

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse

other names/site number Henry David Thoreau birthplace

2. Location

street & number 341 Virginia Road n/a not for publication

city or town Concord n/a vicinity

state Massachusetts code MA county Middlesex code 017 zip code 01742

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Betsy Friedberg, National Register Director,
Signature of certifying official/Title Cara H. Metz, State Historic Preservation Officer
Massachusetts Historical Commission

1/27/04
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the
National Register

☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse
Name of Property

Middlesex, MA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

(Check only one box)

☐ private

☒ public-local

☐ public-State

☐ public-Federal

☒ building(s)

☐ district

☐ site

☐ structure

☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1 building

1 sites

3 structures

0 objects

5 Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling, two-family dwelling

AGRICULTURE

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION: research facility

AGRICULTURE: agricultural fields

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL: postmedieval English

COLONIAL: Georgian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: fieldstone

walls WOOD: weatherboard

roof ASPHALT

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse

Name of Property

Middlesex, MA

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☒ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Community Planning and Development

Literature

Period of Significance

ca. 1730-1953

Significant Dates

ca. 1730 1817 1878

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/a

Architect/Builder

N/a

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Town library, Concord, MA

Wheeler/MinotFarmhouse
Name of Property

Middlesex,MA
County, State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 20.3 acres

UTM References See continuation sheet.

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 19 309880 4704400
Zone Easting Northing

2. 19 310120 4704400
Zone Easting Northing

3. 19 310080 4704160
Zone Easting Northing

4. 19 309880 4704160
Zone Easting Northing

x See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anne McC. Forbes, preservation consultant, with Betsy Friedberg, NR Director, MHC

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date January 2004

street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone 617-727-8470

city or town Boston state MA zip code 02125

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Town of Concord, MA

street & number P.O. Box 535 telephone 978-371-9400

city or town Concord state MA zip code 01742

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse
Concord (Middlesex), MA

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7. Description

Portions redacted

The ca. 1730 Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse (Henry D. Thoreau Birthplace) at 341 Virginia Road in Concord, Massachusetts, and its 20-acre surrounding agricultural landscape retain the accumulated character of nearly 275 years of history. Facing south over Virginia Road to the flat land known as the “Bedford levels,” the house has approximately the same orientation as it did in the position it originally occupied 300 yards to the west. At its former location it was a large “saltbox” house with a massive center chimney and a deep, full-width rear leanto extending east into a jut-by or “Beverly jog” that connected to a line of sheds. That was the house as its most illustrious occupant, Henry David Thoreau, knew it: “built in the old substantial style ... not standing but seated on its hinder parts in the attitude of strength and rearing the sky on its broad shoulders like Atlas.” After Thoreau’s time, however, like many of Concord’s early farmhouses, the building was reduced to a simple rectangular block – a 2½ story, single-pile, five- by one-bay, side-gabled house with a narrow off-center ridge chimney. The exterior walls are clad in wood clapboard, the roof is asphalt shingle, and the foundation is mortared fieldstone.

Setting

Until the third quarter of the 20th century, Virginia Road, which arcs through the flat land of East Concord to Lincoln, was still largely rural, with a few widely spaced 18th- and 19th-century farmhouses, and at the west end, a cluster of small 20th-century dwellings. A recent subdivision of about twenty wood-frame houses is located south of the road, though largely screened from view by mature trees. On the north side of the road, east of Elm Brook, the nearest building to the east is the ca. 1692 Wheeler/Meriam House (NRIND, 1982). Three hundred yards to the west at 215 Virginia Road is the house that replaced this one on its original site – a 2 ½-story sidehall-entry, gable-front dwelling of 1878. Between it and the Wheeler/Minot farmhouse is a small wood-frame dwelling of the 1960s.

The 20 acres immediately surrounding the Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse at its present location comprise an intact, though partially overgrown, agricultural landscape of meadows, fields, and trees, with old lilacs and fruit trees near the house, and a venerable rhubarb patch at the edge of wetlands to the east. (photos #14-17) Fields of market crops fill about nine acres of the nominated property on the flat land north and west of the house. At the west end of the property’s frontage along the road, a recent, unpaved farm drive leads north of the back fields. (photo #5) Closer to the west side of the house, an old cart path (Map #4) parallels portions of a tumbledown fieldstone wall (Map #2). The path curves north around the house to the site of a cluster of 20th-century outbuildings that were torn down in the late 1990s (Map #5). Another length of fieldstone walls lines the roadside west of the farm drive. At the edge of the road southeast of the house is a stone-lined well (Map #3), now capped with stones. (photo #6) Another well, not visible above ground, is located a few yards off the northwest corner of the house. Most of the eastern third of the nominated property consists of wooded wetlands sloping down to the broad grassy marsh and meadows of Elm Brook, which flows under the road just east of the property.

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Beginning at the southeast corner of the property at the road, a fieldstone wall about 400' long runs north along the east boundary line. To the north and northwest is a large area of mixed woods which occupies the south edge of a 250-acre parcel that is part of Hanscom Field, a regional airport and former military facility.

Exterior Description and evolution

The main south façade of the house is symmetrically arranged, five bays wide. (photo #1) While it retains the pattern of its 18th-century fenestration, both the window sash and center entry date to the early part of the 20th century. Among the 18th century architectural elements that were extant until shortly after 1900 were some high-style later Georgian features, including carved quoins at the front house corners, and a 6-panel door (its smaller panels between long upper and lower ones) at the center entry. Late 19th-century photographs show that the door was surrounded by a molded architrave and a pair of tall, tapered pilasters, and surmounted by a five-light transom and an elegant modillioned and dentiled cornice. The windows shown in photographs as late as the 1890s had 12/12 sash, set into projecting plank frames with molded crowns. Around 1900 the windows were replaced with 2/2 sash. Today the four windows at the first-story façade are set flush with the wall in unadorned, flat-board frames. The five narrower windows of the upper story, in spite of their newer sash, retain their earlier plank frames.

The narrow center entry is presently fitted with a wood door of 1930s-1950s vintage – four-panels, with a four-pane, semi-circular fanlight in the upper section – which is set into a plain, flat-board surround. Historic photos show that the entry went through several transformations before the end of the early modern era. A photo of about 1905 shows an open-bracketed, shed-roofed hood over what is either a four-panel door or the 6-panel door painted to look like four panels. The pilasters and cornice were gone by that time. By ca. 1925, photos show the same hood over a glass-and-panel door with horizontal lower panels. (By that time the corner quoins had been replaced by plain cornerboards – a change that may have been associated with a re-clapboarding done around 1923.) By the late 1930s, photographs show the entry sheltered by a wide, pedimented entry canopy supported on colonettes, and a shed-roofed, bracketed hood positioned over the door in the north corner of the east gable roof. Both features were removed in the late 1990s.

Shutters (blinds) at the windows were also added and then replaced during the early part of the 20th century. Louvered shutters flank the 2/2 façade windows in the ca. 1905 photographs. In the 1930s photos they have been replaced by pierced slatted shutters. The same sequence of photographs shows that the chimney position, at least above the roof line, also changed at least once during the same period. From the earliest photos after the building's 1878 relocation through at least 1912, a narrow chimney rises west of the center of the ridge. In the 1930s photographs, it occupies the same position as today – just east of center.

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At the projecting roof eaves is a boxed, molded cornice, and a narrow bed molding lines the upper edge of a narrow frieze board. The cornerboards are narrow. Some clapboard replacement has taken place on the lower section of the house wall during the last two years.

Each gable end of the building displays a centrally placed window at each story. (photo #2) Those at the first story, and at the second-story level on the east end, are 2/2 sash in flat surrounds. The west second-story window, however, as well as a small 2/2 sash at attic level in each gable peak, have projecting plank frames. The two at the west end have molded crowns. The east attic window has lost its crown, but retains the short “ears” that, like the crowns on the west side, are characteristic of the mid- to late 18th century. There are no molded cornice returns on the gable ends. At the rear corner of the east end is a vertical board batten door in a plain surround, the wide, rear portion of which doubles as the lower section of the northeast cornerboard.

The asymmetrical arrangement of the rear (north) elevation apparently dates to 1878, when the building was moved and the rear leanto was removed. This wall also incorporates some 20th-century alterations. All the windows on this side of the house have flat casings. Reading east to west, the first story has one large 6/6 sash window, a narrow tongue-and-groove vertical board door of mid-20th century vintage, another 6/6 window, a three-pane, fixed-sash window placed high in the wall, and a 2/2 sash. At the second story are three widely spaced 6/6 windows. (photos #3-4)

Former outbuildings and appendages.

Concord tax records indicate that two barns stood on the farm in the first half of the 19th century. One of these (later demolished) may be the outbuilding depicted in late-19th century photographs, standing behind the 1878 Tibbetts house at 215 Virginia Road. After the relocation of the old farmhouse and the removal of its rear leanto, jut-by, and attached sheds, a new one-story shed-roofed shed was extended from the northeast corner. By about 1900, a 2-story shingled barn, positioned with its gable-end toward the street and the main entry apparently on the west side, was attached to the east end of the shed. (See Photos A, B, C, and D) By about 1925, that barn and ell had been replaced by a freestanding 1 ½ story, shingled, gable-roofed barn located about 50' northeast of the house. Shortly after the town purchased the property in 1997, the early 20th-century barn and a cluster of smaller outbuildings of the 1920s through 1940s – an equipment garage, a shed, and a henhouse – were torn down. (Map #5) A heap of stones and what appears to be a few feet of the fieldstone barn foundation just northeast of the house are the only visible reminders of these late outbuildings.

Interior description

Although the interior arrangement of the house has been altered by the removal of the massive center chimney, the demolition of the large rear leanto, and by the late-19th and early 20th century

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partitioning of three of the main spaces, what appears to have been the building's original scheme of two large rooms at each story flanking a lobby entrance and the former center chimney is still clearly evident.

While the plates, girts, the 11½ - inch-wide summer beams, and corner posts of the post-and-beam frame project into the rooms, ovolo-molded-edge casings cover most of the timbers. The building apparently had five fireplaces – one in each of the four rooms, and a large first-story cooking fireplace and bake oven let into the rear of the center chimney for the kitchen leanto. The chimney mass, which would have been filled with what is now the rear chimney portion of the first story (where a modern electric range stands now), was removed when the center chimney was taken out, apparently just prior to the move in 1878. At about the same time, all the other fireplace openings were sealed, and their surrounds removed and covered with lath and plaster. All but one floor was eventually covered in the 20th century with narrow hardwood boards and/or linoleum. What appears to be the original wide pine floorboards, however, ranging up to 16½" in width, are exposed in the east chamber.

First story. With the exception of the entry door itself, the section of the house that was least altered in the 19th and 20th centuries is the lobby entrance. It has a high-style three-run staircase with molded handrail and newel caps, turned and carved balusters (possibly reused), and a profusion of raised-field paneling. (photo #7) The paneling, which covers the entry's first-story west wall and the low walls below the middle and upper runs of the stairs, is of three-row configuration with a short middle panel positioned between longer upper and lower ones. This is an expensive, time-consuming type of cabinetry, which demands a high degree of technical skill. Other houses belonging to well-to-do, mid to late-18th-century Concord farmers also display lobby entrances and/or fireplace walls with three-panel sections, including the early and later-18th-century Hosmer Homestead, 138 Baker Avenue (NR 1999), and the 1787-88 Hubbard French House, 342 Sudbury Road (NRDIS 1999). While the raised-field-panel walls may represent renovations of almost any decade from the middle through the end of the 18th century, the scrolled tread ends and molded nosing at the outer ends of the treads are clearly features of the Federal period, likely to date to the 1780s or 1790s. In contrast to the high-style embellishment of the stairway and the west wall, the east wall of the lobby entrance is made up of much simpler vertical feather-edged sheathing, which was nearly ubiquitous in fireplace walls in Concord at the time the house was built. At the back of the stair, where the front face of the brick central chimney was formerly located, is a wall of horizontal beaded board, probably dating to 1878, partially covered by many layers of wallpaper. A curious length of nearly half-round, 4"-wide molding, placed vertically in the wall corner of the upper stair landing, also apparently placed there in the 1878 renovations, appears to be relocated from the fireplace surround of the east chamber (see below).

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The first-story west room (parlor) is entered through a doorway with a six-panel door that has raised-field panels on both sides. The door is hung on “H and L” iron hinges, and has a Norfolk latch. (photo #8) An east-west partition wall behind and parallel to the longitudinal (east-west) summer beam stretches across most of the room from a point just to the rear of the west-end window frame. In addition to the partition, which forms the front wall of a large mid-20th-century pantry, this once large room has been altered by the removal of the center chimney and by the installation of a ca. 1960s sink, countertop, and cabinets against the rear wall east of the pantry.

