

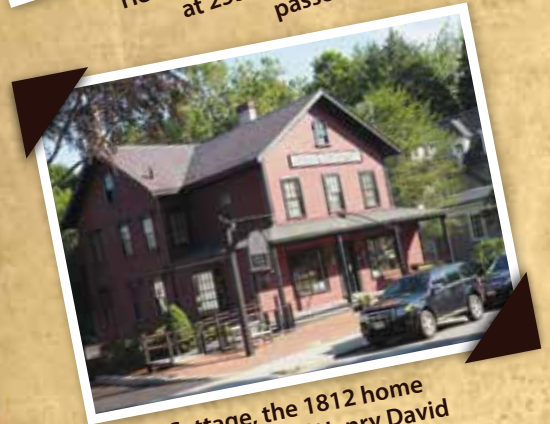
A Sense of Place

One of America's richest literary legacies can be found in the quiet corners of Concord, Massachusetts.

BY RICH WARREN



Henry David Thoreau's final home at 255 Main Street, where he passed away in 1862



The Cottage, the 1812 home and workplace of Henry David Thoreau's parents

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It's the place where Henry David Thoreau took the young Louisa May Alcott on a nature walk and told her that a glistening cobweb was a handkerchief dropped by a fairy. It's where Ralph Waldo Emerson was so beloved by his neighbors that they ran into his burning home to save his books and manuscripts. And it's also where Nathaniel Hawthorne's wife stood at a window holding their baby during an ice storm, scratching a message to commemorate the occasion onto the window pane with her diamond wedding ring.

That place so imbued with literary history is Concord, Massachusetts, just 20 miles northwest of Boston. In the mid-19th century, this sleepy town of 2,000 residents was home to an astounding cluster of America's greatest writers and intellectuals who befriended each other.

Dozens of authors still call Concord their home, including historian Doris Kearns Goodwin and Gregory Maguire, author of the novel *Wicked*. The continuing tradition has made Concord, now a bustling suburban town of 18,000, one of the

country's greatest destinations for literary pilgrims. Here's a roundup of the places to pay homage to that legacy.

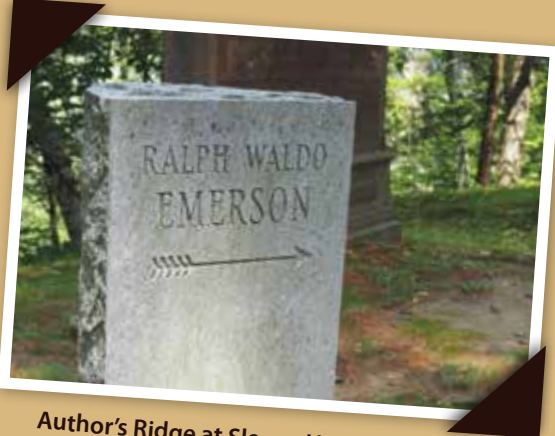
The Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial House

Though not widely read today, Emerson was the literary rock star of his day. A poet, essayist and popular lecturer—even Abraham Lincoln went to hear him speak—Emerson was the reason so many authors came to Concord. Writers ranging from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to James Russell Lowell and from John Greenleaf Whittier to Walt Whitman called on him, and in his parlor, a group of intellectuals hammered out tenets of the Transcendentalist philosophy.

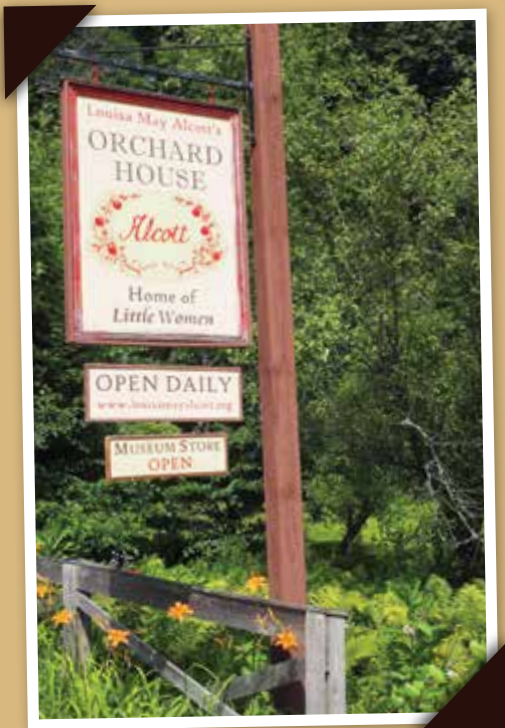
The white-frame, foursquare structure where Emerson resided for nearly 50 years is open from mid-April through October and looks almost exactly as it did when he died in 1882. Restored to its original condition after a fire in 1872 destroyed the roof and most of the second floor, and filled with the remaining relics, the home looks as if the "Sage



