

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	CON.177
Historic Name:	Wheeler, Dea. John - Minot, Capt. Jonas Farmhouse
Common Name:	Thoreau, Henry David Birthplace
Address:	341 Virginia Rd
City/Town:	Concord
Village/Neighborhood:	East Quarter
Local No:	K7-4286, K7-4286-1
Year Constructed:	c 1730
Architect(s):	
Architectural Style(s):	Colonial; First Period
Use(s):	Agricultural; Agricultural Field; Cooper; Dairy; Multiple Family Dwelling House; Orchard; Other Cultural; Other Educational; Poultry Farm; Single Family Dwelling House
Significance:	Agriculture; Archaeology, Historic; Architecture; Community Planning; Conservation; Ethnic Heritage; Literature; Social History
Area(s):	
Designation(s):	Nat'l Register Individual Property (03/19/2004); Preservation Restriction (09/02/2008)
Building Materials(s):	Roof: Asphalt Shingle Wall: Wood; Wood Clapboard Foundation: Stone, Uncut



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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FORM B - BUILDING

Massachusetts Historical Commission
80 Boylston Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Assessor's number

K7-4286

USGS Quad

CONCORD

Area(s)

Form Number

177

ADDITIONAL INFO - ELIS. REQUEST

CORRESP.

MST
1/96

CON. 177

CONCORD

Town

SEA D

Place (neighborhood or village)

East Quarter

341 Virginia Road

ic Name Dea. John Wheeler House/
Thoreau Birthplace
dwelling

Present dwelling

Original early 18th century

of Construction (parts may be earlier)
Wheeler

First/Second Period

Form unknown

ect/Builder

ior Material: (not visible)

Foundation clapboard

Wall/Trim asphalt shingle

Roof

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures
Three
sheds, shingled barn in deteriorated
condition.

Major Alterations (with dates)
Rear
leanto, jog, and quoining removed;
Early 20th-C. doors, porch, and
pierced shutters added.

Condition fair

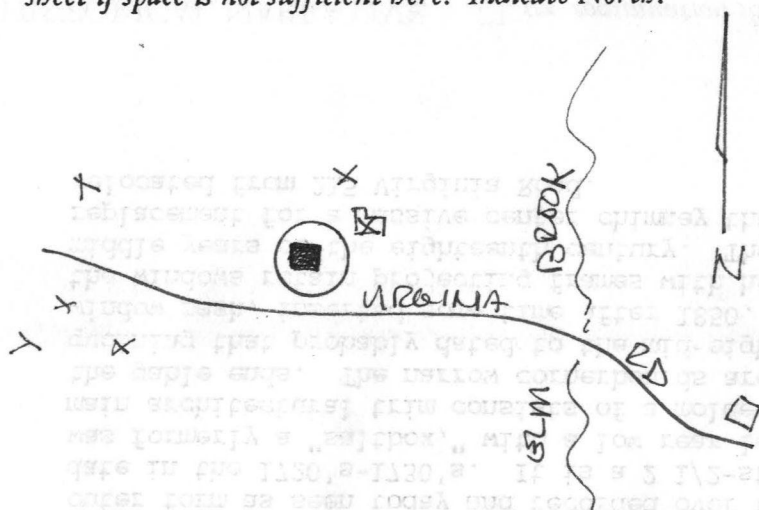
Moved ☐ no ☒ yes Date 1878

Acreage 18.4 acres

Setting In former farming area,
surrounded by meadows and young woods.
Modern houses to west. Open yard,
small cornfield directly east.

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 Forbes;
research by Donna Salacuse
Organization for Concord Hist. Commission

Date (month/day/year) June, 1992

BUILDING FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION ☐ *see continuation sheet*

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

Once reputed to be one of the oldest houses in Concord, it is certainly possible that this building contains at least a portion of a seventeenth-century house. Its outer form as seen today and recorded over the years, however, is consistent with a date in the 1720's-1730's. It is a 2 1/2-story, five-bay, one-room-deep house. It was formerly a "saltbox," with a low rear leanto and a "jog" on the east end. The main architectural trim consists of a molded, boxed cornice without roof overhang at the gable ends. The narrow cornerboards are a replacement for early hand-hewn quoining that probably dated to the mid-eighteenth century, and the 2-over-2-pane window sash, inserted some time after 1850, replace former 12-over-12-sash. Some of the windows retain projecting frames with heavily-molded crowns typical of the middle years of the eighteenth century. The narrow central chimney seen today is a replacement for a massive center chimney that was removed in 1878 when the house was relocated from 215 Virginia Road.

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.