The removal of the chimney took with it the parlor fireplace and the rear (north) half of the fireplace wall. The north end of that wall was not replaced, leaving access to an open kitchen/rear entry alcove behind the stairs, where the kitchen range now stands. The former location of the fireplace, about two-thirds of the way along the wall, most of it positioned to the rear of the summer beam, is lathed, plastered, and papered. South of the summer beam, however, are two sections of three-row raised-field paneling, their two lower panels aligned with the two lower panels of the door to the lobby entrance. The northernmost section of paneling forms a narrow door to a shallow cabinet, surrounded by a molded casing. The surviving portion of this east wall is trimmed with a crown molding of heavy, late-Georgian proportions. Just south of the summer beam, the crown molding projects slightly forward of the section of wall to the south, indicating what is probably the south edge of the trim around the fireplace.

A molded chair rail or dado cap at a three-foot height on the outer south and west walls of this room probably dates to the installation of the late-Victorian beaded wainscoting below it.

The late-19th century pantry behind the partition wall and the small kitchen that occupies the space of the former center chimney stack are undistinguished in their post-1878 detailing. The broken ceiling of the pantry, however, has opened a view through Federal-era accordion lath and plaster to the underside of the upper floor structure, which reveals an earlier, exposed ceiling treatment. Here the 3” x 4” joists and the underside of the upper floor boards are finished with a deep purplish red paint – an indication that they were originally exposed.

The east first-story room is less elaborately finished than the west room. This room, which is plastered and papered on the two outer walls, is also partitioned – by a long east-west plastered wall parallel to the rear of the building, enclosing a narrow passage leading from the present kitchen to the exterior door in the east gable end. In the floor of the passage, a trap door provides access to the cellar. A large section of the feather-edge sheathing of the fireplace wall of this room is visible beneath later lath, plaster, and wallpaper. (photo #9) The sheathing ends at the south edge of what would have been the trim around the fireplace opening. The avocado green paint on the sheathing is likely to have originally been the popular Prussian blue, its linseed oil binder now darkened with time.

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The present door from the east room into the lobby entrance is a four-panel replacement. The original door, six raised panels on one side (to match the lobby entrance finish), and recessed panel on the other, is apparently the one that now hangs upside down at the west end of the rear passage.

Second story. As is typical of 18th century house frames in Middlesex County, the second-story summer beams are transverse, running front to back. The slender corner posts have flared shoulders concealed by the vertical casing boards. The girts and plate are framed into the posts at the same level. The ceilings are higher than those at the first story – 91” to 92” rather than the 88½” height downstairs. The spaces here are broken up with later partitions and mid-20th century closets, and the area behind the stairs that was formerly occupied by the chimney houses a bedroom with a ca. 1920s enameled sink and clawfoot bathtub.

The fireplace wall of the east chamber is finished in a manner similar to the room below it. Even more evidence exists for the fireplace area here, however. Removal of some lath and plaster has revealed a pair of wide, fluted, full-height pilasters framing the former small, low fireplace opening and the two horizontal raised-field panels above it. (photo #10) The ovolo molding on the inside face of the fireplace trim remains. The bolection molding that made the transition to the face of the paneling has been removed, leaving a paint shadow about four inches wide that matches the dimensions of the length of molding set into the angle of the stair landing (see above). Future paint analysis is likely to confirm that the molding came from this location. Part of the feather-edged paneled wall north of the fireplace can also be seen, adjacent to a narrow filled-in doorway.

The west chamber, though a more altered space than the east chamber, provides evidence of what may have been the earliest part of the structure, or of what may lie beneath later finishes in other parts of the house. This section is divided into two rooms by an east-west plastered, stud-walled partition just south of the end window. (photo #11) The east fireplace wall has been replaced by a two-part stud wall, plastered in the front room, and boarded in the rear room. While the southwest and northwest corner posts in this part of the house are cased, the plates, girts, and summer beams are exposed. The edges of the hewn transverse summer beam are finished with beveled chamfers – a finely scaled chamfer of a third- to a half-inch on the west side, and widely varied, fairly crude chamfer along the east side. The lower horizontal faces of the front and rear plates are exposed, while their vertical sides which face the interior are covered with a flat board. The front (south) plate is finished with a narrow beveled chamfer and retains remnants of whitewash behind the face board. The cover board of the rear (north) plate is finished with an ovolo molding. While the treatment of some sections of the beams might suggest that they were intended to be at least partially cased like those in the rest of the house, the appearance of the west end girt raises other questions. The entire length of the girt is decorated with a carved quirk-beaded chamfer – clearly meant to be seen – and a lingering feature of late First Period architecture.

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Carved chamfers also appear in the second story of the lobby entrance. In that space, the edge of the front plate is quirk-beaded, and the west chimney girt displays a narrow beveled chamfer.

The presence of a decorated, chamfered frame in this portion of the house supports the traditional belief that the house was built prior to 1740. Although the narrow dimensions of the summer beams (11" wide) and the connections of plates and girts to the corner posts at the same level usually suggest a construction date toward the middle of the century, the same relationship of timbers exists at the nearby Hartwell Tavern in Minute Man National Historical Park on Lexington Road (MA Route 2A) in Lincoln (NRDIS, 1966), a building that has been accurately documented to within a year or two of 1732. Further investigation of the portions of the structure now covered by later material may lead to some more precise conclusions. (photos #12-13)

Attic and cellar.

The roof structure of the house is a principal-rafter and purlin system, without any diagonal bracing. Each of the six rafter sets is pinned at the top into a four-sided ridge beam. Three sets of hewn purlins support the vertically oriented boards of the roof sheathing. The rafters, which are about 4½" wide and flare from a depth of about 6" in their upper sections to over 8" at the foot, are set into girts joined to the plates at the same horizontal level. The feet of both the front and rear rafters sit slightly outboard of the plates upon the cantilevered ends of the girts. While this type of construction, if present just at the rear, would be an indication that the former rear leanto was integral to the building, its presence here on both the front and back of the house appears to have been for the purpose of providing a boxed soffit at both eaves. Further investigation will thus be needed to determine whether the leanto was integral to the original house construction.

Some of the second-story ceiling framing is visible from the attic in the now nearly open chimney bay. The joists have the typical 3 x 3½" 18th-century dimensions; those visible are placed 28½" on-center. The west face of the rear portion of the east chimney girt has a series of empty square joist cogs, spaced 18" on center. Joists in the easternmost bay are 2½ x 5."

The 1878 cellar, which exists only under the east portion of the house, conveys little information. The first-story structure, which appears to have been replaced around the time of the building's relocation, includes deep, 2"-wide rectangular joists and circular-sawn subflooring.

Archaeological Description

While no ancient Native American sites are located on the Henry D. Thoreau birthplace property, it is possible that sites are present.

The property lies within the Shawsheen River drainage with the Concord River

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approximately one mile to the northwest and the confluence of the Concord, Sudbury, and Assabet Rivers about two miles to the west. All of the above rivers generally flow north to northeast to the Merrimack River drainage.

Given the above information and the size of the nominated parcel (2.53 acres), a high potential exists for locating ancient Native American resources in the nominated area.

There is also a high potential for locating historic archaeological resources on the Henry D. Thoreau Birthplace property. Archaeological resources associated with Henry D. Thoreau are unlikely at the house's present location since Thoreau (1817-1862) only lived at the house for one year when he was born and the house was later moved about 300 yards to its present location in 1878. While the Wheeler/Minot House (ca. 1730) or the Thoreau Birthplace may still remain within the boundaries of the original 18th century farm where it was built, most barns, outbuildings, and occupational related features (trash pits, privies, wells) associated with the farm during its pre-1878 history are likely located in the vicinity of 215 Virginia Road, the original house site now occupied by a later structure. Construction features related to moving the house in 1878 may exist at the 341 Virginia Road location. Archaeological evidence of barns, outbuildings, and occupational related features may also exist at the new location. Structural evidence may exist from a barn and ell (ca. 1900) removed from the northeast corner of present building in ca. 1925. Similar evidence may also exist from a barn (ca. 1925) that replaced the 1900 barn and a cluster of 1920s and 1940s outbuildings (equipment garage, shed, and henhouse) torn down when the town purchased the property in 1997. An existing stone lined well (pre-1880) is reported on the edge of the road southeast of the house. Additional historic research combined with archaeological survey and testing may determine whether any resources exist on the nominated property that were related to the ca. 1692 Wheeler/Meriam House standing on the north side of the road to the east.

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8. Statement of Significance

The ca. 1730 Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, also known locally as the Henry David Thoreau birthplace, is historically significant at the local level under Criterion A as one of the principal farm properties of Concord's agricultural East Quarter for over 200 years. In spite of the loss of its outbuildings and much of its original acreage, it is also one of a small number of properties in the east part of town that have retained a considerable portion of their working agricultural settings. It was the home of farming families who ranged from a series of Concord's most influential residents through the 1850s to a succession of immigrants struggling to establish a place in rural America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its early owners and farmers included prominent colonial citizens Deacon John Wheeler and Captain Jonas Minot and through Capt. Minot's step-daughter Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau, the family of the young Henry David Thoreau. Through its ownership and occupancy by members of the Wheeler family in the 18th and the Meriam family in the early 19th century, it was also closely connected with the farm next east at 477 Virginia Road (NR 1982). The house was later the residence of a disparate but representative group of 19th- and 20th-century citizens. The latter group of owners and tenants included several middling Yankee farmers, two widows, two African-American laborers, and Danish and Irish immigrant families.

During the many periods of its evolution, the building itself typified several important trends in the development of the town of Concord. In the 18th century it was a stylish farmhouse belonging to the sons of landed town leaders, enlarged and remodeled as architectural fashions changed. In the early 19th century it was divided for two families, and became the object of struggles involving heirs and impoverished widows. After a brief period of updating in the early Victorian era, it later entered a long period of decline as the home of farmers from out of town and across the Atlantic. Its relocation within the bounds of the farm and its use as a tenement, with the ensuing loss of its former splendor, illustrate recurring themes across Concord, but especially in the East Quarter. Finally, its role as a cultural icon, which continues still, is shared by many other buildings and sites in this most historic of American towns.

The property has particular local significance for its association with essayist, poet, practical philosopher, naturalist, and Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). During his lifetime it provided both inspiration and subject matter for his writing. After his death, as public interest in his life coincided with the dawn of the modern-day tourist era in Concord, it became a mecca for his disciples, tourists, scholars, and others on literary or historical pilgrimages – a function it still performs today. Through its role as cultural icon, it has also helped illustrate changing attitude towards Thoreau in particular, and more broadly toward Concord's historical properties.

The building meets criterion C at the local level as an evolved colonial farmhouse which in

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addition to its many Georgian features includes both lingering First-Period elements and Federal renovations. The treatment it received at the end of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, which included general deterioration and simplification through the removal of the lean-to, appendages, and trim elements, epitomizes the type of changes undergone by many of Concord's outlying farmhouses during that period. Moved a short distance east of its former site in 1878, the house meets criteria consideration B. It stands on the original Wheeler/Minot farm only a few hundred yards from its former location and retains many of the architectural features mentioned in 19th century descriptions by Thoreau and others, together with updates of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that have taken on their own significance over time.

Although the property on and around the Wheeler/Minot Farm, like other early farms in the east part of Concord, has been progressively eroded by single-family development and by the encroachment of an adjoining airport, Hanscom Field, the house nevertheless retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Introduction

The town of Concord was incorporated in 1635 as the first settlement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony above the tidewater. While the house lots of all the earliest settlers were located near the meetinghouse in the center of town, in the middle of the 17th century two successive divisions of town lands provided several early proprietors with sizeable land grants in the eastern part of Concord known as the "East Quarter." At that time, a substantial portion of the land located between Bay Road (today's Lexington Road) and what later became the south border of Bedford was allotted to settler Sgt. Thomas Wheeler (1625-1704). He and his wife Sarah (Meriam) had ten children, of whom two sons, John (1655-1736) and Timothy (1667-1718), received large acreages from their parents along what later became Virginia Road. (At the time of Concord's founding, the line of Virginia Road was the main route into town from the east, until adequate bridges were built on the Bay Road and it reverted to being a farm road for the next two centuries.) Named after a manor near the seat of the Wheeler family in England, the road was apparently laid out in 1691 partially for the benefit of John Wheeler to provide access to his meadows along Elm Brook. The road's course was realigned by the town in 1736, by which time at least three or four houses were standing along it.

The house built by Timothy Wheeler on Pine Hill ca. 1692 (477 Virginia Road, NR 1982), still stands. John, whose 24 acres (part of his father's first-division land) adjoined Timothy's to the west, is reported to have built his own house on the north side of the road ca. 1678, when he married Sarah Stearns.

Wheeler ownership (pre-1755)

Over the years John Wheeler developed the property into a fairly prosperous farm, where as early as 1717 he was listed as keeping a pair of oxen, three cows, two horses, and ten sheep. In about

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that same year he was named a Deacon in the town church. After raising seven children, Sarah Stearns Wheeler died in 1727. Within a few years, her husband, in his seventies, was remarried to widow Sarah (Farwell) Jones (1662-1741). While it has been speculated that the house at 341 Virginia Road dates to the time of Deacon Wheeler's first marriage in 1678, the building displays no physical evidence to support such an early date. What appears to be the earliest extant features, which are visible in the lobby entrance and the west part of the house, include carved beveled and quirk-beaded chamfers on the second-story beams and plates, and what was once an exposed first-story ceiling with painted floor boards and joists. These interior treatments are most characteristic of the late First Period, suggesting it was closer to the time of the Deacon's second marriage, probably around 1730, that the present house was built.

