

CFP, ALA 2017: Louisa May Alcott and Concord

Louisa May Alcott resided with her family in historic Concord, Massachusetts for several formative and eventful years during their peripatetic lives—from 1840-1844, from 1844-1848, and from 1857 until their deaths. At various times, the Alcotts' response toward the town and fellow Concordians ranged from Louisa's fond childhood recollections to her (as Nurse Tribulation Periwinkle) satirical portrait, from Anna's frustration at neighbors' provincial attitudes to their mother's fury at local racism in 1863, which Abigail Alcott encountered when soliciting donations of used clothing on behalf of Harriet Tubman. Louisa's private writings and published works evidence her adult ambivalence toward the town. "Concord days," she remembered, "were the happiest of my life," but, as she later confided to a correspondent, the town was also "a classical humbug," "the people slow coaches about reform of any kind," except for "a few black sheep like the Emersons, Alcotts & Thoreaus."

As this last comment makes clear, Louisa venerated Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, intimates with her family and fellow Transcendentalists of her father as well as mentors to her and her sisters. Although she once called Emerson "the god of my idolatry," it was Thoreau who especially merited her lifelong affection. Louisa had been charmed by his pronouncement, while leading the girls on excursions in Walden woods, that be-dewed cobwebs were "a handkerchief dropped by a fairy"; her elegiac poem "Thoreau's Flute" tenderly memorializes him as "Pan," "The Genius of the wood." Further revealing of her regard is Alcott's 1864 novel, *Moods*, whose romantic hero Adam Warwick is modeled on Thoreau.

In recognition of the bicentennial in 2017 of Thoreau's birth, we invite proposals considering any aspect of Louisa May Alcott's or her family's varied response to and years of residence in the setting and community of Concord, Massachusetts, including her or their relationship with its townsmen and women, the family's occasional status as objects of community charity, Bronson's tenure as superintendent of Concord schools, the family's participation in local reform movements, and the Alcotts' specific Concord homes of Hillside and Orchard House. Please send brief abstracts by January 20, 2017, to Sandy Petrulionis at shp2@psu.edu.