

# Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

## Scanned Record Cover Page

<b>Inventory No:</b>	CON.44
<b>Historic Name:</b>	Munroe, William Jr. - Prescott, Abel House
<b>Common Name:</b>	Thoreau House
<b>Address:</b>	185 Main St 185 Main St; 12-14 Academy Ln
<b>City/Town:</b>	Concord
<b>Village/Neighborhood:</b>	Concord Center
<b>Local No:</b>	G9-790
<b>Year Constructed:</b>	c 1810
<b>Architect(s):</b>	Prescott, Abel
<b>Architectural Style(s):</b>	Federal
<b>Use(s):</b>	Abandoned or Vacant; Single Family Dwelling House
<b>Significance:</b>	Architecture
<b>Area(s):</b>	CON.DU: Main Street Historic District
<b>Designation(s):</b>	Local Historic District (03/12/1962)
<b>Building Materials(s):</b>	Roof: Asphalt Shingle Wall: Wood; Wood Clapboard Foundation: Granite; Stone, Cut



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125  
[www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)

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Massachusetts Historical Commission  
80 Boylston Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

G9-790

CONCORD

44

RECEIVED

CONCORD



neighborhood or village) \_\_\_\_\_

Concord Center

185 Main Street/12, 14 Academy La.

Name Munroe Homestead/ Abel  
Prescott HousePresent multi-family houseOriginal dwellingConstruction ca. 1805-1810  
updated mid-1840's  
Soc. Circle MemoirsIn Federal period with  
Greek Revival alterations  
Builder Abel and/or John  
Prescott, builder

## Exterior Material:

Foundation dressed graniteWall/Trim wood clapboardRoof asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures \_\_\_\_\_

two-car garage

Major Alterations (with dates) \_\_\_\_\_

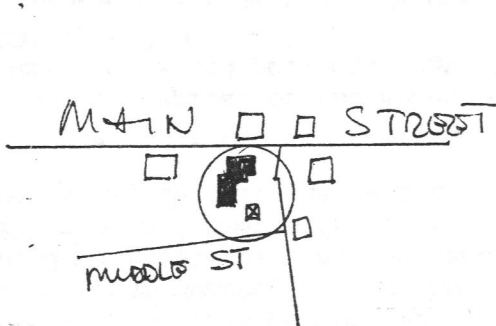
20th C.: rear extension with  
screened porch; vestibule at main  
entry; 2-story trellised open  
porch on rear. See also P. 2.

Condition excellentMoved ☒ no ☐ yes Date N/AAcreage one acre

Setting In area of large Georgian,  
Federal, and Greek Revival residences; on  
south side of Main St. at corner of  
Academy Lane. Chain link fence around  
lot; evergreens at front.

## Sketch Map

Draw a map of the area indicating properties within  
it. Number each property for which individual  
inventory forms have been completed. Label streets  
including route numbers, if any. Attach a separate  
sheet if space is not sufficient here. Indicate North.

Recorded by Anne ForbesOrganization for Concord Hist. CommissionDate (month/day/year) June, 1992

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION ☒ *see continuation sheet*

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Although this building was built during the Federal period, probably between 1805 and 1810, according to tradition over \$30,000 was spent for additions and alterations to it during the mid-1840's, which accounts for its strong Greek Revival character. The main house is a 2 1/2-story five-bay structure with three asymmetrically placed interior chimneys--one on the west part of the ridge, two flanking the ridge on the east. A long two-story rear wing bisects the southwest corner. Maps indicate it was added between 1856, when two buildings are shown on the property, one behind the other, and 1875, when it is shown connecting to what appears to be a large rear shed or carriage house. Thus this may be the section built in about 1875 to house "the suite of rooms" for William Munroe, Jr. Although another wing is said to have been removed from the building about 1915, map evidence does not corroborate this. Sanborn maps as late as 1927 show a former side wing extending west from the front part of the rear section, suggesting that it was removed sometime later in this century.

The windows of the house are 6-over-6-sash; their projecting frames and molded crowns, which are typical of the Federal period, may indicate that they are original to the house. An added polygonal bay window projects from the second story on the west end.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE ☒ *see continuation sheet*

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

185 Main Street is best known as the home of two generations of Concord's prominent Munroe family, who lived here from 1844 to the beginning of the twentieth century. The house was built by Abel Prescott (b. 1782), in about 1805-10. Abel Prescott, who made this his residence, was primarily a baker, and had a bake shop on the property. He apparently constructed the house himself, probably with the help of his brother John, a carpenter. Their father, Willoughby Prescott, who lived opposite, owned a small farm here on both sides of the road.