Deacon Wheeler died in 1736 at the age of eighty-one. His widow died five years later, and the house and farm were owned by Wheeler heirs for the next fourteen years. It is not known who lived in the building during that time, but in 1755 the heirs, who included John and Sarah's (Stearns) children and grandson, sold the farm with forty acres, the house, and the barn to the Deacon's much younger second cousin, Deacon Samuel Minot.

Jonas Minot ownership(1756-1813)

Deacon Minot (1706-1766), who lived south of the Wheeler farm on the Bay Road, bought the farm not for himself, but for his twenty-year-old second son, Jonas, to whom he conveyed the property the next year. In the fall of 1756 Jonas Minot purchased 25 more acres of nearby or adjoining land, and was farming the property on his own. Within a few years the young man had an assortment of livestock that included a pair of oxen, four cows, a horse, and a pig.

Jonas Minot (1735-1813) married Mary Hall of Wayland in 1759, and it may have been on the occasion of their marriage that the house was updated with stylish paneled walls, and possibly enlarged to include the full-width rear lean-to that is described in both words and pictures by later town residents. The high Georgian modillioned, denticulated, and pilastered frontispiece and the quoining at the house corners, however, would probably have not been added until at least the 1770s.

While is was not among the very largest of Concord's farms, over the years Jonas Minot, like John Wheeler before him, became one of the town's most distinguished citizens. By 1766 he held the military rank of Ensign, and was a Captain in the local militia by 1770. He was elected Constable in 1762, Culler of Staves & Surveyor of Boards, Shingles, and Clapboards in 1765, and a Selectman in 1767, serving until 1770. As tensions between the colonists and the English government grew in the 1770s, he was one of nine men appointed to the Concord Committee of Safety. By 1774, however, when local pressure to conform to anti-government views reached its peak, cautious men like Capt. Minot were sanctioned if they were suspected of having Tory sympathies. In the turbulent summer before the Revolution, as a Crown-commissioned officer

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who also owned land under a royal grant in New Hampshire, he wrote to Cambridge Tory William Brattle that if he did not agree to convert his military company to what was essentially a company of minutemen, he might be “constrained to quit his farms and land.” (Gross, 59) Although Jonas Minot fared better than some of his townsmen who openly expressed Tory views, in the local political and military “purges” of later 1774, when militiamen replaced commissioned officers with men of their own choosing, he was stripped of his captaincy. He later regained it, however.

Jonas and Mary Minot had nine children. She died in 1792, and in 1798 at the age of 63, Captain Minot married Mary (Jones) Dunbar (1748-1830). She was the daughter of Col. Elisha Jones, one of the most prominent citizens of Weston prior to the Revolution. Association with Toryism had touched Mary Dunbar’s family, also. Her father was an acknowledged Loyalist, and her brother Josiah Jones, who had been jailed for his politics during the war, escaped by sawing through the bars of his cell with files that Mary had smuggled to him. She and her first husband, Rev. Asa Dunbar, had lived in Keene, NH, and after his death in 1787 she had remained there. Jonas Minot’s New Hampshire properties, which included most of what is now the town of Wilmot, were located near Keene, and it may have been on trips to inspect his land that he came into contact with widow Dunbar.

By the time of his second marriage, Capt. Minot was operating a farm of 104 acres – larger than most in Concord at that time. All his own children were grown (the youngest being nineteen). Mary Dunbar, however, brought her two younger children Charles and Cynthia, to live with them. Cynthia Dunbar (1787-1872) was a girl when she came to Concord, and lived on the Minot farm for fourteen years before she married shopkeeper John Thoreau, Jr. in 1812.

His father, John Sr. had been born on the isle of Jersey in 1754, and had brought his young family to Concord at the end of the 1790s, but died within two years in 1801, leaving a widow and five surviving children. Upon his death, his fourteen-year-old son John Jr. went to work at the general store of Deacon John White at the head of the town common in the center village. After several years with White, John Thoreau, Jr. (1787-1859) opened his own store, which was located at the east end of the common on the site of the present Concord Town House. He and Cynthia probably lived in rooms above the store when they were first married.

Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau’s memories of her childhood on the Minot farm were the subject of much family conversation in her later years, and they found their way into her son Henry’s journals between 1855 and 1861. The picture they draw of life on Virginia Road provides a rare glimpse into early 19th-century Concord farm life, as well as into the mind of Thoreau, who throughout his writings valued the simplicity of Concord’s farmers and their agricultural way of life in an age increasingly dominated by progress and the machine:

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My mother was telling tonight of the sounds which she used to hear summer nights when she was young and lived on Virginia Road – the lowing of the cows, or cackling of geese, or the beating of a drum as far off as Hildreth's but above all Joe Meriam whistling to his team, for he was an admirable whistler. Says she used to get up at midnight and go and sit on the door-step when all in the house were asleep and she could hear nothing in the world but the ticking of the clock in the house behind her. (Journal of Henry D. Thoreau, 9: 381; May 26, 1857)

Specific historical events were made vivid by Cynthia's recollections of how they were experienced in the Minot House, as later retold in the words of her son. One event documented throughout New England was the well-known "cold day" or "Cold Friday" on January 19, 1810, when the entire region experienced record lows:

Mother remembers the Cold Friday very well. She lived in the house where I was born. The people in the kitchen – Jack Garrison [a fugitive slave, born in New Jersey], Esther, and a Hardy girl – drew up close to the fire, but the dishes which the Hardy girl was washing froze as fast as she washed them, close to the fire. They managed to keep warm in the parlor by their great fires. (Journal... 9:21; January 11, 1857)

The personality of his step-grandfather, Jonas Minot, as filtered through the experience of his mother also became part of Thoreau's literary repertoire, and added its own color to the collection of Concord characters which he drew upon as both example and inspiration. In his writings Thoreau dwelt on Capt. Minot's quirks and idiosyncrasies, such as the habit of roasting rows of little wild apples in a long semicircle "from jamb to jamb under the andirons on the reddened hearth," and of placing a quart of new milk at the head of his bed, from which he would drink during the night. Thoreau's wry humor emerges even in his account of the Captain's death:

My grandmother discovered his dying by his not turning over to reach his milk. I asked what he died of, and mother answered apoplexy! At which I did not wonder. Still, this habit may not have caused it. (Journal... 14: 329; March 18, 1861)

Although he never knew Jonas Minot, the fact that the Captain was his grandmother's husband may have been a factor in one of Thoreau's most important friendships, which in turn helped shape his views on work and leisure, and on living simply and self-sufficiently, which permeate works such as Walden (1854), for which he is best known today. He formed a bond with farmer George Minot, a distant relation, who lived with his sister Mary in a house on Lexington Road nearly opposite Ralph Waldo Emerson's. Henry's conversations with Minot, whom he called "the most poetical farmer," were the subject of many of his journal entries, and the old man came to epitomize homespun traits that Thoreau saw vanishing with the advent of the "scientific" farming era:

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He cares not so much to raise a large crop as to do his work well. He knows every pin and nail in his barn...He is never in a hurry to get his garden planted and yet [it] is always planted soon enough...He always prophesies a failure of the crops, and yet is satisfied with what he gets...He indulges in no luxury of food or dress or furniture, yet he is not penurious but merely simple...he is not poor, for he does not want riches. (Journal..., 3: 42; October 4, 1851)

Thoreau family residency, 1813-1818

Jonas Minot died in 1813. At the time, his farm included several pieces of land, the house, and an assortment of outbuildings. There were two barns with their barnyards, a woodshed, and a chaise house attached to the end of the house, and a cooper shop – all of which were later demolished, but were probably standing when Henry Thoreau was born there in 1817. Parcels of land described in the inventory of Capt. Minot's estate included a meadow west of the farmstead, a small orchard behind the barn, a maple swamp (probably located near Elm Brook to the east), and a nearby hill. Other pieces included several pastures and another farm, called "the Marshall Place."

Shortly after her husband's death Mary Minot moved to the center village, and asked her daughter and son-in-law to come back to Virginia Road to manage her portion of the farm – the traditional "widow's thirds" of the time. The Thoreaus, who already had one child, Helen, occupied the house for about five years, during which time two more children were born: John in 1815, and Henry David (originally baptized David Henry) two years later. In the house, the portion that Mrs. Minot inherited and which the Thoreaus occupied, included only the southeast part of the building (both the east first-story room and the chamber above it), and a first-story bedroom in the west end of the lean-to. The front entry and stairs, the lean-to kitchen and "sink room" were shared in common by the Thoreaus and the occupants of the west part of the house. At the time Thoreau was born, the residents of the west side were a widow, Mary Kathrens, and at least one child.

The presence of the Kathrens family both marks the beginning of the house's long history as a two-family dwelling, and illustrates a continuing close connection between Wheeler/Minot Farm and the farm at Pine Hill to the east at 477 Wheeler Road, the old Timothy Wheeler homestead. The latter farm had come down to Timothy Wheeler's great-grandson, Joseph Meriam (1767-1856), by way of Joseph's wife Lucy (Wheeler), who was another of Timothy's great-grandchildren. Joseph's brother, Josiah Meriam, Jr. (1755-1832), lived on other former Wheeler land nearby, and while four of Josiah's sons moved away from Concord, three of his daughters established homes in the vicinity of Virginia Road. Two of them, Mary and Lydia, each lived for a time in the old Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, on which their father held a mortgage for a few years after Dea. Minot's death. Josiah Meriam's daughter Mary (b. 1780) had married Robert Kathrens of Boston in 1799. He died in 1814 at the age of forty-four. It is not known whether

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the family moved into the west part of the Wheeler/Minot house while Mr. Kathrens was still alive, but it is likely that after he died, Mary Kathrens rented it directly from the Minot heirs. In any case, Mary Meriam Kathrens lived in the west part of the house with at least one child for several years during the time when the Thoreaus occupied the east part.

According to the terms of Mary Minot's dower rights, during their occupancy of the Wheeler/Minot House the Thoreau family had the right to use the wood yard adjacent to the east end of the building, and to pass "down to the lower well to be used in common." (It is not known whether the present well near the road [Map #3] is that "lower well.") In those interim years, Mary Minot, like many farmers' widows, apparently found herself reduced to near poverty. Franklin Sanborn, in his 1888 biography of Thoreau, quotes part of the petition sent by Rev. Ezra Ripley on her behalf to the Masonic charitable society asking for aid for "this decayed gentlewoman." According to the petition, "in the settlement of the estate of her late husband, Jonas Minot, Esq. Late of Concord, she has been particularly unfortunate, and become very much straitened in the means of living comfortably." (Sanborn, *Henry D. Thoreau*, 10)

Mary Minot may well have needed the charity of others. To help make ends meet, she sold part of her dower rights at the same time that the other Minot heirs were also selling off portions of her husband's estate. Between 1813 and 1818, the farm was gradually reduced to about 30 acres. In fact, John Thoreau (who even sold his gold wedding ring) managed the shrinking farm during some of the hardest years for agriculture in New England – several difficult seasons, including 1816, "the year without a summer," during which farm production suffered throughout Massachusetts. In 1818, the remaining portion of the farm, including the farmstead, was finally sold. While the terms of the transactions are somewhat unclear, the house and farmstead, plus some other parts of the Minot farm, came back into the hands of the mortgagee, Josiah Meriam, Jr.

The Thoreaus moved back to the center village where John Thoreau again took up storekeeping for a short time. After a few months they relocated to Chelmsford, then moved again to Boston in 1821, returning to Concord Center two years later. Cynthia and John remained in Concord for the rest of their lives, occupying several other houses over the next 30 years, including John's father's former house facing the common, and several other residences on Main Street. As an adult, after graduating from Harvard, Henry Thoreau also lived at many different locations in town; at times with his parents, but also lodging for three years with the Emersons, and living in his famous hut at Walden Pond from the summer of 1845 to the fall of 1847. He began his literary career with the hope of becoming a poet, and published the first of the nature essays for which he is best known today in the early 1840s. After one year in New York, where his writings met little response, he returned to Concord. There he remained, working for a while in the family pencil-making business, and drawing a slim income as a surveyor. All the while, he was producing written works, many of them drawing on his experiences in the Concord countryside,

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that met with little acclaim during his lifetime, but established his worldwide reputation as an American master after his death. Today, he is recognized as one of history's greatest champions of the individual life shaped by inner principle, as a founder of the conservation movement, and a national cultural hero whose influence has only grown, rather than diminished, with time. His last years before his death from tuberculosis in 1862 were spent at the house his family bought in 1850, the so-called Thoreau/Alcott House at 255 Main Street. (NR 1976)

Post-Minot ownership

For a short time in the mid-1820s, Josiah Meriam Jr.'s son, wheelwright Darius Meriam (1798-1874) appears to have owned at least part of the farm before moving to Lowell. In 1832, however, the farm was purchased by Colburn Hadlock, the husband of Josiah's youngest daughter, Lydia.

