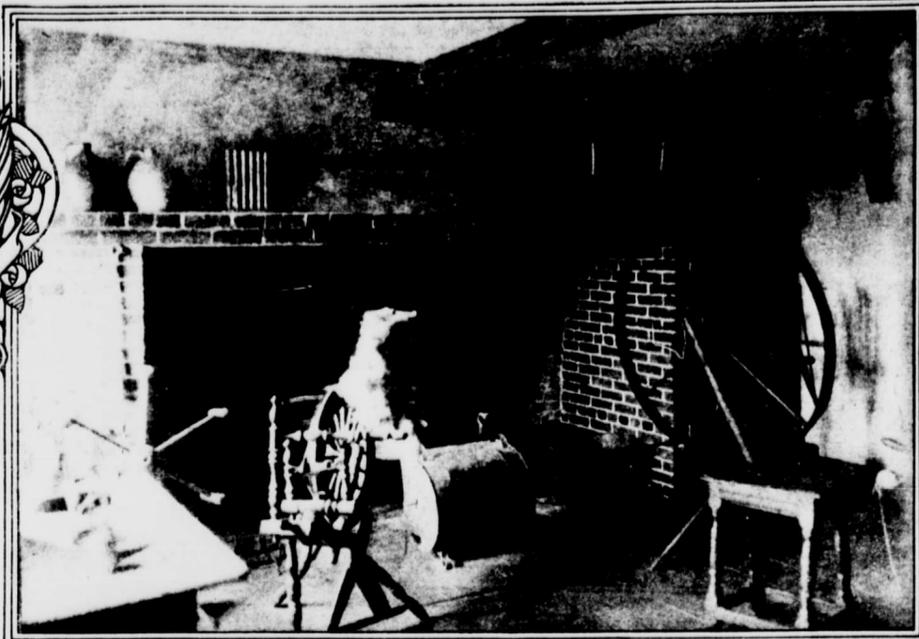


FRUITLANDS, FAMOUS HOME OF PHILOSOPHERS, RESTORED



Upper end of the long kitchen.



The Colonial kitchen—Nancy Palmer's candle moulds on mantle shelf.

House at Harvard, Mass., Where Bronson Alcott and English Mystics Lived Refined With Original Furnishings

FRUITLANDS, an old Colonial house at Harvard, Mass., where Bronson Alcott, the Concord Philosopher, and the English mystics tried their unique experiment years ago, has been restored.

The complete restoration is made possible by the return of furniture and personal effects of the Alcotts, Emerson, Charles Lane and the Palmers, so perfect in every detail that one steps across the threshold to-day into a dream of bygone days.

Relatives of these early day experimenters from far and near have yielded from their possessions these bits of property that once figured so prominently in the furnishings of Fruitlands. The beautiful old mahogany furniture, famous pictures of Emerson, Channing and Thoreau, old samplers, the farming utensils, brooms; in fact could the pioneers step into the house to-day they would no doubt see it but little changed from its order of the days when they first settled in that community.

It was of the stay here that Louisa Alcott has written her "Transcendental Wild Oats," as seen by one of those who was there.

One must know the early history of the founding of the unique organization to appreciate the story. The house dates back to the early part of the eighteenth century. The earliest deed is marked 1717. The transcendental philosophers took it for a home in which to try living as a "con-sociate family" in 1843.

Bronson Alcott had gone to England to investigate the workings of a school at Ham Common which had been started by Mr. Odham, Charles Lane, James Pierpont Greaves and others along the lines of Pestalozzi in Switzerland. Young minds were to be especially trained toward increasing the capacity for philosophical thought.

Mr. Alcott's personality and un-oughted genius so impressed these men that the school was named Alcott House in honor of him. He persuaded Charles Lane, his son William, Henry Gardner Wright and Samuel Bower to return to America with him. These were called the English mystics. They remained with him in Concord for a time, joining the circle of eminent men who lived there. It was then that Charles Lane and Bronson Alcott looked for a place in which to start their New Eden and they chose this place on the slope of the hillside overlooking the valley of the Nashua. Ralph Waldo Emerson held the deed for a time. He did not join the community, but he visited it often, as did Ellery Channing and Hawthorne and all the other men of letters.

"On the first day of June, 1843," wrote Miss Alcott, "a large wagon drawn by a slow horse and containing a motley and worn lumbering over certain New England hills, with the pleasing accompaniments of much hail and rain.

••• A serene man with a serene child upon his knee was driving. ••• Behind a small boy embracing a bust of Socrates was an energetic looking woman with a benevolent brow, satirical mouth and eyes full of hope and courage. A baby reposed upon her lap, a mirror leaned against her knee, a basket of provisions dangled against her feet and she struggled with a large umbrella with which she tried to cover every one but herself."

Such was the entrance of the Alcotts into Fruitlands as pictured by one who was there.