From 1827 to 1835 this was the home of the John Thoreau family, including the young Henry David, who would have been ten years old when they moved in. The owner of the property at that time appears to have been Daniel Shattuck, who bought, sold, and held mortgages on many properties at Concord center. (1939 deed research revealed that Daniel Shattuck bought the house, with 4.5 acres, from Abel Prescott in 1816.) Another tenant was Andrew S. Edwards, a craftsman who made pianos in a shop at the rear of the property (possibly the second building shown on the map of 1856.) (Cont.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES ☒ *see continuation sheet*

Maps, atlases: 1830, 1852, 1856, ca. 1871, 1875, 1889, 1893, 1906.  
Sanborns from 1903.

Keyes/Tolman.

Wheeler House Files #M7 and M9\*. (\*Contains errors as to Munroe ownership.)  
Town directories.

Richardson, Concord Chronicle.

Jarvis. (Cont.)

☒ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Community

Property

CONCORD

Munroe Homestead/  
Abel Prescott House

Massachusetts Historical Commission  
80 Boylston Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Area(s) Form No.

44

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE, cont.

In spite of the removal of a porch of unknown date that once spanned the facade, this house retains a wealth of some of the most high-style Greek Revival ornamentation in the area. One-story porches on fluted Doric columns extend from both the east and west ends of the main building, and small ones shelter both the main facade entry and a second one on the east side of the rear wing. All are typical of the Greek Revival period. The main entry porch is flat-roofed, with triglyphs in the frieze; the one at the east ell entry is pedimented, with pilasters and medallion-ornamented capitals. At least some of the house trim appears to remain from the Federal period, including the narrow cornerboards; the cornice appears to have been rebuilt in the Greek Revival style.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, cont.

In 1844 Shattuck sold the house to **William Munroe, Sr.** (1778-1861), who is said to have spent over \$30,000 on the building, considerably enlarging it for his own residence, and updating it with stylish Greek Revival detail. William Munroe, who in the first decade of the nineteenth century had been a highly-skilled cabinetmaker on the Milldam, is best known today as the inventor of the first American-made lead pencils in 1812. His pencil business was one of several small industries that sprang up in Concord as a result of the embargo during the War of 1812, and its success led to the making of pencils by several others in the Concord area, including John Thoreau. In 1819 he apparently gave up cabinetmaking to devote himself entirely to pencil manufacturing. He and his wife Martha (Patty) moved their family from Monument Square back to the former home of her parents at 222 Barrett's Mill Road, (See Form #CO-449,) where over the course of the next twenty-three years he built up a sizeable business (in 1835 he produced 35,000 gross of pencils), and amassed a considerable fortune. In 1844 he bought and renovated this house, where he lived with his wife and most of their large family of seven grown children until his death in 1861.

Patty Munroe, who inherited the property, survived her husband by several years, after which its ownership was shared by their daughters **Mary** and **Eliza Munroe**. During their lifetimes the property was still one of the largest on the south side of Main Street, extending back to Middle Street. One son, Alfred, continued to live here also. In spite of local tradition, this house does not appear to have been the year-round residence of the Munroes' most illustrious son, William Munroe, Jr. He did spend considerable time here, however, especially in the summer months. Apparently he had planned to give up his Boston residence shortly before he died in 1877, and it was William who added the ca. 1875 wing for his own living quarters. After his death, Alfred and one of his sisters subsequently occupied his suite of rooms. (Cont.)



INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Community

Property

CONCORD

Munroe Homestead/  
Abel Prescott House

Massachusetts Historical Commission  
80 Boylston Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Area(s) Form No.

44

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, cont.

William Munroe, Jr. (1806-1877), was as successful in his own way as his father had been. His entire career was spent in the drygoods business. He worked his way up to become an agent for the sale of European drygoods in both Boston and New York, and at one time operated agencies in London, Paris, Germany and Belgium. After about twenty years, most of it spent abroad, he returned to become a partner in a large importing house in Boston, where he established his primary residence. He also had a substantial interest in the Pacific Mills in Lawrence, where he served as a director.

William Munroe, Jr. did much to change Concord center, and was one of the town's major benefactors. From the 1860's on, he invested in considerable local real estate. Among his holdings were a pair of houses on lower Thoreau Street and a large double-house nearby facing Main (demolished,) and the three cottages he had built on Bow Street in 1875. (See Area Forms #AA and P.) Closer to the family homestead, in 1864 and 1865 he bought the former Whiting property across Academy Lane, removed the outbuildings (one to 126/128 Belknap Street--see Area Form Z,) widened and re-aligned the lane, and resold the Whiting house itself to Henry Smith. In 1864-65 he had the cottage at #29 Academy Lane built for the Munroe family gardener, and constructed #35 Academy Lane as a stable/carriage house. His greatest dream, however, was the construction of the Concord Free Library. As Jarvis puts it, William Munroe, Jr. "planned, paid for, and oversaw" the construction of the building, which was dedicated in 1873. He also left a substantial bequest for the library's support, and for the future expansion of the building. As part of the library project, he purchased the former Nathan Brooks House and removed it to Hubbard Street (see Form #138), shifted several others back from Main Street, and widened and re-designed the intersection of Main and Sudbury Road.