Lydia Meriam (1795-1888) had married Colburn Hadlock in 1819. They lived in Boston for the first years of their marriage, during which time at least three of their four children were born. Several local stories, some of them told by Henry Thoreau, refer to the fifteen-year period when the Hadlocks occupied the old Wheeler/Minot Farm. Colburn and Lydia had at least two daughters who reached marriageable age while they lived there, whom local historian and social commentator John S. Keyes refers to as "Hadlock's handsome daughters."

In the 1840s Colburn Hadlock purchased the old Middlesex Hotel on the town common, which had been badly damaged by fire in 1845. Apparently in conjunction with its longtime proprietor, Thomas Wesson, he repaired and renovated the hotel, and reopened it in 1847 with his 22-year-old son, J. Bartlett Hadlock installed as clerk and bartender. In the process of the restoration work, considerable refuse and debris from the hotel may have been buried on the Minot farm. Many years later, Henry Thoreau, returning from skating on the Bedford meadows over the fields of the farm of his infancy, observed so much broken china mixed in with the soil that he suggested the area be called "crockery field."

In 1847 the Hadlocks sold the Minot Farm, then 85 acres. The buyer was another East Quarter neighbor, Capt. Asa Brooks II, whose family had owned a nearby farm on the Bay Road for generations. Asa Brooks (b. 1800) and his wife were in their forties when they purchased the property, and no children are listed as living there with them in the census of 1850. Instead, their household included at least two Irish-born farmhands – an illustration of a trend that was taking place all over Concord, as farmers, in particular, were hiring the first of what was to become a large influx of people fleeing the harsh conditions of Ireland in the middle of the 19th century. Under Asa Brooks, who was engaged in general agriculture, raising some livestock and crops that included hay and a variety of grains and vegetables, the farm covered approximately 100 acres – about the same size as it had been under Jonas Minot at the turn of the 19th century. During Mr. Brooks' time the farm had the relatively high value of \$5,000.

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In 1852 the farm changed hands again. This time the purchaser was George Ellis of Newton. In 1859 he sold the property to 44-year-old William Tibbetts (Tibbets), who came to Concord from Brookfield, NH, with his wife Mary and their young family. The Tibbetts' farm in the 1860s was moderately prosperous by Concord standards, and produced enough grain and hay for a small herd of about eight cows, some market produce, and a small amount of orchard products. As had been the case under Asa Brooks' ownership, over the years the Tibbetts household included a series of young farmhands from Ireland.

Tenant farming period: impact of immigration: mid-1870s to 1894

After the Civil War, the old Wheeler/Minot farm, like many others in town, entered a phase of tenant-farming which, like the shift from American- to Irish-born farm employees, was illustrative of a significant agricultural trend of the times in Concord. In fact, in its current, unrestored state, the building is one of the most intact examples of a transformation that many once-stylish colonial farmhouses in town underwent in the late 19th century. Some of the interior partitioning, and much of the deterioration and loss of exterior detailing that was evident by 1900 apparently date to this period.

By the 1870s, immigrants not only from Ireland, but from Nova Scotia and Scandinavia, were working on many of the town's larger farms. Some were hired as laborers; others managed to lease existing farms, where they raised livestock and worked the land on their own behalf. William and Mary Tibbetts moved to Melrose for a few years in the 1870s but retained ownership of the farm, renting the old Wheeler/Minot House to a series of tenants. The longest-term occupant during that time was Irish-American farmer Edward McKenna, who lived there with his mother.

By 1878 the Tibbetts had returned to Concord. The Tibbetts family, like the Hadlocks and Meriams before them, included several grown and growing daughters – four in all. The second eldest, Sarah J. had married Henry Wheeler of Acton in 1871, and they and their young child moved in with her parents and at least one of her sisters. The extended family did not move back to the old farmhouse, however, but in that year the Tibbetts moved the building a short distance to the east, where they continued to rent it out. For their own residence, they built a more fashionable gable-front Italianate house on the old site (today's 215 Virginia Road, MHC #176). Assessor reports of the time list both the "new house" and the "old house" standing on the Tibbetts farm, which then covered 96 acres.

It is not known when the McKennas vacated the old Wheeler/Minot farmhouse. References of the period suggest that the building was continually occupied by at least two families for many years after it was relocated. One tenant in the 1870s and 1880s, prior to his death from consumption at age 82 in 1882, was Peter Hutchinson. Like Jack Garrison, who had worked on the farm for the Minots, he was a member of a more longstanding demographic group in Concord

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than the Irish – African-American residents, most of whom, like the most recent immigrants, worked as laborers or domestics for the local landowners. Peter Hutchinson was one of a handful of local African-Americans who had been somewhat assimilated into town society, due partly to their capacity for hard work. He had spent much of his life doing odd jobs, both for farmers and for households in the center of town. J. Fay Barrett, writing in 1871, refers to him as “our colored townsman...the ablest common laborer I have ever known.” (**Barrett, *Memoirs of the Social Circle*, I, 64**) A well-known local story tells of a sheep-shearing contest between Hutchinson and prominent farmer George Barrett. The two men sheared all day, and it was only after the sun went down that George Barrett pulled ahead to win the contest, shearing 62 sheep to Hutchinson’s 60. Peter Hutchinson perhaps best typifies the lives led by several of Concord’s early free blacks, who first built cabins out on the river meadows belonging to the town’s farmers, and later moved into lodgings in town or on outlying farms. His name was immortalized by Emerson in the title of his poem *Peter’s Field*, in which Emerson describes the meadows near the site of Hutchinson’s former cabin along the Concord River. Thoreau also wrote of Peter Hutchinson several times in his journal.

William Tibbetts’ wife Mary died in 1880, and he remarried the following year. In 1882 he sold the entire farm, with both the family house and the tenant farmhouse, to his eldest daughter Susan (b. 1841), and her husband William Foster, a German-born sailor. Later that year she sold to her sister Sarah Tibbetts Wheeler the new house at 215 Virginia Road, with 60 acres, where Sarah and her husband continued to maintain a small dairy herd. After a few years the Fosters defaulted on their mortgage for the rest of the farm, and William Tibbetts bought back the old Wheeler/Minot house, by then shorn of its rear lean-to and center chimney. In 1886 he sold it again, with 25 acres to English-born Thomas Giblin of Boston. Giblin may not have done much farming as he is listed as an upholsterer; five years later he too lost the property to foreclosure.

It is not known whether the Fosters actually occupied the relocated house during their brief period of ownership. The Giblins apparently lived in part of the building after they bought it, and rented out the rest. The longest tenancy was that of Danish immigrants Peter and Anna (Thompson) Peterson who had come to America in 1875 and were in residence by the following year. By the mid-1880s the Petersons had two horses and a small dairy herd of eight cows. Like the Irish before them, and frequently after a period of tenancy, many Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish immigrants with farming skills eventually gathered enough money to buy farms of their own in Concord. What they could afford, however, were often properties like the old Wheeler/Minot farm must have been in the 1890s, which were in a state of neglect and decline – many of them having been through a series of mortgage foreclosures, often located in the East Quarter. When Thomas Giblin lost the property in the early 1890s, the farm came up for auction. Concord businessman Prescott Keyes bought it, and sold it to the Petersons in 1894.

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Transformation to a commemorative property, late 19th century through 1954.

By the time the house was sold out of the Tibbetts family for good in 1886, Henry Thoreau had been dead for 24 years. Over the course of a generation, while his birthplace gradually fell into disrepair, his writings became ever more popular, and by 1890 the first biographies about him had been written. Nathaniel Hawthorne had died in 1864, Emerson and the Alcotts all died in the 1880s, and devotees of the illustrious mid-19th century circle of Concord authors were soon traveling to town to view its literary, as well as historical, sites. Augmented by a groundswell of both antiquarianism and nostalgia, an explosive tourist boom was building in Concord as the turn of the 20th century approached. The number of tourists continued to swell after 1900, when the Lexington & Boston streetcar line was extended down Old Bedford Road to Concord Center, passing just a few hundred yards west of the old Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse – an easy walk for curious visitors from the city.

During this time several local guidebooks helped make true tourist attractions out of the homes of the authors, of their gravesites on Author's Ridge in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery (NR 1998), and the one birthplace among them – the old Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, by then relocated to 341 Virginia Road. The road itself, lined with fields and apple orchards, was a picturesque part of a favorite recommended route for carriage drives. Even Henry Salt's definitive 1890 *Life and Writings of Henry David Thoreau* refers to Thoreau's birth "in a quaint old-fashioned house on Virginia Road, surrounded by pleasant orchards and peat-meadows." (Salt, 13)

Late 19th- and early 20th-century literature about Thoreau and his birthplace ranged from serious first-hand accounts, such as Salt's and the 1888 biography by Franklin Sanborn, to sentimental, over-romanticized descriptions in some of the guidebooks. Even Thoreau's colleagues, however, in their writings before the building was moved, helped set the stage for the later wave of nostalgia. Fellow Concord author William Ellery Channing, in *Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist* (1873), describes the house and its environs before its reduction and relocation:

The old-fashioned house on the Virginia road, its roof nearly reaching the ground in the rear, remains as it was when Henry David Thoreau first saw the light in the eastern-most of its upper chambers. It was the residence of his grandmother, and a perfect piece of our New England style of building, with its gray, unpainted boards, its grassy, unfenced door-yard. The house is somewhat isolate and remote from thoroughfares; the Virginia road, an old-fashioned, winding, at length deserted pathway, the more smiling for its forked orchards, tumbling walls, and mossy banks. About the house are pleasant, sunny meadows, deep with their beds of peat...It was lovely he should draw his first breath in a pure country air, out of crowded towns, amid the pleasant, russet fields.

Several late 19th-century writers lamented the changes that had occurred to the property over time. Franklin Sanborn, in an article for the *New England Magazine* (Vol. III, No. 4, December 1890), notes the house's relocation and the concurrent demolition of the rear lean-to:

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Though standing yet, it has been removed, after the Concord fashion, to another site, and has lost the quaint sloping roof, which gave it an old-world character, like the similar house in Torrington, Ct. where John Brown was born. This 'Minot House' ... stood on the right hand of the 'Virginia Road' as you come from Lexington to Concord by that route...

No author was more outspoken in her dismay at the altered state of the house than Margaret Sidney (a.k.a. Harriett Lothrop [1844-1924]), a prolific author of children's books, including the *Five Little Peppers* series. A fierce antiquarian who was largely responsible for the early restorations of the Wayside (home to both Hawthorne and the Alcotts), and the Alcotts' Orchard House (both NHL, 1966), her disdain at the decline of Thoreau's birth house extends beyond the building to rendering judgment on its later inhabitants. In the entry on it for her 1888 guidebook, she begins with a description of the 1878 Tibbetts house, with the old trees stand standing in what had been the dooryard of the Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, and ends with a scathing critique of the latter's immigrant occupants and the condition of the property:

A tidy little homestead of the pattern so common in New England as to be describable by the hundred, meets us at the gentle slope; and presently we come upon two poplars gaunt and grim, seeming to say, "we guarded the homestead that you seek."

"We must believe them," we exclaim, and draw rein, to pay tribute of respect to their undoubted connection with Thoreau. We are delighted to find it all true; that the house in which Thoreau was born was moved some time afterward from the shelter of the poplars, to its present position of treeless waste. A little more of doubling and winding, and we see the house, an ugly, square, flat-faced domicile given up to a foreign element that swarms in and out its old door. So we gaze reverently at the unpicturesque shell of a habitation, and determine to see if possible its interior...

After a brief account of a surly dog and the coarse language of the rough woman who greeted the visitor at the door, she continues:

*Neither of the apartments is in the least interesting. The house is not old enough to be quaint, and nothing of its interior calls for a description. It is Thoreau's birthplace; this is its only claim for attention. We pass out silently, and resume our journey. (Sidney, *Old Concord, her Highways and Byways*, 1888. 37-39)*

On the other hand, Thoreau himself would probably have disagreed not only with Sidney's discriminatory remarks about the residents, but with those about the state of the house as well. As he stated in an unpublished manuscript,

*There is a time when every house becomes beautiful at last, and we cease to quarrel with the original architect, when Time with his scythe and weather staining and mossy brush has come to smooth over and cover up the farmer's blunders – when the elements have repaired man's faults. (Blanding, *Thomas in The Concord Journal*, 12/21/1995)*

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Homage to the Wheeler/Minot House as Thoreau's birthplace did not appear only in written form. At least two local artists were commissioned to create drawings of what the house looked like during Thoreau's lifetime. As a fitting accompaniment to the passage describing the house with its "quaint, sloping roof," for Franklin Sanborn's 1890 article (see above), Florence Richardson, a Concord wood engraver produced an illustration of the building with its center chimney and rear lean-to, but devoid of its east-end attachments. In Sanborn's words, Thoreau "was born in the old-fashioned house which Miss Richardson's sketch has restored to its primitive aspect." However, while she depicted the building at the old location at the bend in the road, Miss Richardson showed it positioned behind the two tall poplars that in her time sheltered the 1878 Tibbetts House.