Among the group of those pastoral enthusiasts were Charles Lane, an Englishman, whose private means purchased the place of one hundred acres or more and who eventually returned to his own land; Joseph Palmer, who ultimately came into possession of the farm and who lived there until he died; and Anna Page, a lone female disciple. Miss Page became the music teacher of the Alcott girls. Miss Alcott in her book refers to this music instructor as "fussy and unpopular."

"Here gathered the band," wrote a later author, "and began the work of forming a family in harmony with the primitive instincts of men. No meat

was to be eaten, nor were fish, butter, eggs, cheese or milk allowed—nothing in the taking that would cause pain or seem like robbing an animal; besides animal food, if only approximately animal, as milk and butter would corrupt the body and through that the soul.

"Tea, coffee, molasses and rice were forbidden for two reasons, because they were in part foreign luxuries and in part the product of slave labor. Water alone for drink, fruit in plenty and some vegetables were permitted."

But in these last a distinction was made between those which grow in the air and those which grow downward like potatoes. The latter were less suited for what these visionaries termed "chaste supply" for their bodily needs.

Louisa Alcott said that ten ancient apple trees were all the "chaste supply" the place afforded. Salt was forbidden, but maple syrup and sugar were to be abundant in time, and "bayberry tallow" was to furnish light. All this was to elevate and purify the body and bring about a state of perfection in body, mind and soul.

Decidedly the most interesting man connected with Fruitlands was Isaac F. Hecker, who came from the social experiment at Brook Farm. Hecker stayed only a short time and among his principal reasons for leaving were that the place had but little fruit on it and his fear that the occupants had too decided a tendency toward literature and writing for the prosperity and success of their enterprise.

Hecker's summing up of the difficulties which lay in the path of Fruitlands as conceived by its projectors proved only too true. With the approach of cold weather the philosophers one by one faded away until only the Alcotts themselves were left to face the seriousness of the situation. Barley was the only grain cultivated, but the method of harvesting brought about its ruin.

Confronted by starvation and with freezing imminent they were rescued by a neighbor who placed oxen and sled at their disposal for use in transferring them to a habiter of refuge in Still River village. In due time the "transcendentalist" with his wife and "Little Women" was back at Concord.

Today the dignity of the old house has returned to it. The two old mulberry trees still guard the building. Near by is a graceful locust and on the side of a hill are the sturdy oaks that shaded the "Little Women" in their outdoor amusements. The apple orchard has not yet lost its life. They com-



Fruitlands.

plained that the house was very old when they took it and was falling to decay, but it has withstood the wintry blasts and now stands restored ready to face the future with confidence.

In the old dining room the portraits of the Concord philosophers are upon the walls. It was in this room that many deep and searching conversations took place between Emerson and Chan-

ning as they with other groups of eminent men ate of the frugal repasts of "Fruitlands." As a rule the midday feasts took place at the Community table in the long kitchen, but both Emerson and Channing speak of this room as the one in which they were wont to dine when they went there.

Against the east window is a fine old mahogany highboy, the original

owned by Joseph Palmer at the time of the Community. Palmer was Moses White in Louisa Alcott's "Transcendental Wild Oats." On the mantle shelf is a pair of snufflers that was also here at that time. The centre table and chairs are early Jacobean and date back to 1688. The andirons belonged to Thoreau, whose picture is close by.

In the small entry library is found a fine set of the *Dial*, the periodical in which Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Margaret Fuller and all the literary Concord circle wrote at that time. In one of these books appears the name of Bronson Alcott in his own handwriting in the corner; another, a very rare and valuable book, has Charles Lane's name signed. Looking down from the top of the highboy is a bust of Socrates which is mentioned in Louisa Alcott's story.

In her "Transcendental Wild Oats" Louisa Alcott says that they brought whatever pictures and mirrors they had to give the house a habitable look. A few old memorial pictures and samplers have been hung on the walls to give the right atmosphere of something that has passed and gone.

In the kitchen to-day are noticed the refectory table and benches and the old family clock, a fine one made by Willard at Ashby, dating from 1790. It lay in the garret all through the time of the Community—no one knows where it came from. It had been stored away there and forgotten by some former owner.

The Community kitchen utensils are here. Next to the dining room door is the old lantern and foot warmer of Community days. On the walls hang the Emerson deeds of the place and the Joseph Palmer deed is opposite them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote out his deed, and it is a fine example of his handwriting. The old plough is an interesting relic. It is the original used by the philosophers. And the yoke which hangs above it is the one that Joseph Palmer brought from Leominster when the enthusiastic brotherhood found from the pain in their backs that after all they could not spade up the ten-acre lot without the use of oxen.

It is said to be quite true that one of these was a cow and that Joseph Palmer secretly partook of many a

Home of Unique Organization and Birthplace of Louisa M. Alcott, Dates Back to 1717

drink of milk to assuage his hunger as well as his thirst, although it was a luxury that was not allowed, cold water being the only beverage that was tolerated at Fruitlands.

A curious old advertisement hangs on the kitchen door composed by Silas Lamson. He was a well known character in his time, just crazy enough to make himself picturesque, clever in inventing farming utensils. He used to nearly break up the anti-slavery meetings in Boston by rushing into the assembled throng and crying out wildly that the end of the world was coming and advising the people, before he was thrust out, to buy one of his scythes.

