

Concord Historical Collaborative

Conscience of a Community

Slavery and Anti-Slavery in Concord

Concord deservedly holds an iconic status as the birthplace of freedom in America. It was also a town where slave holding was more common than many now realize.

How did this clash of beliefs, or practices, occur? What forces were at work that prompted most of the townspeople, on one occasion, to chase an enslaved man who was attempting to run to freedom? What did it mean to be subjected to slavery? What did it mean to own a slave in Concord? How did a community's conscience evolve? How did attitudes and practices change over time, in Concord and New England? How has this history been uncovered, and made accurate and whole? What is the meaning of these stories for Concord and the nation today?

These are the questions we will examine in this special series. It is open to 30 people by advance enrollment; Concord residents have priority until January 1. The course fee is \$45. Course #3291.

Session 1: Sunday, February 27, 2:00-4:30, Concord Public Library

Antislavery in Concord: Incorporating powerful archival documentation, this two-and-a-half hour presentation at the Concord Free Public Library will focus on community context, local organizations, and key players in the story of antislavery in Concord from the 1830s up to the Civil War. It sets the stage for the 7-session program.

Session 2: March 6, 2:00-4:00 PM, Concord Art Association

From Slavery to Freedom: Historians and Authors Discuss Slavery and Antislavery in Concord:

Panelists include Robert Gross, Draper Professor of Early American History, University of Connecticut; Elise Lemire, author of *Black Walden: Slavery and Its Aftermath in Concord, Massachusetts*; Lois Brown, Elizabeth Small Professor of English, Mount Holyoke College; Valerie Cunningham, co-author of *Black Portsmouth: Three Centuries of African-American Heritage*; and Leslie Obleschuk, Chief of Interpretation & Education, Minute Man National Park.

Session 3: Sunday, March 13, 2:00-4:00 PM, Old Manse, The Trustees of Reservations

Slavery and the early African Communities in Concord: Slavery in Concord is explored from its earliest beginnings through the early 1800s. Set at the Old Manse with a tour of the attic slave quarters, this session details of the role of slaves in Rev. William Emerson's late 1700s household - one of whom married Caesar Robbins. The Drinking Gourd Project details the Robbins family journey from enslaved people to vital, independent citizens of Concord.

Session 4: Sunday, March 20, 2:00-4:00 PM, Maj. John Buttrick House, Minute Man National Historic Park

Program Text: Hidden History at the Wayside: The class will explore letters and diaries of residents of the Wayside. Who was an abolitionist and who was not? How did the Wayside become recognized as part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom? What actually happened here?

Session 5: Sunday, March 27, 2:00-4:00 PM, Thoreau Farm

Exploring Conscience: Thoreau and Anti-Slavery: Three historians will examine Concord's "native son" and his unique and sometimes misunderstood stance on slavery. Jeff Cramer, Curator of Collections at the Thoreau Institute; Mike Frederick, Executive Director of the Thoreau Society; and Jayne Gordon, Director of Education and Public Programs for the Massachusetts Historical Society and Thoreau Farm Advisor will discuss influences on Thoreau's beliefs, his anti-slavery convictions, and how his story has been transmitted forward to today.

Session 6: Sunday, April 3, 2:00-4:00 PM, Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House

Living Their Ideals: The Alcotts and the Antislavery Movement in Concord: The Alcotts exemplified the antislavery reform movement by actively supporting John Brown and his followers, participating in the Underground Railroad, and nearly sacrificing one of their own daughters to the cause of the Civil War. View artifacts and images related to the family's involvement in the antislavery movement, and tour the home where Louisa May Alcott wrote *Hospital Sketches*, a break-through account of her experience as a nurse in Washington, D.C.

Session 7: Sunday, April 17, 2:00-4:00 PM, Concord Museum

When Duty Whispers: Concord and the Civil War: Tour the Concord Museum's newest exhibition in honor of the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War. Curator David Wood will lead a gallery talk exploring Concord's involvement in the Civil War through objects from the Museum's collection. See the outstanding exhibit -- and the flag of the 55th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Harvard Professor and author John Stauffer will present "Transcendentalism and the Election of Abraham Lincoln."

The Concord Historical Collaborative coordinates efforts and activities in Concord to present its rich history through diverse educational opportunities and fosters an appreciation and stewardship for Concord's historical resources. Members: The Concord Museum, Ralph Waldo Emerson House, The Old Manse/The Trustees of Reservations, Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House, The Thoreau Society, the Concord Free Public Library, The Walden Woods Project, Minute Man National Historical Park, the Concord Chamber of Commerce, Concord-Carlisle Schools, Walden Pond State Reservation, the Concord Art Association, the Concord Historical Commission and Thoreau Farm.