



CONCORD  
MUSEUM

*From the first shots in the battle for American Independence to the legacy of Emerson, Thoreau and Alcott, Concord holds a unique place in American history. And for over 100 years, the Concord Museum has been the gateway to this special town.*

## The Thoreau Collection at the Concord Museum

### Scope and Impact of the Thoreau Collection

The Concord Museum's Thoreau Collection, the world's largest collection of objects related to Concord's native son, Henry D. Thoreau (1817-1862), numbers over 250 artifacts. The Museum is honored to be the steward of this national treasure which includes:

- The humble green desk on which Thoreau wrote "Civil Disobedience" and *Walden*.
- Personal possessions such as Thoreau's walking stick, flute and spyglass about which he wrote and which now bring us in contact with Thoreau's physical environment and enable us to see his world through his eyes.
- Family furnishings from the Thoreau family house on Main Street in Concord which serve to illustrate 19<sup>th</sup>-century economic issues and social reforms.
- The ambrotype by E.S. Dunshee, the last known image of Thoreau taken in August 1861.
- The lock and key from the Concord jail in which Thoreau was imprisoned for non-payment of taxes, a protest over the Mexican-American War and the expansion of slavery.
- Some of the earliest known photographs of Walden Pond – six stereoscopic "Views of Walden Pond & Grove by D.A. Clifford," dating from the middle or late 1860s.

### Thoreau and the Early Years of the Concord Museum

Thoreau's relationship with Cummings E. Davis (1816-1896), an early collector of Americana whose collection forms the core of today's Concord Museum, helped establish the ongoing tradition of local residents donating artifacts to the Museum.

- "Looked at Mr. Davis's museum," wrote Thoreau in his journal on September 15, 1860.
- Concord townspeople called the collection Davis's "Old Curiosity Shop;" Davis called it his "Sacred Collection." Henry Thoreau called it "our museum."
- Thoreau gave Davis several objects for his collection, including a stuffed wildcat shot in neighboring Carlisle and a British cartridge box taken on April 19, 1775.
- After Thoreau's death in 1862, his sister gave Davis several of her brother's possessions.

### Development of the Thoreau Collection

For more than 100 years, the Museum has served as the repository for Thoreau related artifacts provided by his family, his neighbors, friends and admirers, and others—a tradition that continues today.

- After Thoreau's death, Cummings Davis continued to collect artifacts that represented Thoreau's life and interests, including architectural fragments of Thoreau's birthplace, his schoolboy ruler, the pen he last wrote with, and the caned bedstead on which he died.
- When Sophia Thoreau moved to Maine a decade after her brother's death, Davis purchased many items at the Thoreau auction in 1873. Many other objects, purchased by others at the auction, were subsequently given to the Museum.
- Davis's successors at the Concord Museum, especially Thoreau neighbor George Tolman, zealously solicited and acquired items associated with Thoreau and his family.
- People whose property Thoreau had surveyed donated maps he had drawn, and neighbors gave pencils made in the Thoreau shop.

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- Fragments from the Walden house were donated by devotees who had made pilgrimages to the ruin. Others gave books from Thoreau's library and furniture from the Walden house.
- E. Harlow Russell, the inheritor of Thoreau's manuscripts, gave Thoreau's walking stick.
- The Ricketsons of New Bedford donated Thoreau family furniture, ceramics, books, an ambrotype of Thoreau, relics from the Walden house, and Thoreau's flute and spyglass.
- The Concord Museum continues to add to this collection, most recently acquiring four samplers worked by Thoreau's mother, aunts and great-aunt.

### **Use of the Thoreau Collection in Exhibitions, Publications and on the Web**

The Museum shares its Thoreau collection with scholars, teachers, students, regional visitors and tourists from around the world through permanent and changing exhibitions, books, scholarly articles and on the Web.

- Published in 2006 and funded in part by a Museums for America grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, *An Observant Eye: The Thoreau Collection at the Concord Museum*, is a 160-page, award-winning, illustrated interpretive book by curator David F. Wood that explores the role that objects played in Thoreau's intellectual life.
- A searchable database of the Museum's Thoreau collection is available on line at [www.concordmuseum.org](http://www.concordmuseum.org).
- The Thoreau Gallery, one of six *Why Concord? Galleries*, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, explores Thoreau's work as a surveyor, writer and naturalist.
- Artifacts from the collection have been used in temporary exhibitions at the Museum such as *Visiting Thoreau's Walden*, celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first publication of *Walden* and *Wild Flora*, which explored the New England tradition of botanizing.
- Six of the 100 entries in the Museum's 1996 catalogue, *Concord Museum: Decorative Arts from a New England Collection*, are Thoreau-related.
- Images from the Museum's collection are used with permission in textbooks, guidebooks, children's books, and books for a general audience, like Harmon Smith's *My Friend, My Friend* and W. Barksdale Maynard's *Walden Pond*.

### **Use of the Thoreau Collection in School and Public Programs**

The Museum offers extensive, object-based, Thoreau-related programming year-round for children and adults, families and scholars, teachers and students.

- The visually rich artifacts in the Thoreau collection together with the Walden house model on the Museum's grounds are widely recognized resources for introducing Thoreau to elementary school students, expanding and enriching classroom curriculum. Through teaching techniques such as living history, analysis of primary source materials, cooperative learning and deductive reasoning, these collections have come alive for thousands of young students.
- Middle school students and teachers find the Thoreau collection an important access point for studying topics such as ethics, individualism, literature and environmental awareness.
- For high school students and teachers investigating Thoreau's ideas, choices and actions and their impact on future generations, the Museum's collection and the Walden house model on the Museum's grounds allow students to experience a first person interpretation of Thoreau.
- Public programs for adults, children and families, attended by both tourists and regional residents, use the Thoreau collection as a stepping off point for historical, environmental, artistic, and literary explorations.

### **Concord Museum Collaborative Thoreau Programming**

The Museum often works in partnership with other organizations to enrich and expand its Thoreau programming and to increase awareness of its Thoreau collection.

- *Thoreau and Friends*, a high school level course using the community as a classroom and offering opportunities for the application of higher-level thinking skills, was developed in collaboration with 13 regional historical, educational and environmental organizations, supported in part by the Educational Collaborative of Greater Boston.
- Book talks and signings on topics related to Thoreau are offered throughout the year in collaboration with the Concord Book Shop and the annual Concord Festival of Authors.
- Thoreau-related public programs, designed together with The Trustees of Reservations, Orchard House, Walden Pond, The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods, Mass. Audubon Society and other regional institutions, engage and educate an ever-widening audience.