Down the floor by the door is the old noon mark. When the sun cast a shadow along this line it was high noon and they all sat down to the midday meal. Joseph Palmer's boat-jack hangs by the old kitchen door and above it is Nancy Palmer's hatched for compassing out the flax for her wheel.

The Colonial kitchen was in ruins when the Community was there. The chimney had fallen down, the roof had caved in and one of Joseph Palmer's grandsons has told how as a child he played there and discovered the old crane, which he kept until recently, when he returned it to Fruitlands to be placed in the restored chimney. The foundations of the chimney were intact, as well as those of the kitchen wall, so it was quite easy to build the room as it was in former times. Against the wall is the old settle that belonged to Joseph Palmer and which was his favorite seat.

Here on the mantle shelf are two of Nancy Palmer's candle moulds, and two of her candles made with her own hands are in two of the original candlesticks on the settle in her room of tallow left by her when her son took her away to Leominster after Joseph Palmer died. She always made her candles and sometimes made "dipped" candles, and her sticks for the purpose are on the mantle shelf. The jars here and in the long dining room were home made, but at a period long before the days of Fruitlands. They were found almost buried in the foundations of the chimney, and they must have been here well over a century. An old Revolutionary gun hangs over the mantle and two blunderbusses on the walls bring back to mind stories of the old stage coach days, when two men rode at the back of the coach, each with a blunderbuss, to protect the passengers from the sudden attack of highway robbers.

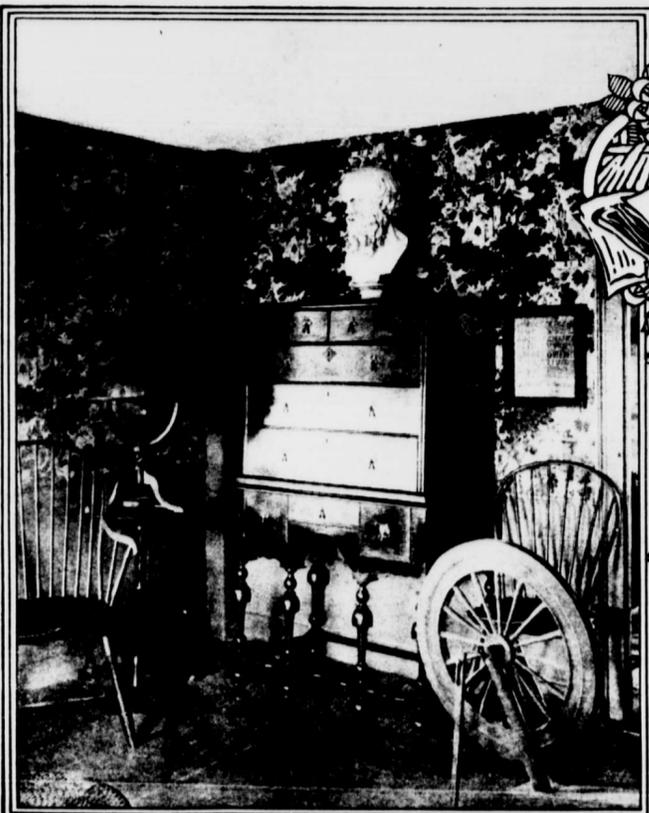
The table is one of Joseph Palmer's, and on it are the old mortar and pestle and two of the earliest kind of candlesticks made in this country—the pinners were for holding a rush, while there was also a place for the bayberry candle. Two Betty lamps are there also and these used to hang on a nail.

The kitchen dresser is a very unique old piece of furniture, dating back to the last part of the seventeenth century, as does also the old Jacobean stool.

Above the settle hang pictures of the three English kings, George I., George II. and George III., and the manuscripts hanging with them are original documents bearing the signatures of each King as well as those of the Prime Minister and other memorable names. These are hung here to draw attention to the fact that this old house was under British rule and under those kings in succession until 1775, when the Revolution secured its freedom. The pictures of Gen. Washington and his family and the sur-end of Cornwallis and Washington crossing the bridge at Trenton complete the historical drama.

In the garret is where the Alcott children slept. In her diary written here Louisa Alcott says: "It rained when I went to bed, and the rain sounded so pretty on the roof." This garret is where the old clock downstairs lay so mysteriously for so many years. The old beams show well in the roof and no sign of decay can be found in spite of their age.

A little bedroom downstairs is now used for the letters of Charles Lane and Ralph Waldo Emerson concerning Fruitlands. A perusal of Charles Lane's shows a peculiar mixture of devotion and regret that clings to his thought of the place. It would seem that with him and with Bronson Alcott some lamp within the soul was snuffed out when the Fruitlands experiment proved to be a failure. They dreamed of a mode of life where the need of dollars and cents was exterminated. They awoke to discover that they had not found realization of this dream.



The small entry and the bust of Socrates.



The dining room.