This house is significant both for its early history, and for its later connection with the family of Henry David Thoreau. It originally stood several rods to the west, at #215 Virginia Road. After the "second division" of land in Concord in 1653, much of the land along the Virginia Road belonged to Sgt. Thomas Wheeler (1625-1704). He had thirteen children, but conveyed most of his property in this vicinity to his sons Deacon John (1655-1736) and Timothy (1667-1718--see 472 Virginia Road, NR.) Sources conflict as to the construction date of this house. Although it was previously speculated that #341 was built by Sgt. Thomas, or by John near the time of his marriage to Sarah Stearns in 1678, another source indicates that John built it, possibly reusing part of an earlier house, in 1736. (Since John died at the age of 81 in 1736, an unlikely age to construct a new house, future research may reveal that the house was indeed built prior to that time. If that is the case, it would probably have been the next owner who updated the building with mid-eighteenth-century vernacular Georgian features.) It is not known who lived in the house after John Wheeler, but in 1755 his heirs sold it to a cousin, Samuel Minot. Samuel then conveyed it to his son Jonas. Capt. Jonas Minot (b. 1735) married first Mary Hall of Westford, who died in 1792. (Cont.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES ☐ *see continuation sheet*

- Maps, atlases: 1830, 1852, 1856, ca. 1871, 1875, 1889, 1906.
- Keyes/Tolman. "Houses in Concord." 1885; rev. 1915 and 1920's.
- Jarvis, "Houses and People in Concord." 1882.
- Town directories and tax files.
- Interview with Richard O'Connor, Thoreau Lyceum 3/92.
- Dormer, Jean "Virginia Road farm site of Thoreau's birth." Concord Journal, 11/30/89.
- Wheeler, Ruth. "Thoreau Farm." Thoreau Society Bulletin #42, Winter, 1953.
- Wheeler House File #V1.
- Concord Free Public Library photo file.

- ☐ 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

CONCORDDea. John Wheeler House
Thoreau BirthplaceMassachusetts Historical Commission
80 Boylston Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Area(s) Form No.

177

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, cont.

Six years later he married "the widow Dunbar," who brought her daughter Cynthia to Concord with her. In 1812 Cynthia married John Thoreau, and the next year Capt. Jonas, aged 77, died. A few years later his widow asked her new son-in-law, who was already a storekeeper on the square at the town center, to run the farm for her. Cynthia and John lived in the house for a year and a half, and it was here that their son, Henry David Thoreau, was born in 1817. Although he only lived on Virginia Road as a baby, Henry Thoreau had much fondness for this part of town, occasionally walking and picking blueberries here, and mentioning it and its inhabitants frequently in his works. His Journals also recount his mother's recollections of the farm, and include at least one story about Capt. Minot.

Mrs. Minot inherited only half the house and one third of the farm. After her husband's death she moved to Concord center, to #201 Lexington Road. In 1817 the west half of the house was occupied by the Robert Kathren family. Mrs. Minot died in 1830, and the farm house was sold out of the family.

Over much of the middle part of the nineteenth century the house had a succession of tenants, and apparently several different owners as well. Among the tenants was Peter Hutchinson, who lived here in the last years of his life. (See #324 Bedford Street.) Colburn Hadlock, manager of the Middlesex Hotel after it was rebuilt following a fire in the 1840's, owned and lived in the house for a few years in the late 1840's. He kept pigs on the farm, feeding them on refuse from the hotel, and left so many pieces of broken dishes in one field that Thoreau remarked that it should be called "Crockery Field." Asa Brooks, the next owner, apparently acquired the farm in 1848, and is shown here on the map of 1852. George Ellis is shown as owner on the 1856 map.

In 1870 the property was purchased by farmer William Tibbetts. He evidently sold it to F.P. Parks, who is shown on the 1875 map as owning both it and the adjoining farm at #550 Old Bedford Road. It was apparently Mr. Parks who moved the old John Wheeler farmhouse here to its present site. By 1878, however, Tibbetts bought back the portion of the property at #215, and built the house there on the site of the old farmhouse.

It is not clear exactly when #341 was acquired by members of the Peterson family, but it appears that by 1886 this was the residence of farmer Peter Peterson, one of several Scandinavian farmers who settled in the east quarter. By 1905 both he and his son Carl Peterson are shown on Virginia Road. Another son, Thomas Peterson, still remembered as the longtime owner of Concord Clothing Company on Walden Street, was born here. The property was purchased by James Breen in about 1910, and remains in the Breen family today.



CON. 177 ✓ 88

wn Concord

reet 341 Virginia Rd

me Thoreau

iginal Use _____

esent Use _____

esent Owner _____

te pre-1700 (?) Style older house made over

urce of Date Mrs Wheeler

chitect _____

3. CONDITION: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated Moved Altered Mrs Wheeler didn't say how

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

4. DESCRIPTION

FOUNDATION/BASEMENT: High Regular Low Material: brick

WALL COVER: Wood clapboard Brick Stone Other _____

STORIES: 1 2 3 4 CHIMNEYS: 1 2 3 4 Center End Cluster Elaborate Irregular

ATTACHMENTS: Wings Ell Shed Dependency E side, also shed Simple/Complex

PORCHES: 1 2 3 4 Portico Balcony E side 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: Side door front side; also door center

Windows: Spacing: Regular/Irregular Identical/Varied 2/2

Corners: Plain Pilasters Quoins Obscured _____

OUTBUILDINGS _____ LANDSCAPING _____

5. Indicate location of structure on map below

6. Footage of structure from street 20
Property has _____ feet frontage on street

Recorder aw

For _____

Photo 68-498

68-498

8-09-065. 1-088

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

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)

