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A New Trail for Concord to Connect Two Historic Themes



A view in area of trail proposed by Minute Man National Historical Park, the Town of Concord, and The Thoreau Farm Trust. Photo: Nick Reinhardt

Minute Man National Historical Park, the Town of Concord, and The Thoreau Farm Trust announce a three-way public-private partnership to establish a trail linking the Battle Road Trail with Thoreau Farm. The trail alignment will be identified through a public planning process, but the goal for the trail will result in an experience north from the Battle Road Trail to join with the Town's wooded upland, and end at Thoreau Farm, the house on Virginia Road where Thoreau was born. The trail combines an ecologically rich landscape of woodland, wetland, agriculture and edge habitats, with views across the Park's historic farmlands. In the Concord Select Board's letter of support, Chair Matthew Johnson noted the proposed trail "aligns with the *Envision Concord* Long Range Plan goals of increasing physical and social connectivity ... and enhancing connections to walking trails between open spaces and village centers."

"The opportunity to enhance the visitor experience through a new trail connection between Minute Man National Historical Park via Town land to reach Thoreau Farm will strengthen the relationship between these natural and cultural sites for the enjoyment of all," stated Minute Man National Historical Park Superintendent Simone Monteleone. Court Booth, a founding member of the Thoreau Farm Trust, recognizes the potential of this public-private partnership to enhance the town. Booth adds, "We are confident that the trail will appeal to walkers from near and far, history enthusiasts, naturalists, and neighbors seeking a path to town center. People who

experience the trail's unique vistas will witness climate change up close, and be inspired to care for local land.”

The project came into being years ago from a shared belief in the opportunity to make an on the ground connection between two critical themes of Concord history: the 18th-century American Revolution, and the 19th-century revolution of thought that brought us Emerson, Thoreau and the Transcendentalists. Both arose in Concord. Both were seedbeds for political and social change that ultimately reverberated around the world.

In his new book, *The Transcendentalists and Their World*, social historian and Concord resident Robert Gross explains that the colonists initially worked as a close interdependent community. Over time, through shifts in trade and agriculture, linking to wider markets, and through their own social and religious choices, the townspeople pulled away from the collective legacy of the past and put a new premium on individual action and voluntary association. By the time Emerson and Thoreau appeared on the scene, they were open to the new and transformative ideas that we associate with Transcendentalism. Public historian Jayne Gordon writes, "whereas the people represented by the Minute Men were breaking away from political dependence on the Old World, the people represented by Emerson and Thoreau were breaking away from intellectual and cultural dependence." Hence, what Gordon and other scholars refer to as "The Two Revolutions." The proposed connector trail would link these two revolutions along a footpath that includes one of Concord's most beautiful landscapes.

“The trail project brings together history, ecology, and recreation in a tangible, and meaningful way,” said Kerry Lafleur, Town Manager. “I’m grateful to the Natural Resources Commission and the Trails Committee, in addition to the Minute Man National Historical Park and the Thoreau Farm Trust, for having the vision and commitment to bring this to life and know that it will resonate just as strongly with our community as the project moves forward.”

General agreements have been signed by each party. The next steps are for the National Park Service to initiate a philanthropic partnership agreement and a partner design and construction agreement. These will address the trail's design, review, compliance, permitting, construction, and costs. Thoreau Farm will fund the multiyear project and include an endowment for maintenance, in collaboration with partners from the park and town.

Thoreau Farm welcomes the opportunity to announce the long-planned project and looks forward to engaging with organizations and trail enthusiasts. Minute Man National Historical Park, the town, and Thoreau Farm have been encouraged by the enthusiasm so many already have expressed and are grateful to the Concord Natural Resources Commission and the trails committee for their stalwart support, and to Massachusetts Audubon for its two studies of the proposal.