Mary Munroe, the last survivor of William and Patty's children, owned this house until her death in 1909, after which it was vacant for some years. About 1915 the property was bought by George P. Grant, Jr., a manufacturer from Fitchburg, who lived here for only a short time. The next owner was Mrs. F.L. Gay. By the 1930's the property had been acquired by Mrs. Gilman Prichard, and after 1937, by Dr. R. Fulton Johnston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY, cont.

Concord Assessor's Records.

Fondiler and Meyer. "Vernacular Carpenters."

Hurd. History of Middlesex County. 1890.

Obituary File, Concord Free Library.

Shattuck.

Social Circle Memoirs, II: "William Munroe, Sr."

Will of William Munroe, Jr., 1975.

CON-44

Massachusetts Historical Commission  
80 Boylston Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Community  
CONCORD

Property Address  
185 Main Street

Area(s)	Form No.
	44

## National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form



Check all that apply:

- ☒ Individually eligible    ☐ Eligible only in a historic district  
☒ Contributing to a potential historic district    ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria:    ☒ A    ☐ B    ☒ C    ☐ D

Criteria Considerations:    ☐ A    ☐ B    ☐ C    ☐ D    ☐ E    ☐ F    ☐ G

Anne McCarthy Forbes

Statement of Significance by \_\_\_\_\_

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

This house meets the criteria for individual listing on the National Register and as part of a district of large well-preserved buildings of the late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-centuries at Concord center. For its association with early-nineteenth-century baker Abel Prescott, its brief connection with the Thoreau family, and as the primary residence of prominent and influential citizen, developer, and philanthropist William Munroe, Jr., it meets Criterion A. As a well-preserved example of a high-style Federal period house, it meets Criterion C. It possesses integrity of design, setting, location, materials, and workmanship, feeling and association.



Ases HD X 35  
Consolid B CON. 44  
185  
63 Main St  
William Munroe  
al Use  
ent Use  
ent Owner private  
1800s Style  
e of Date  
tect  
ed Altered Very many Times

IMPORTANCE of site to area: Great Little None \*SITE endangered by

4. DESCRIPTION

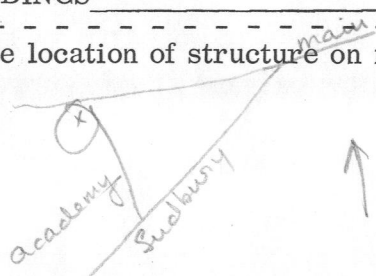
FOUNDATION/BASEMENT: High Regular Low Material:  
WALL COVER: Wood Brick Stone Other  
STORIES: 1 2 3 4 CHIMNEYS: 1 2 3 4 Center End Cluster Elaborate Irregular  
ATTACHMENTS: Wings Ell Shed Dependency Simple/Complex  
PORCHES: 1 2 3 4 Portico Balcony Recessed  
ROOF: Ridge Gambrel Flat Hip Mansard  
Tower Cupola Dormer windows Balustrade Grillwork  
FACADE: Gable End: Front/Side Symmetrical/Asymmetrical Simple/Complex Ornament  
Entrance: Front/Side Centered Double Features:  
Windows: Spacing: Regular/Irregular Identical/Varied  
Corners: Plain Pilasters Quoins Obscured

OUTBUILDINGS

LANDSCAPING

5. Indicate location of structure on map below

6. Footage of structure from street  
Property has feet frontage on street



Recorder

For

Photo VII-15  
68-566

2.09.065.1.035

NOTE: Recorder should obtain written permission from Commission or sponsoring organization before using this form. (See Reverse Side)

14-2 A-3  
2.2

HD



FOR USE WITH IMPORTANT STRUCTURES (Indicate any interior features of note)

Fireplace  
Stairway  
Other

GIVE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC IMPORTANCE OF SITE (Refer and elaborate on theme circled on front of form)

\* Wm Monroe, according to census, established first pencil manufactory in US - See Wm Monroe was founder Concord Library - (gave library to Concord + funds for upkeep)

REFERENCE (Where was this information obtained? What book, records, etc.)

\* Story of Concord, Swaine

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Original Owner: \_\_\_\_\_  
Deed Information: Book Number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ Registry of Deeds