Seven years later, local photographer and Thoreau scholar Alfred Hosmer commissioned another Concord artist, Mary Wheeler, to make a second historical sketch of the building for a new edition of Thoreau's *Walden* which he was preparing. Wheeler's drawing, also a pastiche of the contemporary and the historical, showed the building with its east jog and attached sheds (undoubtedly meant to convey the chaise house and woodshed listed in Mary Minot's "widow's thirds"). Miss Wheeler, too, showed the trees on the old farmstead as they had appeared in the 1890s, and even added a contemporary pine tree which Mr. Hosmer had photographed and particularly wanted to include. (Illust. F) In a letter of June 5, 1897, to University of Illinois professor S.A. Jones, he wrote "Have just had a new sketch of the birthplace made, so as to have one with the pine tree in full in it, for the *Walden*." (Oehlschlaeger and Hendrick, eds. *Toward the Making of Thoreau's Modern Reputation*. 1979)

Twentieth-century ownership

In 1908, having occupied it for a generation, but having owned it for only fourteen years, the Petersons sold the farm to the family who owned it until the end of the 20th century. The buyers of the property, by then reduced to 25 acres, were a group of Irish immigrants, Jeremiah and Timothy Breen and Carl Hedin. They subsequently conveyed it to Michael Breen and in 1909 all their shares in the farm were acquired by James J. Breen. Both Michael and James Breen were recent Irish immigrants who came to Concord after a brief stay in Boston. (Their family name was first referred to as "O'Breen" by town officials.) While Michael Breen soon left town, James, age 27, stayed, and the next year married Irish-born Annie Cassidy, who had been working as a domestic servant. Over the years, through the Great Depression and Second World War, the Breens maintained a modest agricultural operation at 341 Virginia Road on 22 acres, with flocks of chickens, a variety of crops, and a small dairy herd. James Breen replaced the former barn with a low, 1½ story shingled cow barn, to which he added a milk room before 1930, and later built a hen house and an equipment garage behind the house (all demolished 1997). The property was eventually inherited by James and Annie's son, James Breen, Jr. (1912-1995), who owned it until his death.

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While the Breens were farming the property, the old Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, though simplified in form during its long period as a tenant farmhouse, and updated by the Breens with simple early 20th century detailing, continued to be a destination point for Thoreau devotees. Interest in public or non-profit acquisition of the property as a commemorative site was expressed sporadically throughout the 20th century. In 1931, during the period when restorations such as Colonial Williamsburg and the Wayside Inn in nearby Sudbury were commanding national attention, a writer in *The Bookman* expressed the following:

I think perhaps the house in which Thoreau was born might be a good investment for the State, or for some enterprising Henry Ford. Thoreau's reputation is growing with the years, and in the end the effect of his life and works upon the history of America may not be so inconsiderable.

By the time of James Breen, Jr.'s death in 1995, much of the land that had remained with the 1878 Tibbetts House at 215 Virginia Road had been developed for single-family ranch houses and modest late-20th century colonial revival homes. To the east, an office park was built in the 1980s on the old Wheeler/Meriam property at 477 Virginia Road. To the north, a wartime airport, Hanscom Field, expanded in the post-World War II era into a combined government and private plane facility on hundreds of acres of former farmland in Concord, Lincoln, Bedford, and Lexington. The twenty acres around the relocated Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, however, remained undeveloped through the period of Breen family ownership.

In 1997, Concord's Town Meeting appropriated \$160,000 toward the \$960,000 purchase price of the remaining portion of the old farm. The campaign to save this historic property from development was initiated by a neighbor, joined by the Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance. A private-public task force put together the financial package, receiving early critical support from the Educational Collaborative for Greater Boston (EDCO) which provided \$160,000 from funds originally donated by Nathaniel Seefurth for a Thoreau-related education center. Additional contributions came from Massport for air rights (\$200,000), from a Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Management self-help grant for \$160,000, a foundation grant of \$180,000, and smaller amounts from other organizations, groups, and individuals. The property was conveyed with an encumbrance requiring that it be open to all residents of the Commonwealth.

Following the Town's purchase, negotiations were started with EDCO to build an education center on the land, and with a new citizen's group, the Thoreau Farm Trust, which intended to restore the house and use it, in conjunction with the education center, to memorialize Thoreau and to teach about the history of agriculture in Concord. However, no agreement was reached, and the Town now plans to consider alternate proposals for the preservation and use of the house and property. Meanwhile, nine acres of land behind the house have been leased to Gaining Ground, a non-profit organic farming group that gives young people a chance to experience farming and

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donates the produce grown there to the needy. Concord's Natural Resources Commission is charged with stewardship of the land. The goal of preserving the house as a memorial to Thoreau and keeping the total property for use in interpretive programs on agriculture will be greatly enhanced by its listing on the National Register.

Archaeological Significance

Although numerous ancient Native American sites have been recorded in the Concord, Sudbury, and Assabet River drainages (which converge approximately two miles west of the Thoreau House), few sites have been systematically excavated in the area limiting their interpretative value and making surviving sites in the area potentially significant. Much of our information relating to Native American site locations in the Concord area dates from the 19th century or later and results from information compiled by artifact collectors and avocational archaeologists. Recent cultural resource management studies conducted by professional archaeologists in the Concord area have added to these early efforts and provided a systematic body of data which forms the basis for Native American subsistence and settlement models available for the Concord River drainage. Any ancient sites located in the nominated area have the potential to further define the variability within these models and how they changed during the last 12,500 years of demonstrated settlement in this area. Recent archaeological studies in Concord have identified Native American use of that area dating from the Middle Archaic through Woodland Periods. Similar Native American resources may be present in the nominated area indicating the potential for a wide variety of additional research topics including lithic and ceramic technologies, changing resource use, and procurement and possibly exchange patterns.

Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential to contribute detailed information on the evolution, layout, and social history of the farm where Henry D. Thoreau was born. Additional documentary research combined with archaeological survey, testing, and careful mapping may help document structural and landscape changes that occurred to the farm since its possible pre-1736 construction date. Although the original house site is not included in this nomination, structural evidence from associated outbuildings and occupational related features may exist that contribute information related to the farm's original date of settlement. The close proximity of the original house site also indicates archaeological features (refuse areas) may exist that could contribute information on the architectural details of the original house. The above information combined with construction dates and functions for existing buildings and structures may also document the design and evolution of a late 19th/early 20th century farmstead from its Colonial Period beginnings.

Detailed analysis of the contents of occupational related features may also contribute important information relating to the social history of the farmstead including the Thoreau period of

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habitation and inhabitants that preceded then followed Thoreau. Occupational related features may contain detailed information relating to the social, cultural, and economic characteristics of the farm's inhabitants. Important information may exist relating to the life of the late 19th century immigrant community in Concord, and the acculturation and ethnicity of the Irish and Danish immigrants. Information on Concord's African-American community may also be present. Archaeological resources may exist that contribute information on structural changes that occurred to the farm building and layout during the tenant farming period from the mid 1870s to 1894.

(end)

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Section number 9 Page 1

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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(continued)

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1798 Federal Direct Tax Census

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Research by Barbara Lambert and Joseph Wheeler, 2000-2001.

(continued)

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(end)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM REFERENCES (cont.)

5. 309820 4704260

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property consists of two parcels: #4286 (2.53 ac., with the Wheeler/Minot House, [341 Virginia Road]), and surrounding it on three sides, and parcel #4286-1 (17.77 ac.) as shown on the Town of Concord's Assessors Map K7. The map, the most recent available, still shows the footprints of outbuildings that have since been demolished.

Boundary Justification

The National Register boundaries encompass the remaining 20.3-acre portion of the Wheeler/Minot Farm that was acquired by the Town of Concord in 1997. Parcel #4286 includes the farmhouse and the sites of all known outbuildings associated with it after its relocation in 1878. Parcel #4286-1 includes the agricultural fields that adjoined the farmstead.

(end)

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PHOTOGRAPH DESCRIPTIONS

All photographs by Anne Forbes, August 2000

1. View north/northeast
2. View northwest
3. View southwest
4. View southeast

Supplementary photographs (4 x 6")

5. View south to house with cart path
6. Fieldstone wall
7. Lobby entrance, looking east
8. West first-story room, fireplace (east) wall
9. East first-story room, fireplace (west) wall
10. East chamber: portion of fireplace (west) wall
11. West chamber, with partition wall, looking west
12. Second story: connection of southwest corner post, front plate, and end girt
13. Second story: connection of northwest corner post, rear plate, and end girt
14. View northeast over rear fields
15. View northeast over fields
16. View north, with northwest field
17. View north, with northwest field

HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS AND DRAWINGS (photocopies)

All in collection of Concord Archives, Concord Free Library

- A. Alfred Hosmer: "Thoreau Birthplace, family in doorway." Ca. 1896
Hosmer: "Thoreau Birthplace – late fall or winter." Ca. 1896
- B. Thoreau birthplace: open doorway. Ca. 1896
- C. Thoreau Birthplace, ca. 1905
- D. Thoreau Birthplace, ca. 1925
- E. Thoreau Birthplace, 1940
- F. Mary Wheeler, "Thoreau's Birthplace," 1897

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RESOURCE COUNT

Map #	Name/description	Date	Status	Type
1	Wheeler/Minot House	ca. 1730	C	B
2	system of fieldstone walls	pre-1900	C	St
3	well	pre-1880	C	St
4	cart paths/farm drives	pre-1950	C	St
5	site of former outbuildings	late 19 th - early 20 th century	C	Si

	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>
Buildings	1	0
Structures	3	0
Objects	0	0
Sites	1	0
TOTALS	5	0