The Wayside, a National Historic Landmark lived in by three American Literary figures: Louisa May Alcott, Margaret Sidney and Nathaniel Hawthorne



Author's Ridge at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, the burial place for many notable writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa May Alcott and Nathaniel Hawthorne



Orchard House, birthplace of Louisa May Alcott's beloved *Little Women*

of Concord" has just gone out for a short time. His walking stick and hat remain in the hall; his bathrobe, which resembles a medieval beggar's cloak, is laid out in his bedroom; and more than 3,000 books seem ready for his perusal. Many visitors find the "Sunday Chair" particularly compelling. Thoreau installed a special drawer in it to hold his friend's gloves so that the chronically late Emerson would be on time for church.

Walden Pond

Ever since *Walden* was published in 1854, literary pilgrims have visited Walden Pond, a three-quarter-mile-by-one-half-mile "kettle" lake formed by retreating glaciers. It was here, on the shores of this pond, that Henry David Thoreau, America's principal proponent of the simple life, lived for two years, two months and two days in a tiny cabin he built with his own hands. Still grieving from the loss of his brother, who died in the writer's arms, Thoreau kept a journal while residing here that formed the basis for his *Walden* masterpiece.

Though the site still seems remote, it's only a mile outside Concord, and Thoreau, far from a hermit, frequently walked into town to visit family and friends—especially the Emersons, who came to regard him as a member of the family. The pond, still mostly surrounded by forest, is now a Massachusetts state park. During warm-weather months, a beach filled with boisterous swimmers lies at one end of it. Thoreau's original cabin was dismantled when he moved back into Concord, but today a replica of it stands adjacent to the parking lot, illustrating how small and sparsely furnished it was.

The actual site of Thoreau's cabin is a goodly little walk through the woods and along the lake to a clearing where a marker and granite posts indicate where the structure stood. Visitors can add their contributions to a large cairn of stones commemorating the man who famously marched to the beat of a different drummer.

Orchard House

As you approach Orchard House, a two-story clapboard farmhouse built in the 1690s, picture Louisa May Alcott answering the front door when uninvited fans of *Little Women* knocked. Publicity-shy Alcott would sometimes pretend to be a servant, telling them the author had gone for a walk.

Like Emerson's home down the street, Orchard House appears almost exactly as it did when the Alcotts lived there from 1858 to 1877. Even the walls are adorned with the artwork of the writer's sister, May, an accomplished painter. The trunk in May Alcott's room contains the costumes that the sisters wore in the theatrical shows they performed for their family and friends downstairs.

Relics tied to Louisa Alcott include her "mood pillow" on the couch in the parlor, which she turned sideways when she was feeling ill-tempered. And the little half-moon desk in her bedroom is where she composed *Little Women* in a writing frenzy she described as "the vortex," working as many as 14 hours a day. When her right hand got tired, she simply switched to the left. The novel, loosely based on experiences of the Alcott sisters, became an international bestseller, which explains all the visitors who flocked to Concord hoping to catch a glimpse of its author.

The Wayside

Next door to Orchard House, The Wayside is now a rambling frame structure with a wrap-around porch and a conspicuous tower that's been considerably modified by its many residents from its origins as a Colonial saltbox home. During the American Revolution, it was the home of Samuel Whitney, muster master of the Concord Minute Men.

A number of writers have resided here. It was the home of the Alcotts during Louisa May's childhood, and most of the autobiographical elements in *Little Women* happened here. Hawthorne spent his final years in the house, which was the only house he ever owned. He added the tower study, which today has ceiling murals in his memory. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, The Wayside was the residence of the writer Harriet Lothrop, who wrote the *Five Little Peppers* children's book series under the pen name Margaret Sidney.

Today, the house is part of Minute Man National Historical Park. It is open for guided tours from June 16 through October 29 in 2018.

