

day trip

Concord: Still Revolutionary
after all these years

By Marc Teatum



Perhaps you find yourself between summer vacation and fall adventures, and are looking for a wonderful day trip. If so, look no further than Concord, Massachusetts, located eighteen miles northwest of Boston.

Whether you take the Massachusetts Turnpike for speed or Route 2 for beauty, the drive is easy and promises delight upon arrival.

Situated on 26 square miles of woodlands between Routes 495 and 95, Concord has a population of approximately 18,000. And while its downtown is typical of many small New England towns, Concord is rich in history and American literature. Here you will find an abundance of significant historical sites as well as art- and music-appreciation opportunities.

Most of us know about Concord because of the famous battle between Colonists and the British Army in the early morning hours of April 19th, 1775. Army regulars in Boston were given secret orders to capture and destroy Colonial military supplies reportedly stored in Concord. On the night before the battle, warning of the impending British invasion was sent from Boston to militias in the area. As we all know, the most famous of these messengers was Paul Revere. The

first shots in the battle were fired in nearby Lexington as the sun was rising. Eight colonial militiamen were killed; the British suffered only one casualty. Outnumbered, the militiamen fell back. The British Regulars proceeded on to Concord. At the North Bridge, approximately 400 militiamen engaged 100 British regulars at about 11:00 a.m., resulting in casualties on both sides. The outnumbered British fell back from the bridge. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a Concord resident, later called this battle “the shot heard ‘round the world;” and it was here that the American Revolution truly began.

Concord is unusual among New England towns because it doesn’t have a town common. Instead, it has **Monument Square**, which is not even square, but rectangular. The “square” is named for a Civil War memorial erected in 1866. There’s metered parking around it and on Main Street, with a few free lots scattered nearby. Payment for street parking is done through an easily downloadable app.

Should you arrive in Concord hungry, fuel up in one of the great breakfast spots just off Monument Square down on Main Street. **Helen’s Restaurant**, open since the early 1930’s, sources many of its ingredients from a small organic produce farm nearby. There’s also **Haute Coffee** on Walden Street; they serve



Just one of many great coffee spots



Three Stones Gallery



Minute Man Tavern

baked goods, made in-house from scratch. If you're looking for more traditional breakfast fare, **Main Streets Café** (that is not a typo!) is the place to go.

Many historic sites are less than a mile's walking distance from these breakfast spots. Start off by heading north to **Orchard House**, the home of Louisa May Alcott, who wrote and set her beloved classic, *Little Women*, there in 1868. You can take a guided tour of the house in under an hour.

On your way back to town, stop at **The Concord Museum**, which has an entry fee. Located on the same street as

Orchard House, the collection includes local artifacts and decorative arts, including 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century furniture, clocks, textiles, ceramics, and metalware. The museum boasts the world's largest collection of possessions owned by writer and philosopher (and one-time Concord resident) Henry David Thoreau and a terrific exhibit of that first battle of the Revolution.

If you lean toward art more than history, after breakfast it's a short walk to **The Concord Center for Visual Art**, which is located off Monument Square. The 1,000-member-strong

Center is prized for its contemporary art exhibitions, art education, and cultural programming. Several galleries are also in town: **The 1780 House**, which, despite the name, offers modern art, as does **Three Stones Gallery**. The **Lucy Lacoste Gallery** focuses on fine ceramics from around the world. **Artisans Way Gallery** on Walden Street displays a wide variety of artisan-made ceramics, glass, jewelry, apparel, and fine art.

At this point you've probably been walking for a while. Are you ready for a rest, and something to hold you over until dinner? You will do yourself a favor by picking up sandwiches from **The Cheese Shop of Concord**, **SallyAnns**, or **Concord Provisions and Country Kitchen**, all downtown. (More information about restaurants can be found below.)