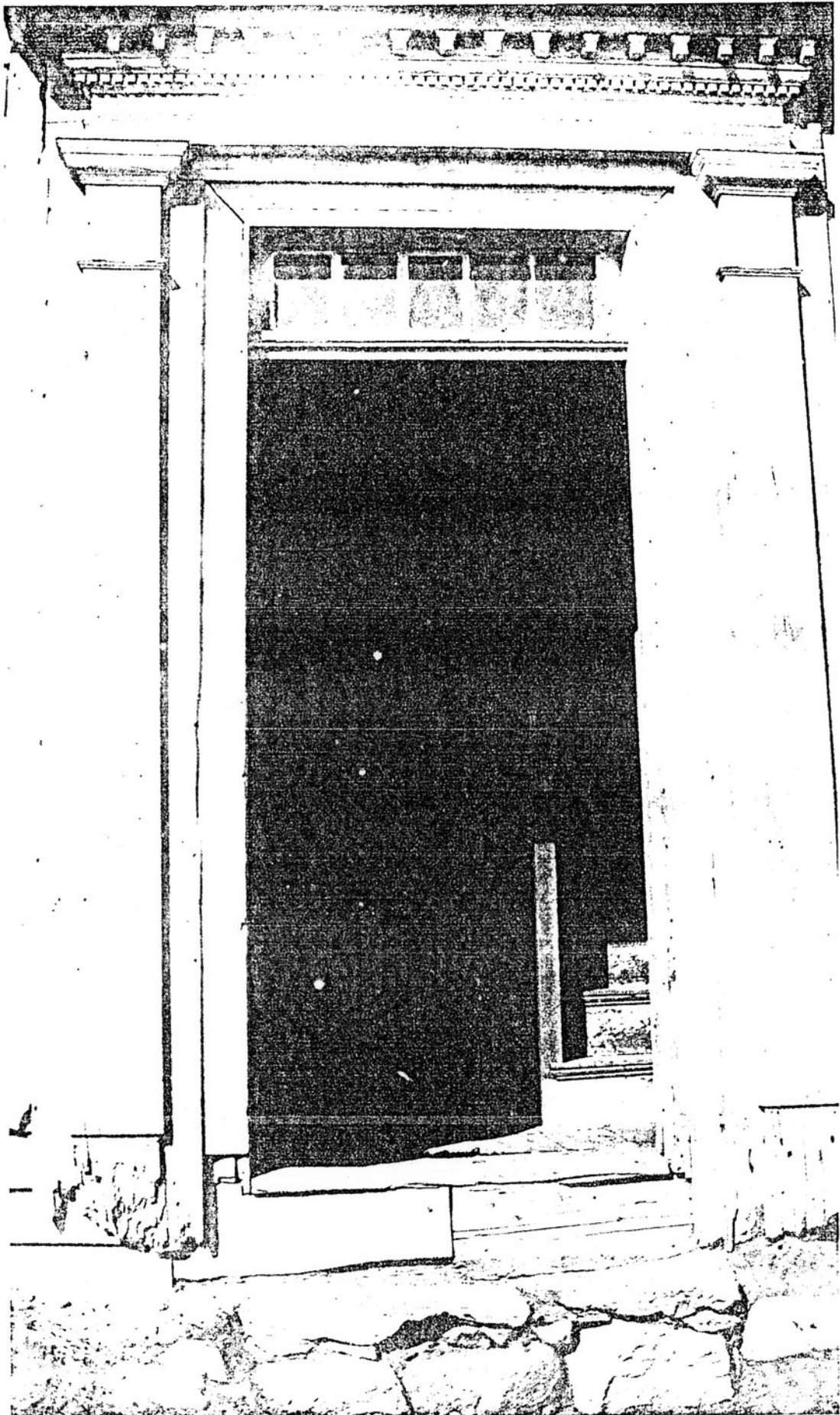


III. 196 "THOREAU BIRTHPLACE: FAMILY IN DOORWAY" Alfred Hosmer ca. 1896
 (A)

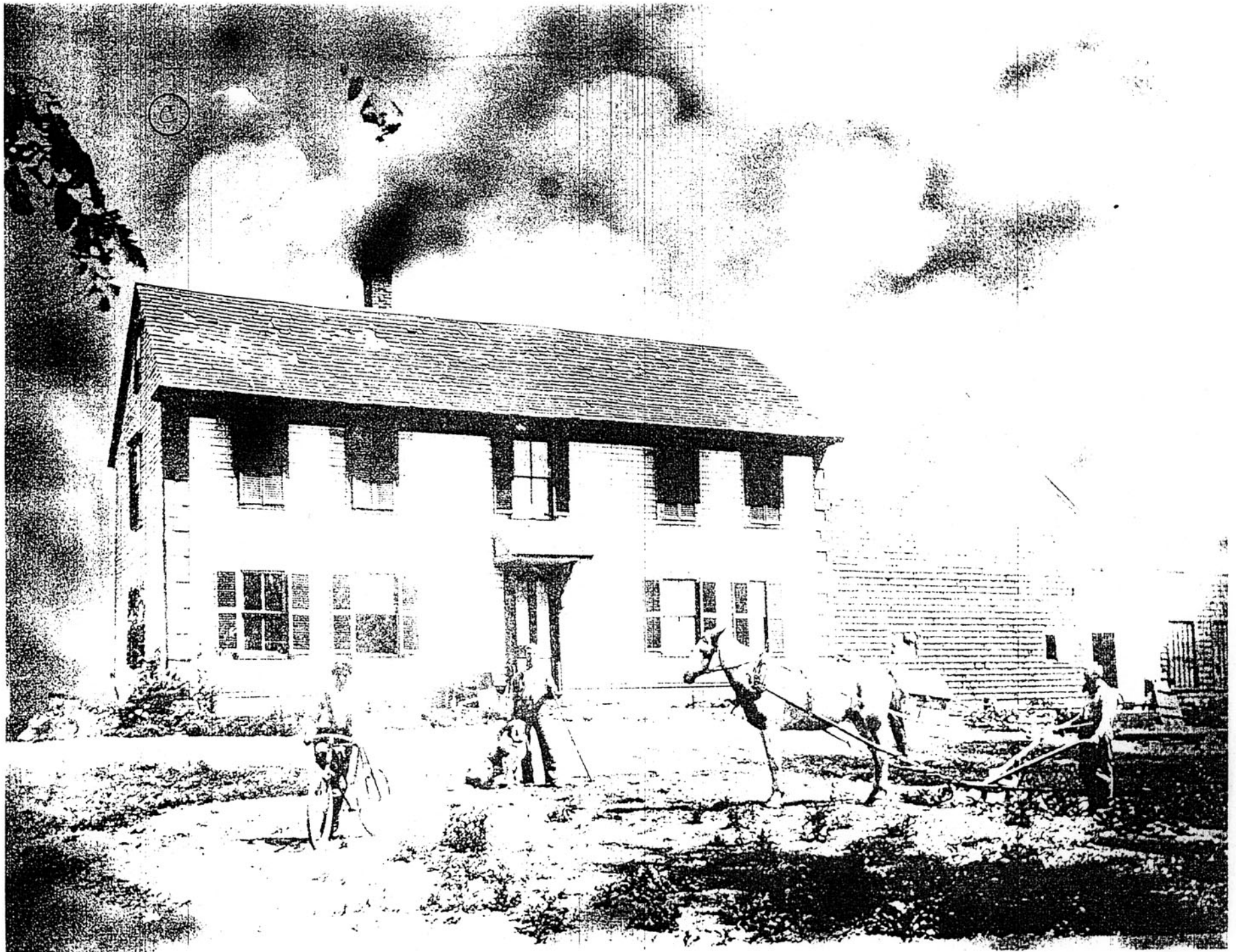
III. 195 "THOREAU BIRTHPLACE: LATE FALL OR WINTER" Alfred Hosmer ca. 1896