The Old Manse

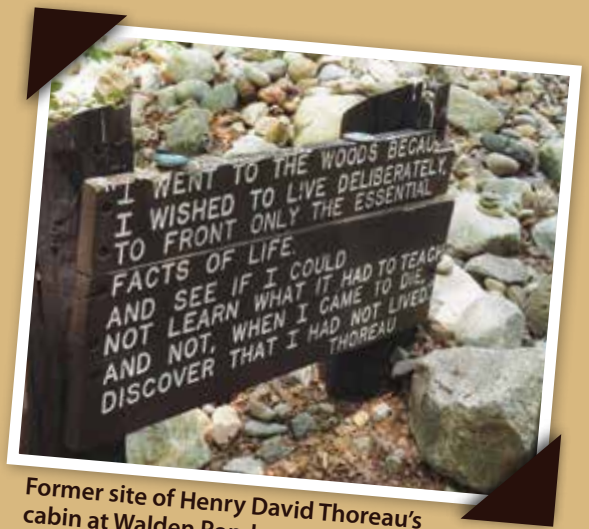
There's good writing mojo in The Old Manse, a Georgian-style clapboard parsonage built in 1770. It was the home of Emerson's grandparents, who watched the first battle of the American Revolutionary War at the adjacent North Bridge. His grandfather, a minister, composed hundreds of sermons inside the home, still furnished with many original relics, such as the highchair Emerson sat in as a baby.

Emerson himself lived here briefly prior to his marriage and moving to his larger home of many decades. He composed the first draft of his famous essay "Nature" while in residence. Nathaniel Hawthorne afterward came here with his bride, Sophia, on their wedding day in 1842 and rented the home until 1845. It was here that Sophia Hawthorne wrote the still-visible inscriptions with her diamond ring in the window of her husband's study, where Hawthorne composed *Mosses from an Old Manse* on the simple desk, which was turned away from the window so that he wouldn't be distracted from his writing.

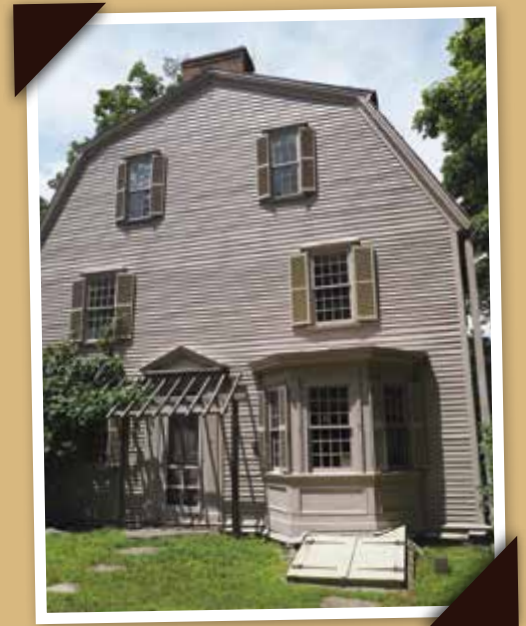
More to Explore

Just as they were neighbors in life, so are they in death. At "Author's Ridge" in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, the Concord writers—Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne and Alcott—lie in repose a few feet from each other. Their grave markers range from a huge quartz boulder atop Emerson's resting place to a simple eight-by-seven-inch flat stone reading simply "Henry." Mementoes visitors leave behind include many pens and pencils and even pine cones and twigs on Thoreau's grave.

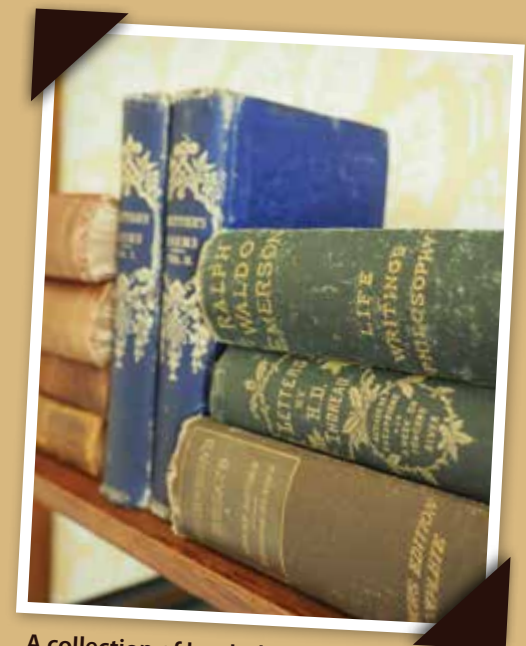
Don't miss the Concord Museum, a fascinating repository of artifacts associated with the town's history since its founding in 1635. In addition to Thoreau's bed and desk, you'll see his flute, spyglass and snowshoes. Emerson's original study is here (the one at the Emerson House is an exact replica), and other treasures include one of the two lanterns Paul Revere saw in Boston's Old North Church, prompting his famous ride.



Former site of Henry David Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond



The Old Manse, once called home by Emerson and Hawthorne



A collection of books by Transcendentalist authors on display at The Old Manse