

Exploring Concord, Mass. where history abounds

By Carol Goodman Kaufman

This summer, after the barbecue grill has cooled, the last notes of the 1812 Overture fade in the summer night, and the Fourth of July fireworks are just a puff of smoke in the sky, a visit to Concord is in order. It was here in April 1775 that the Battle of Lexington and Concord launched the Revolutionary War, more than a year before John Hancock affixed his signature to the Declaration of Independence.



Concord, and Massachusetts in general, was never a major gathering point for the Jews, Puritan intolerance making settlement by non-Christians impossible. In fact, the first mention of any Jew in the colony is in 1649, and there are occasional references to Jews in Boston in the next century, it wasn't until 1842 that Boston had enough Jews (eighteen, to be precise) to establish the city's first congregation, Ohabei Shalom. By the year 2000, the city's Jewish population would explode to over 250,000.

With increasing financial success, Jews left the old neighborhoods in Boston and moved to the suburbs, but they didn't arrive in Concord in any great numbers until the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with the influx of scientists and engineers in the high-tech industry along the Route 128 corridor. The town and its neighbors now boast several synagogues representing every stripe.

Although our People of the Book weren't found here, Concord was home to a significant number of prominent writers and thinkers in the 19th century, the most recognizable being Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Louisa May Alcott. In fact, Concord was home to such a congregation of outstanding writers that fellow scribe Henry James called Concord "the biggest little place in America."

Concord may indeed be small in area, but it packs a punch culturally and recreationally. A pastoral way to spend an afternoon is to rent a canoe or kayak at the South Bridge boat house and paddle down the Concord River to the North Bridge, from whence the "shot heard 'round the world" was fired. The sound of the water lapping against the boat is soothing, the view of homes and gardens along the way is grand, the workout is not too hard, and at the end you can enjoy a picnic at the Minute Man National Park.

If you liked *Little Women*, you'll love Orchard House, the home of Louisa May Alcott and her

family. The desk at which she wrote the book is on display in this meticulously preserved property. In fact, 80% of the items on display actually belonged to the Alcotts. Walking through the house you can imagine the author gazing out at the apple orchard that her father, teacher and transcendentalist Bronson Alcott, so loved.

Orchard House offers a "Summer Conversational Series," whose topic this year will be "Heaven in the Mind: The Spirit of Place in Transcendental Concord."

You can also visit the two homes in which leading writer and lecturer Ralph Waldo Emerson lived. Emerson's grandfather built The Old Manse before the Revolutionary War. Situated right next to the North Bridge, it provided an ideal position from which his the family witnessed the fight. Emerson wrote his seminal work, *Nature*, while living there.

Nathaniel Hawthorne rented The Old Manse for a three-year period, and his friend Henry David Thoreau established a vegetable garden there for his use. Unfortunately, Hawthorne and his wife were ultimately evicted from the home for non-payment of rent. Except for this break, members of the extended Emerson-Ripley

family lived in the house until 1939, when it was turned over to the Trustees of Reservations.

Emerson, on the occasion of his second marriage, to Lydia Jackson, then purchased a house at 28 Cambridge Turnpike where he lived out his years. A National Historic Landmark, the home was a regular gathering place for leading thinkers of the day, including Thoreau, the Alcotts, and the Transcendental Club. The home operates as a private museum, featuring original furnishings and Emerson memorabilia.

To see Emerson's books and the furniture from his study, just cross the street to the Concord Museum, which houses one of the oldest collections of Americana in the country, including literary records, artifacts, and decorative arts that chronicle the area's great history. And through September 20, a special exhibit, "The Art of Baseball," is a most fitting addition to our national pastime.

Emerson's earned enough from lecturing that he managed to acquire many acres of land. It was on his



property that Henry David Thoreau built his one-room cabin. The Walden Pond State Reservation, now part of the Massachusetts Forests and Parks system, spreads over 335 acres and includes the iconic glacial pond, a National Historic Landmark. Hiking trails run throughout Walden Woods, almost 2,700 acres of undeveloped land. On leads to a replica of the one-room cabin in which Thoreau lived while developing his ideas of naturalism and transcendentalism. Park interpreters provide tours and ongoing educational programs.

You will probably get hungry and thirsty after all your touring, but you won't be able to purchase a bottle of water to quench your thirst in Concord, Massachusetts. The town has become one of the first communities in the U.S. to ban the sale of single-serving plastic water bottles. However, you may be able to purchase a glass of grape juice made from real Concord grapes, developed in 1854 by Ephraim Wales Bull. Bull named the variety after this little village where he cultivated it specifically to withstand cold New England winters and its rocky soil. American Jews are familiar with this variety of grape as the basis of oh-so-sweet sacramental wine, Manischewitz and Mogen David being the most prominent.

Concord Grape Pie -- Serves 8

While most Members of the Tribe may associate the Concord grape with Mogen David or Manischewitz, this plump, round fruit also makes an excellent addition to your baking repertoire. So, what better way to celebrate your visit to Concord than with a genuine Concord grape pie?

The preparation of the grapes is a real *potschke*, but the result is worth the effort. Unfortunately, you will have to wait until August to get the first of the crop of the midnight blue globes.

Ingredients:

Pastry for a 9-inch double pie crust
 5½ c. Concord grapes
 1¼ c. white sugar
 ¼ c. all-purpose flour
 1 pinch salt
 1 T. lemon juice
 1½ T. butter
 1 egg, beaten
 Sugar for dusting



Directions:

Wash grapes, and remove the skins. Save the skins.*
 Place grape pulp in a large saucepan; mash a few at the bottom to release their juice.
 Cook over medium low heat until grapes come to a full boil.
 Remove pulp from heat, and press through a food mill to remove seeds.
 Combine pulp and skins in a large bowl. Stir in lemon juice.
 In a separate bowl, mix sugar, flour, and salt.
 Stir into grape mixture.
 Spoon into pastry shell and dot with butter.
 Top with second pastry shell.
 Flute edges, and cut little slits in the top crust for steam to escape.
 Brush with beaten egg - sprinkle with sugar.
 Bake on baking sheet 45-60 minutes at 350 degrees, or until crust is brown and juice begins to bubble through slits in top crust.
 Cool.

*An easy way to peel the grapes: Remove the grapes from the stem, put into a plastic container, and place in the freezer for at least two hours.

Remove and rinse under warm water. Most of the grapes will slip out of their skins as they thaw.

For the grapes whose skins do not fall off, make a small slit in the end of the grape with a sharp knife and slip the skin off.