We recommend you take those sandwiches, retrieve your car, and, via Route 126, cross to the other side of Route 2 and venture to **Walden Pond**, where Thoreau lived for exactly two years, two months, and two days—and which was immortalized in his magnum opus, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. The pond is now a 250-acre State Reservation and should be a must on any Concord itinerary. The Reservation offers several places to picnic at the water's edge or within the peaceful wooded grounds. Bring a blanket or chairs—there are no picnic tables. No alcohol is allowed here, either. There's a parking lot with an \$8 fee for state residents, and \$30 for out-of-state visitors. Be sure to take a swim in the pond or maybe nap in the cool shade. You've earned it.

Refreshed from your park visit, it's time for more sight-seeing—namely, a walking tour of the **Minute Man National Historical Park**. It's a quick drive back through Concord, and well worth it. Parking is free, and the full self-guided **Battle Road Trail** is an easy five-mile walk connecting historic sites from Meriam's Corner in Concord to the eastern boundary of the park in Lexington. Much of the trail follows the original remnants of the Battle Road, where thousands of Colonial Militia and British Regulars fought several bloody engagements in 1775. In some areas the trail leaves the historic road to follow the route of the Minute Men, traversing farm fields, wetlands, and forests. Aside from its significance as a hallowed battlefield, the trail is known for its scenic beauty, biodiversity, and natural resources.

If the five-mile hike is more than you bargained for, park

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Walden Pond, Old North Bridge,
Ralph Waldo Emerson's House.



your car in the Monument Street parking lot and visit the **Robbins House**, a 544-square-foot, early-19th-century house once inhabited by the first-generation descendants of Caesar Robbins, a formerly enslaved African American Revolutionary War veteran, and by fugitive slave Jack Garrison. There you can pick up maps for a self-guided **walking tour of Concord's African-American and anti-slavery history**.

Across Monument Street and a short walk into the park, you can visit **The Old Manse**, where some of New England's most esteemed 19th-century minds found inspiration. Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne both called the Manse home for a time. There is an admission charge, as well as a selection of tours available (best to book in advance). The Old Manse overlooks the reconstructed **Old North Bridge**, where the battle of April 1775 took place. Here you can also see **The Minute Man** statue by Daniel Chester French, of Lincoln Memorial notoriety. (And you can see mock-ups of the Minute Man in French's studio at Chesterwood, back in Stockbridge.)

No trip is complete without bringing home something from your visit. Happily, plenty of shopping can be had. If antiques are your jam, **Thoreauly Antiques** packs two floors with interesting finds. **Jack+Toba** curates a cool mix of vintage and contemporary furniture, clothing, and accessories. Another highlight is **The New England Olive Oil Company**, a family-owned business. The store stocks dozens of types of olive oils and vinegars. You can taste-test all the varieties, which, if you've never done so, is an experience not to be missed.

Of course, a town with such a rich literary history has a great bookstore. **Barefoot Books** is the retail operation of a small, woman-owned publishing house started back in 1992.

You may be reluctant to leave the environs, so why not stay for dinner? Because Concord is centered around our colonial past, the obvious restaurant choice is **The Colonial Inn** on Monument Square. Built in 1716, the Inn has had incarnations as a boarding house, storage facility, variety store, and as a second boarding house once again, where Thoreau lived while studying at Harvard in the mid-1830s. It didn't become the Inn as we know it now until 1889.

Today, you can choose among three dining options: the Liberty Room serves classic American cuisine alongside new favorites; the Village Forge Tavern is exactly what you'd expect it to be—a small intimate bar with local patrons; and an eatery called Merchant's Row with offerings more refined but not formal.

Looking for a different gastro experience? Consider **Fiorella's Cucina** on Walden Street. The restaurant proffers gourmet Italian dishes with a focus on fresh, locally sourced ingredients in a rustic, yet elegant atmosphere. Do not resist finishing off your meal with their fabulous Italian cannoli and a cappuccino!

Being satiated in both mind and body, it's time for the trip back home. Heading west at this time of day is a breeze, so barring anything unusual, you should be home in no time with great memories, a newfound appreciation of our country's history in fighting for independence, and perhaps a list of reasons to visit Concord again (and again).