③



TIHORO BIRTHPLACES: open doorway

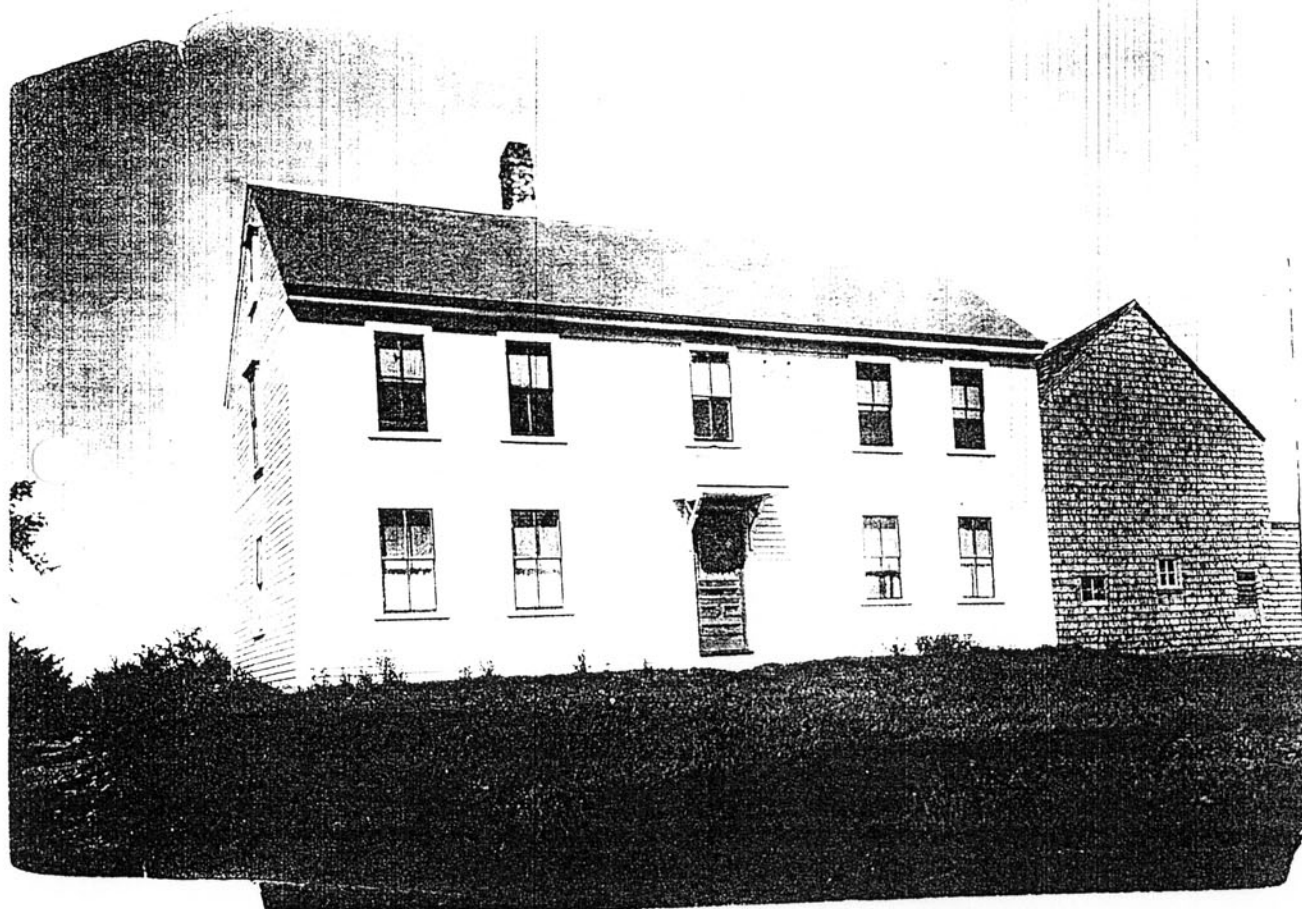


THOREAU BIRTHPLACE, ca. 1905

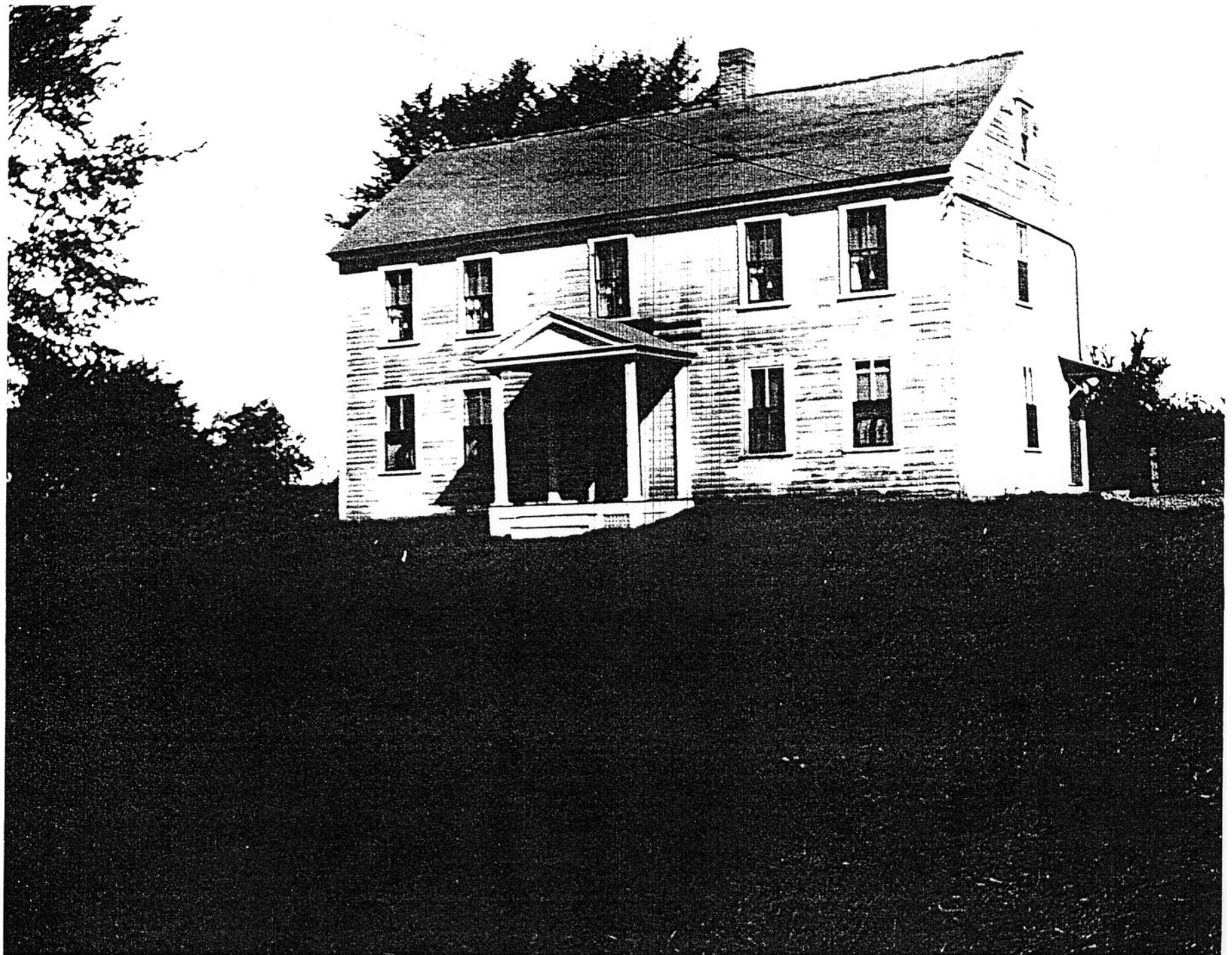
①

THORNTON BIRTHPLACE

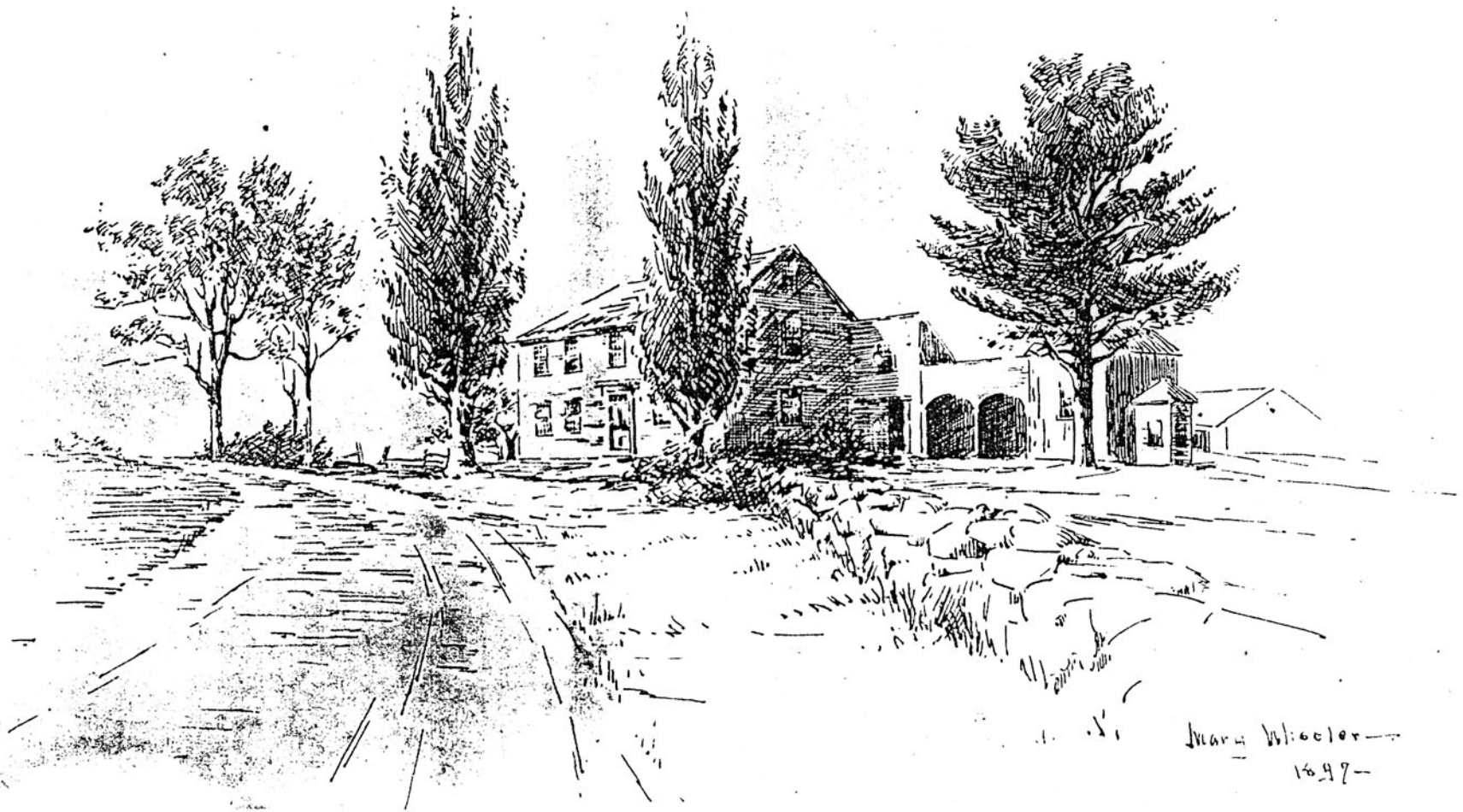
ca. 1925



(E) THOREAU BIRTHPLACE, 1940

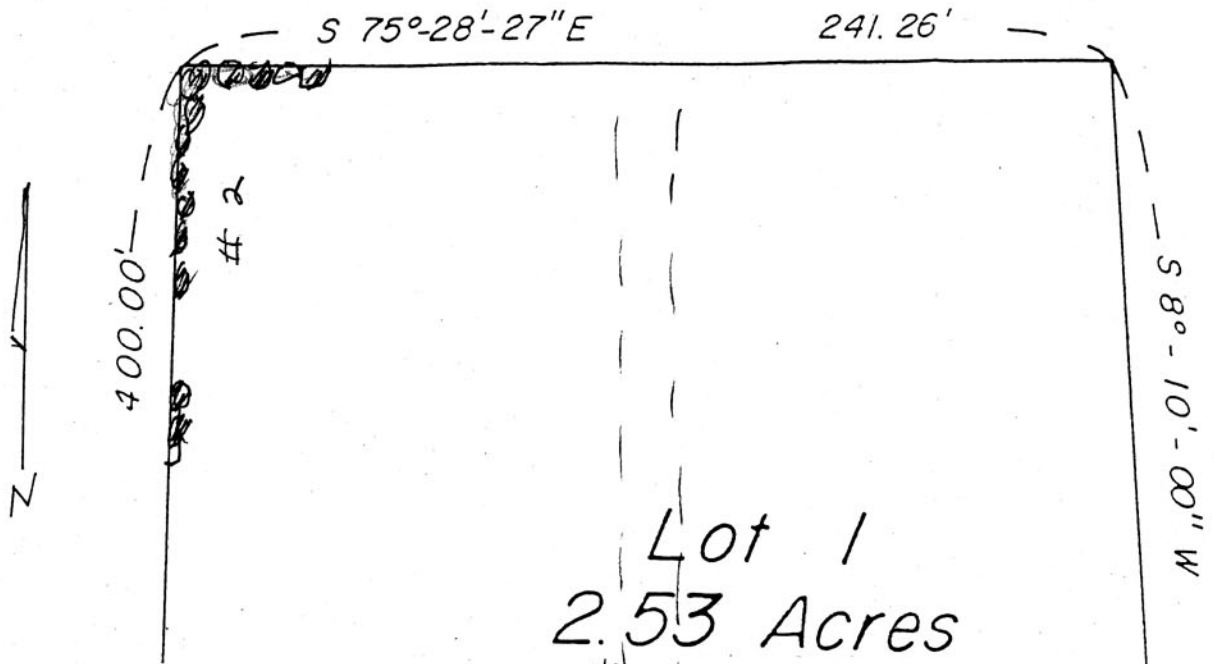


(F)



Mary Wheeler—
1897—

Thoreau's Birthplace.



Lot 1
2.53 Acres

**WHEELER/MINOT FARMHOUSE
(HENRY THOREAU BIRTHPLACE)**

341 Virginia Road
Concord, MA

#1
EXIST. HOUSE
Thoreau Birthplace

TOTAL
166.73'

134.00'

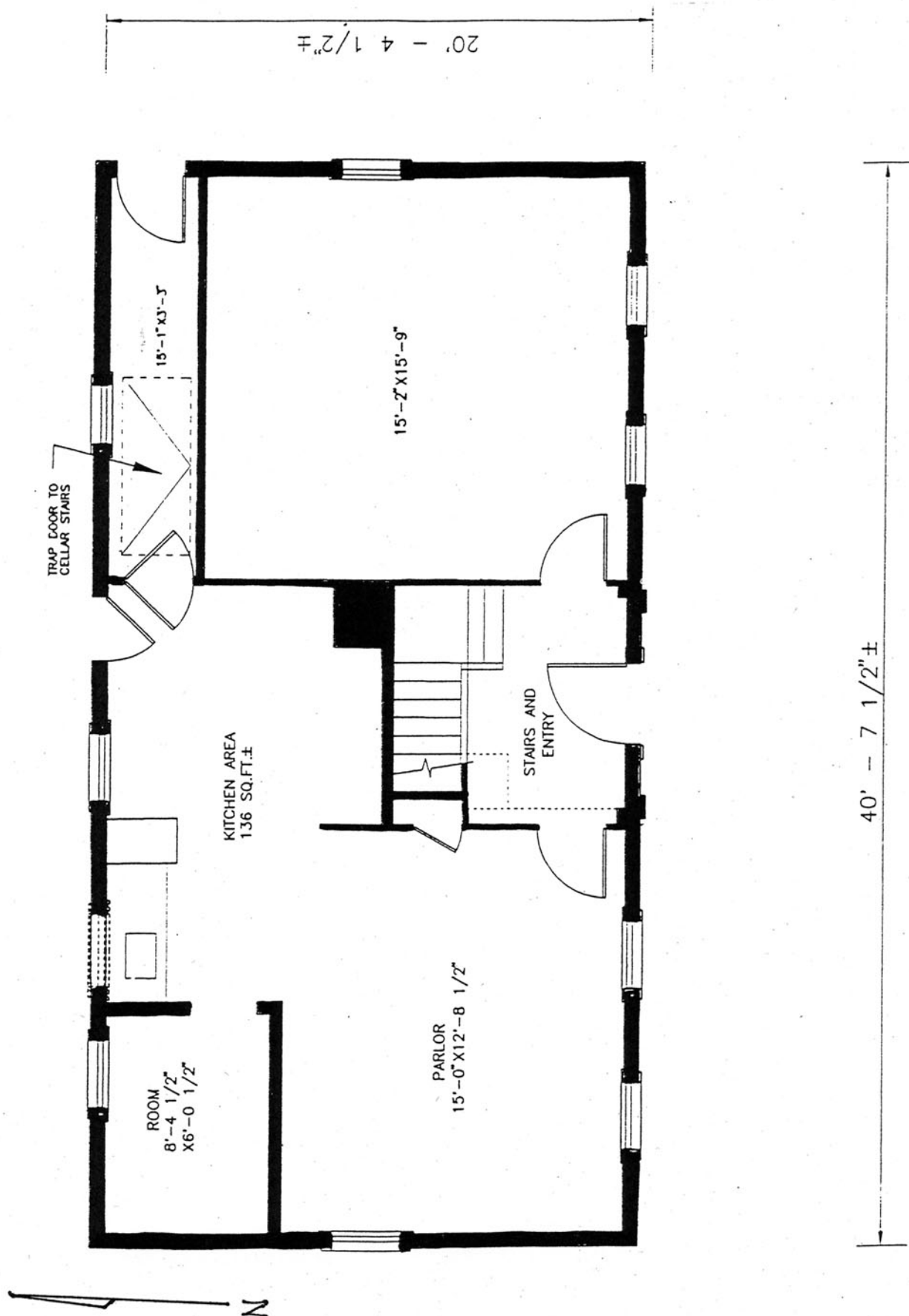
N 72°-29'-30" W

Virginia Road

EDGE OF

WHEELER-MINOT FARMHOUSE (HENRY THOREAU BIRTHPLACE):

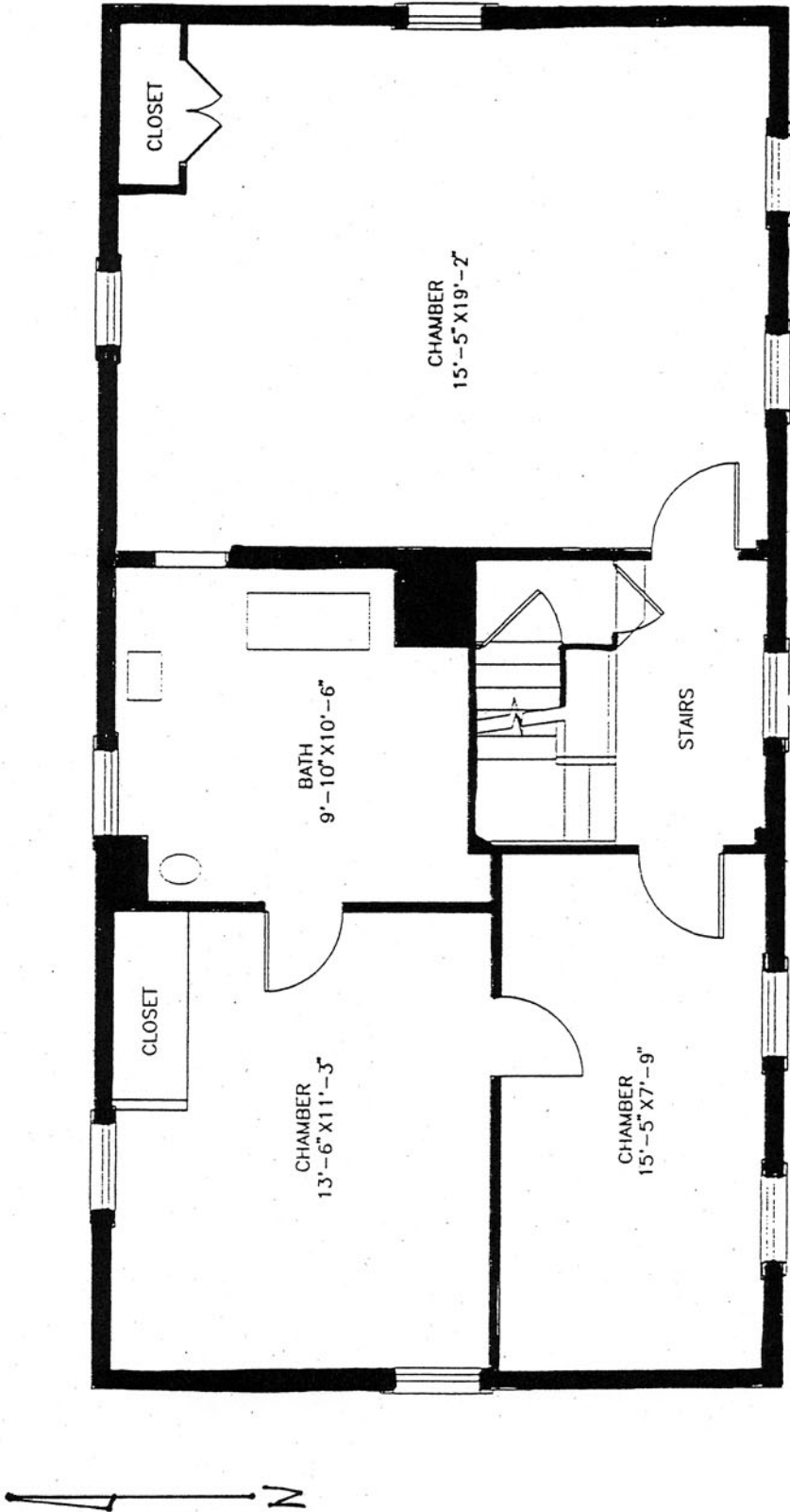
Floor plan from Ferro, Maximilian L. "The Henry David Thoreau Birthplace, Concord, Massachusetts: a Report Prepared for the Town of Concord and the Thoreau Birthplace Task Force," December, 1998.