Born here July 12, 1817
Suspect house was added to - perhaps it was original house - and

built by Sgt. Thomas Wheeler (died 1704) occupied by son
Deacon John Wheeler who died 1736. Grandson John lived
at piggery with sister Martha -
Deacon John's brother Timothy lived at Algeo place
(called pine hill farm)

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

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Original Owner:

Deed Information: Book Number _____ Page _____, _____ Registry of Deeds

Original yellow form: Eligibility file _____
Copies: Inventory form ☒ _____
Town file(w/corresp.) _____
Macris _____
NR director _____

CON. 177

Community: Concord

MHC OPINION: ELIGIBILITY FOR NATIONAL REGISTER

Date Received: 12/11/95

Date Due:

Date Reviewed: 1/3/96

Type: ☒ Individual ☐ District (Attach map indicating boundaries)

Name: Deacon John Wheeler Ho./Thoreau Birthplace

Inventory Form: CON.177

Address: 341 Virginia Rd.

Requested by: Doris Smith, Concord Meadows Association

Action: ☐ Honor ☐ ITC ☐ Grant ☐ R & C ☒ Other: Endangered

Agency:

Staff in charge of Review: TA/BF

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

☒ Eligible
☐ Eligible, also in district
☐ Eligible only in district
☐ Ineligible
☐ More information needed

DISTRICTS

☐ Eligible
☐ Ineligible
☐ More information needed

CRITERIA: ☒ A ☒ B ☐ Possibly C ☐ Possibly D

LEVEL: ☒ Local ☐ State ☐ National

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE by Michael Steinitz

Although the property has various historical associations, MHC staff has had to address several issues related to this property that might preclude eligibility for National Register listing. Birthplaces and moved buildings are specifically identified as classes of properties that are not usually considered eligible for listing on the National Register. The property at 341 Virginia Road falls into both of these categories.

Birthplaces and graves which otherwise have little association with historic figures are usually not eligible for listing on the National Register. In the case of Henry Thoreau, who spent only the first year of his life in the house, at least two other Concord properties associated with his productive life - the **Thoreau-Alcott House** (listed in 1976) and **Walden Pond** (listed in 1966) - are already listed on the National Register. Moreover, the property was moved ca. 1878, and many of its distinctive architectural features were lost or altered at that time. Moved properties and properties that have undergone major alterations may not be eligible for the National Register.

Despite these concerns, the Massachusetts Historical Commission staff is of the opinion that the **Deacon John Wheeler House - Thoreau Birthplace**, 341 Virginia Road, is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic places. The property, with its historic outbuildings and surrounding fields, meets National Register **Criterion A** (associations with events that have contributed to broad patterns of history) for its associations with the nineteenth and early twentieth century agricultural history of Concord. Although moved a short distance in 1878 - either within the same farm parcel or to an adjacent Virginia Road parcel - the property appears to meet National Register special **Criteria Consideration B** for moved buildings. The alterations that took place at this time, including removal of the central chimney stack and the rear leanto, were typical of late 19th century "modernizations" of older buildings, and part of the process of configuring a farmstead complex at the new site.

Although other historic properties in Concord more directly associated with the productive life of Henry David Thoreau are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 341 Virginia Road has long been recognized among the places in Concord associated with the life of Thoreau. Soon after his death, Thoreau's Birthplace, at its new Virginia Road location, was widely noted in the literature on Thoreau, and it quickly became one of the local pilgrimage sites visited by Thoreau enthusiasts. Given the exceptional significance of Thoreau as a literary figure, and the historical recognition of 341 Virginia Road as the house in which he was born, MHC staff is of the opinion that the property does meet National Register **Criterion B** (associations with the lives of persons significant in the past) for its associations with Thoreau, and meets National Register special **Criteria Consideration C** for birthplaces and graves.

The extent of physical alterations to the house during and after its relocation in the late 19th century prevent this property from being eligible for listing under National Register **Criterion C** (design or construction representative of a type or period) as a Colonial or Federal period house. However, 341 Virginia Road may be eligible for listing as representing the design of a late 19th/early 20th century farmstead, one that would include the modified house and its associated agricultural outbuildings and setting. An argument for listing based on this criterion would need to identify construction dates for the surviving outbuildings, and discuss the evolution of the farmstead during this period. MHC staff would need more information along these lines to assess eligibility under **Criterion C**.

Finally, given its possible, although not fully substantiated, pre-1736 construction date, the house at 341 Virginia Road may also retain structural and architectural features that contain information related to Massachusetts First Period (pre-1730) building technology and design. Additional analysis and documentation of actual surviving First Period architectural fabric in the building would be necessary for MHC staff to assess whether or not the property might yield important information that would make it eligible for listing on the National Register under **Criterion D** (for significant research potential). An interior examination of the building framing by an architectural historian well-versed in First Period architecture might provide a good initial assessment.