of remaining a publically relevant place to either a mass popular audience or a more self-selecting group of intellectually specialized and interested group of visitors, it risks the possibility of becoming insignificant to the community.

Thoreau's Birthplace and The Thoreau Farm Trust

Henry David Thoreau is the only one of Concord's prominent nineteenth century literary residents whose life is not celebrated in the context of the historic house museum. The closest approximation is the Walden Pond State Reservation which commemorates the two years that Thoreau lived on the shores of the Pond. The park, a popular recreational spot, maintains the site of Thoreau's cabin as well as a replica. Thoreau, however spent his entire life in Concord, Massachusetts, not only the isolated years he lived at the Pond. He is the only one of the

¹⁸⁴ Charles B. Hosmer, 276.

celebrated authors that was actually a Concord native. Perhaps because the public memory associates Thoreau with an individualist mystic, too unconventional to be defined or confined by the domestic home space, he belongs more appropriately to the natural world of the outdoors. Nevertheless, all of the many houses that the Thoreau lived in remain private residents, with the exception of The Emerson House, The Colonial Inn, and more recently the Thoreau Farm. Of these three sites, The Thoreau Farm is the only one dedicated to Thoreau's memory.

The Thoreau Farm Trust was formed in October of 1998 by a group of interested Concord residents, in order to save Henry David Thoreau's birthplace from destruction. The Trust, working with the town of Concord, raised funds to purchase the house and twenty acres of farmland. The birthplace is scheduled to open to the public in Spring 2010, not as a historical house museum, but as a community education center, dedicated to Thoreau's environmentalist legacy and the present environmental needs of the global community.

The Thoreau Farm Trust represents a new conception of the historical house and Place of Memory in Concord. Interestingly, Thoreau only spent eight months of his infancy in this house, which will be envisioned as the "birthplace of ideas."¹⁸⁵ The Thoreau Farm will function as a Memory Place that not only memorializes Thoreau's life and works, but attempts to educate the public about their continued relevance. Inspired by "Thoreau's example of living deliberately,"¹⁸⁶ interpretive exhibits at the Thoreau Farm will encourage visitors to "think about the choices that they make more deliberately and responsibly."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Thoreau Farm Trust Strategic Plan," draft, June 2006.

¹⁸⁶ Thoreau Farm Interpretive Plan, Draft October 20, 2009.

¹⁸⁷ Thoreau Farm Trust Strategic Plan," draft, June 2006.

This self-conscious philosophy is reflected in the Thoreau Farm Trust's "green" restoration of the farmhouse. Low VOC-paints, FSC-certified wood, as well as roofing and siding made from recycled materials were used. A low-temperature heat pump and Clivus composting toilet was installed in the restroom. A draft of the "Interpretive Plan" asserts that the house is "preserved, not restored."¹⁸⁸ Although the restoration work follows the guidelines set by the Secretary of Interiors for historic preservation, the site includes a modern kitchen in the original farm house, as well a modern addition where facilities will be located. The green restoration required the Thoreau Farm Trust to make an initial large fiscal commitment, with the expectation that it will more cost effective in the future, but more importantly, it demonstrates a deliberate choice to be environmentally responsibility, consistent with an aspect of Thoreau's writings that "prompt us to ask what it means to live ethically and responsibly in society and in the natural world."¹⁸⁹

The structural fabric of the house is being restored to its appearance in 1817, the year of Thoreau's birth, but it will not be historically furnished. Although it would be impossible to authentically replicate the historical furnishings, the Thoreau Trust Farms choice is more purposeful. The site will function as a active resource for the community. Although reproduction chairs will be used in the community room, the purpose of the room will be meaningful social interaction and personal reflection. Interpretive label will educate visitors not only on Thoreau, but also on the site's "preservation philosophy,"¹⁹⁰ even including interpretive labels in the bathroom about the composting toilet system. Cell phone tours recognize modern society's preference for technological interaction. While more traditional labels will be

¹⁸⁸ Thoreau Farm Interpretive Plan, Draft October 20, 2009.

¹⁸⁹ Thoreau Farm Trust Strategic Plan," draft, June 2006.

¹⁹⁰ "Thoreau Farm Interpretive Plan," Draft, October 20, 2009.

available, cell phone tours may appeal to younger visitors, who are used to communicating accessing information through technological devices. Thoreau's birth room, although it will not be reproduced is referred to in the Interpretive Plan as "the shrine/manger,"¹⁹¹ utilizing the linguistics of sacred memory, common to historic house sites. Exhibits in this space will explore the significance of Thoreau's famous quote: "I was born in the most estimable place in the world and in the nick of time too"¹⁹² and aim to make Thoreau relevant to contemporary visitors. Reflection cards will encourage a self-reflective dialogue between visitors. The idea is to intellectually engage visitors about issues that affect the present global community and to create a meaningful encounter that transfers into the visitor's every-day life. Extending its usefulness to the community, as well as generating financial support, the Thoreau Farm Trust leases 18 acres of farmland to Gaining Ground, an organization that raises organic food for meal assistance programs and rents two rooms in the house to the unaffiliated Thoreau Society for use as private office space. The Thoreau Farm trust represents on new conception of how a historical house and place of memory can fulfill an active and present need in the community, while memorializing the past, making it relevant to the present and future.

Conclusion:

Successful historic sites fulfill a living need in a community. They preserve an element of the past that the present possess a psychological need for. Pierre Nora says that places of memory preserve our collective memories and protect something necessary to society. He maintains that if the entities remembered were present in our lives instead of in the past, we

¹⁹¹ "Thoreau Farm Interpretive Plan," Draft, October 20, 2009.

¹⁹² Thoreau Farm Interpretive Plan," Draft, October 20, 2009.

would not have memories of them.¹⁹³ Therefore, places of memory commemorate something which we no longer have, but need. Nora directly relates this phenomenon to the lessening importance of literature. He states, "History has become our substitute for imagination ... History offers profundity to an epoch devoid of real novels. Memory has been promoted to the center of history: thus do we mourn the loss of literature."¹⁹⁴ If Nora is correct, Concord's literary shrines and places of memory are now more important to our cultural well-being than ever. These places of memory provide vital and tangible connections to a literary past that we no longer possess as a society, but nonetheless have a need to belong to.

¹⁹³ Pierre Nora, 7.

¹⁹⁴ Pierre Nora, 20.

Acknowledgements

Writing a paper criticizing institutions that you love can be a difficult experience, but worthwhile if you succeed in loving them more for the analysis. Compiling research for this paper was an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Thank you to Professor Melanie Hall for the opportunity to pursue this topic and for patiently reading the lengthy result!

Thank you to Marie Gordinier, who graciously met with me despite initial hesitations. Ms. Gordinier was candid and obliging. I thank her also for the tour of The Emerson House.

Thank you to Terrie Wallace, who courteously assisted me in my research efforts. She suggested and made available to me archival materials from The Minute Man National Historical Park archival library. Ms. Wallace also amiably took the time from her busy schedule to participate in a written interview, which was invaluable to my understanding of The Wayside from a curatorial standpoint.

Thank you to Nancy Grohol for the private tour of the Thoreau Farm, for sharing drafted strategic and interpretive plans, and for her enthusiasm for this project.

Finally, thank you to all of these women, their supporting staffs and all of Concord, Massachusetts' historic institutions for the time, effort, and passion spent preserving Concord's precious history.

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