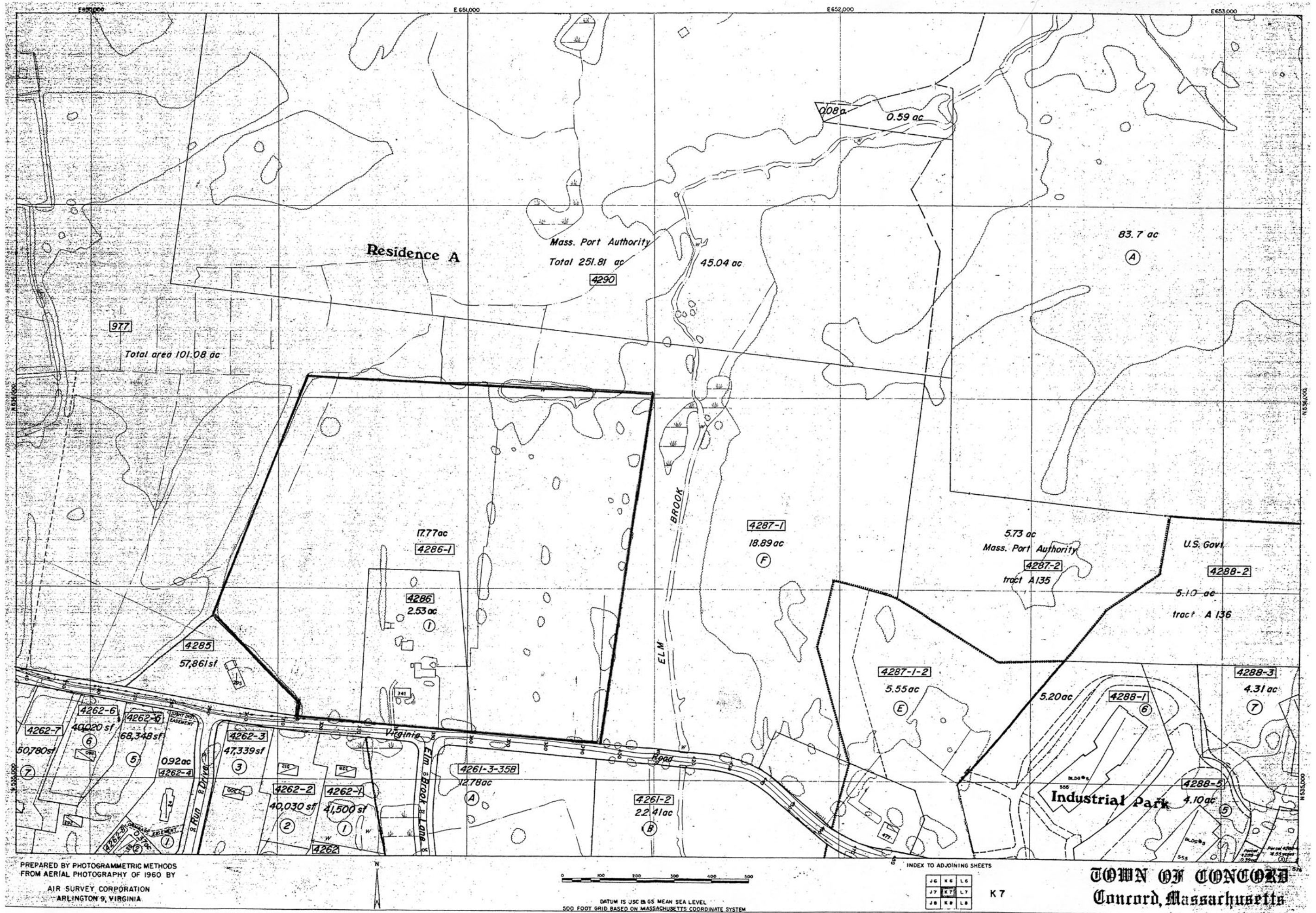
First Floor Plan 3/16" Scale

WHEELER-MINOT FARMHOUSE (HENRY THOREAU BIRTHPLACE):

Floor plan from Ferro, Maximilian L. "The Henry David Thoreau Birthplace, Concord, Massachusetts: a Report Prepared for the Town of Concord and the Thoreau Birthplace Task Force," December, 1998.



Second Floor Plan 3/16" Scale



HENRY D. THORAU BIRTH PLACE
341 VIRGINIA RD.

CONCORD

MIDDLESEX CO.
MASS.

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

① 19

309880

4704400

② 19

310110

4704390

③ 19 310090 4704150

④ 19 309880 4704160

⑤ 19 309820 4704260

7.5 X 15 MINUTE SERIES (TOP)

308

20'

309

310

CARLISLE 5.7 KM.

17' 30"

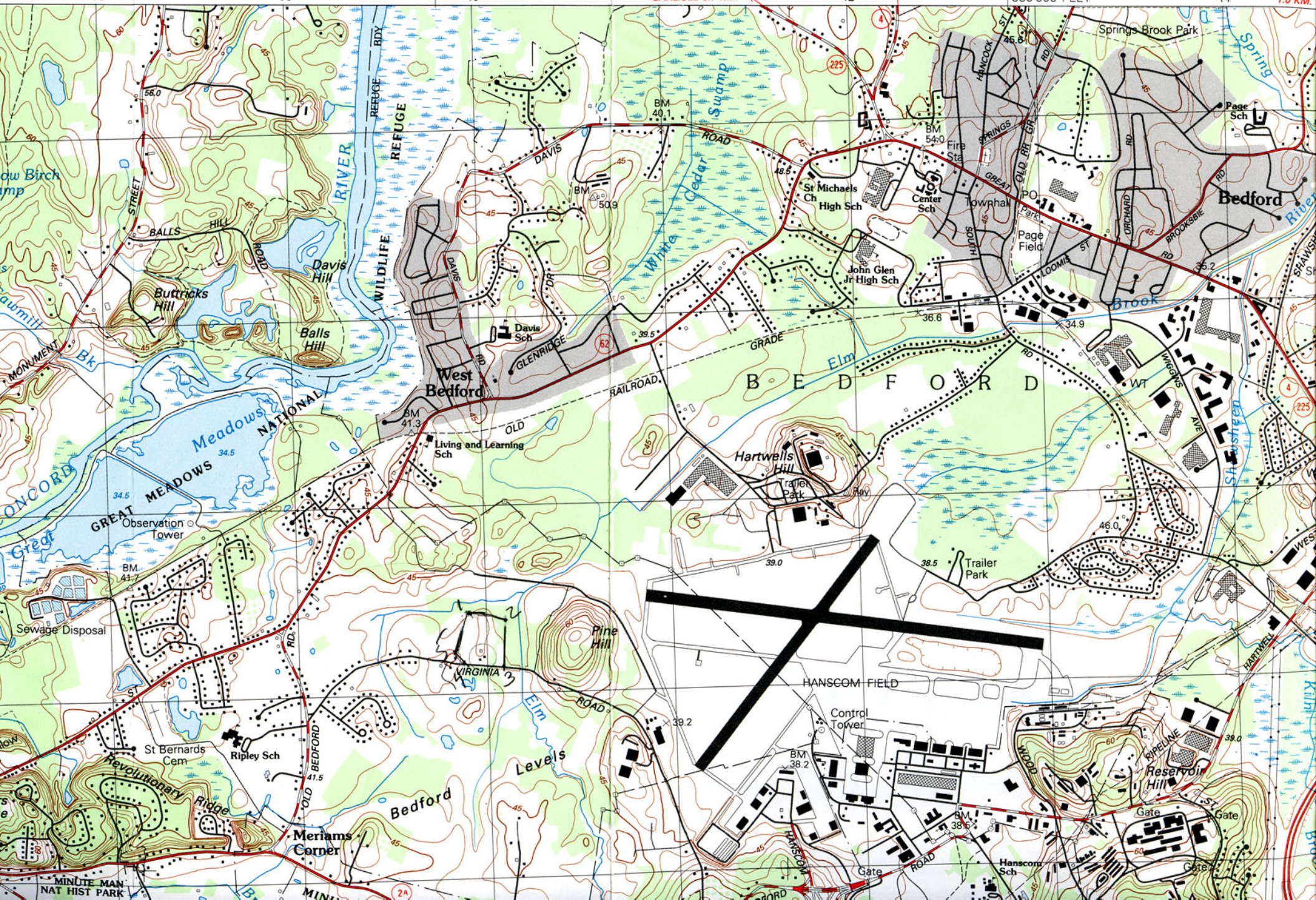
312

CHELMSFORD CENTER 12 KM.

660 000 FEET

314

1.0 KM.





1. View north/northeast (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)



2. View northwest (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)



3. View southwest (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)



4. View southeast (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, Concord (Middlesex Co.)



5. View south to house with cart path (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)



6. Fieldstone wall (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, Concord (Middlesex Co.)



7. Lobby entrance, looking east (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)

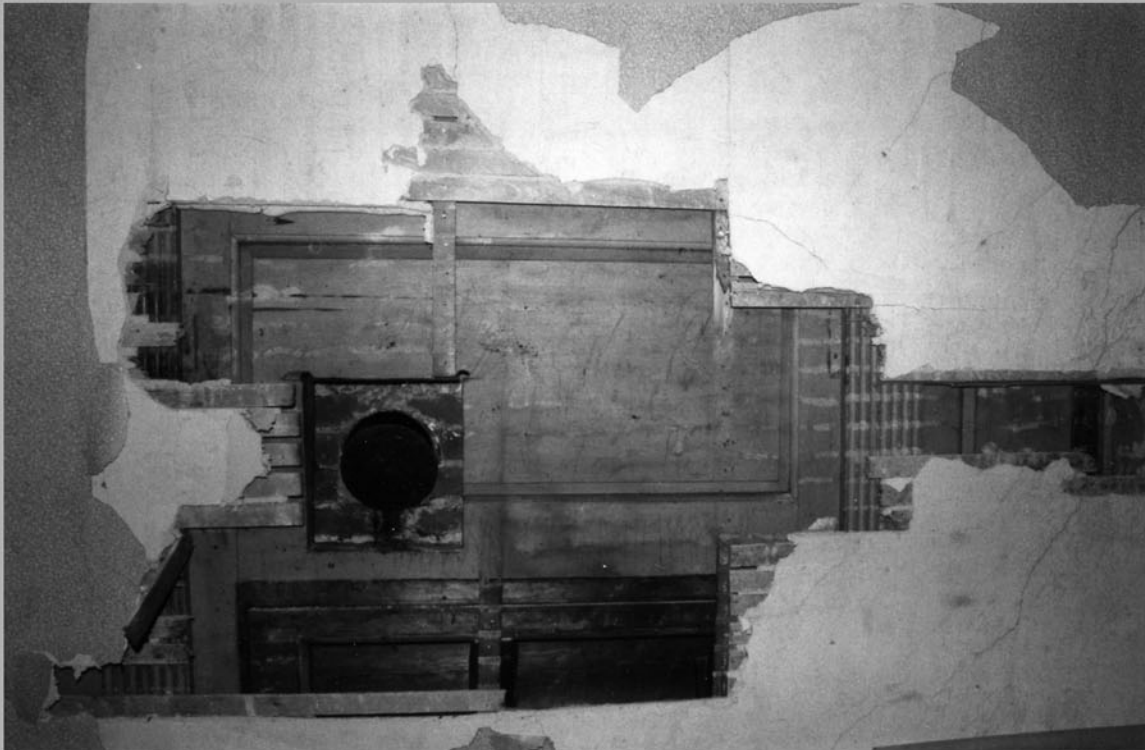


8. West first-story room, fireplace (east) wall
(Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, Concord (Middlesex Co.)



9. East first-story room, fireplace (west) wall
(Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)



10. East chamber: portion of fireplace (west) wall
(Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, Concord (Middlesex Co.)



12. Second story: connection of southwest corner post, front plate, and end girt
(Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)



13. Second story: connection of northwest corner post, rear plate, and end girt
(Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, Concord (Middlesex Co.)



11. West chamber, with partition wall, looking west
(Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, Concord (Middlesex Co.)



14. View northeast over rear fields (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)



15. View northeast over fields (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)

Wheeler/Minot Farmhouse, Concord (Middlesex Co.)



16. View north, with northwest field (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)



17. View north, with northwest field (Photographer: Anne Forbes, August 2000)