## May 23rd, 2011 When Duty Whispers: Concord and

the Civil War by Jeanne Schinto

Concord, Massachusetts by Jeanne Schinto

Concord Museum,

The first thing a visitor sees, even before entering this remarkable exhibit at the Concord Museum in Concord,

Massachusetts, is a section of white picket fence draped with black fabric. One might logically think it's to commemorate the Civil War dead, but instead it represents a statement of personal conviction. The statement was made originally on

July 4, 1855, six years before the war began. While other houses in Concord were festooned in red, white, and blue that day, Ralph Waldo Emerson's wife, Lidian, a fervent

abolitionist, chose the mourning color for the fence and gateposts in front of her house as a protest against the continuation of States. "She used her gate like a bumper

slavery in the United sticker," said David F. Wood, the museum's curator, the exhibit's organizer, and the one whose idea it was to echo Lidian Emerson's graphic gesture. But the fence in this exhibit serves a

different purpose. In

Wood's words, "It's a reminder of the domestic nature of these issues that are certainly national in character, scope, and importance but which are worked out in the home." In choosing the objects for When Duty Whispers: Concord and the Civil War, some of them never before exhibited, Wood said he intended to stress "the familial nature,

the community

aspect" of the Civil

years ago is being

country.

commemorated by

museums and events

"When you take this

War, whose start 150

causes] apart, what it comes down to is people sitting across from each other at a tea table talking-at least before the shooting war actually began." Concord is closely associated in most people's minds with our country's war for independence. On April 19, 1775, Concord's militia turned out to

confront the British

regulars at the North

Bridge during the

first battle of the

Revolution. As this

exhibit makes clear,

early to the cause of

Concord also was

American

abolition, already being one of the most radically antislavery communities in the nation in the 1830's and 1840's. Anti-Slavery Society Concord's Mary Merrick Brooks, whose portrait is hanging in the exhibit, was a driving force behind that group. As its secretary, she corresponded frequently with Wendell Phillips and other abolitionist orators who were

community

repeatedly at the

Garrison were

Concord Lyceum.

"Phillips and William

familiar with Mary

parlor," said Wood.

"They sat there and

were soundly hated

in other parts of the

country, including

talked. And they

Merrick Brooks's

community activist. She wanted results."

Union. It was written and directed by another Concordian destined to do great things, Louisa May Alcott. "It was her first directorial role, and it was for the benefit of abolition," said Wood. Henry David Thoreau's mother, Cynthia, and sisters Sophia and Helen were Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society members too. An undated letter to Helen from Frederick Douglass is part of the exhibit. One subject it discusses is the "total failure" of abolitionist meetings in nearby Sudbury, Framingham, and Bedford, Massachusetts. There isn't any context to the remark-it's the only known piece of correspondence

compared to that of its neighbors.

but he picked up a gun." famous of the two Black regiments from the state. Wood, who wrote AnObservant Eye: The Thoreau Collection at the Concord Museum, added, "Thoreau said he knew there were things worth dying for. The example of John Brown told him there were things worth killing for. That's quite a difference."

Just as Concord supported the cause intellectually and financially early on, it was also the setting for a precocious display of military readiness. In September 1859, Massachusetts Governor Nathaniel Banks ordered an unusual militia muster, one that included companies from all across the state. Some 6000 men in uniform gathered in Concord for three days of military exercises. "That was the largest assemblage of troops ever in the United States," said Wood, who included in the exhibit an 1860 lithograph that shows a

replies, I can." The April 19 pistol in the exhibit is engraved on the ivory grips to "Joseph Derby Jr./ 1st Lieutenant,/ Co. G. 5th Regiment. Mass. Volunteer/ Infantry." Derby was not a "youth"-he was 40 years old at enlistment-but he came from a family with a history of military service to country. His father had served Concord in the War of 1812, and his grandfather had fought in the American Revolution. Concord families gave their men. They also continued to give money. Sarah A. Ripley of Concord gave both. A war tax receipt in the exhibit

shows that on July 18, 1862, she paid \$6.55 in a town assessment for

serving in the infantry at the time. He died while returning home on

Concordians also gave of themselves. For six weeks in 1862-63 Louisa

D.C., and the copper kettle she used there is on display. Alcott wrote

about that experience in *Hospital Sketches*, basing it on her now-lost

letters home. The book mentions a teakettle at one point, in a

May Alcott nursed soldiers at the Union Hotel Hospital in Washington,

benefit of "our Soldiers." The signage says her son Ezra Ripley was

board the hospital ship *Glasgow*, July 28, 1863.

The theme of the war's aftermath ends the exhibit in items such as a portrait of an old war veteran, a postcard of Concord's Civil War memorial, and a G.A.R. belt. G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) was an organization of Union veterans that was active politically in the period leading up to the First World War. It was formed in 1866; the last member died 90 years later. The belt in the exhibit belonged to Warren F. Flagg, a Concord farmer. At the opening ceremony of the exhibit on April 14, the Concord Museum's executive director, Peggy Burke, made sure to mention "our

current time of war" and the sacrifices being made today. In the exhibit

museum will mail them. The effort is in keeping with the single most

powerful theme of When Duty Whispers. It is that the actions of mere

individuals, inspired by their personal convictions, can make a difference.

The museum is participating in Blue Star Museums federal program that

families from Memorial Day through Labor Day. The exhibit closes on

offers free admission to all active-duty military personnel and their

September 18.

there is a desk where people can write a postcard to a soldier. The

At the top, from the **Concord Museum's** collection, the pistol that was presented to Joseph

Model 1860 Colt revolver from the collection of Brad Bigham.

At bottom, from the Concord Museum collection, a

Remington revolver. Photograph by Joel Bohy.

Derby Jr. on April 19,

1861, before his departure

with the 5th Massachusetts

Regiment. In the middle, a

This is the kettle used by

Louisa May Alcott (1832-

1862-63 while she nursed

Union soldiers at Union

Washington, D.C. The

kettle was presented by

Alcott to Cummings Davis,

Confederate First National

whose collection initially

This small, homemade

1888) for six weeks in

Hotel Hospital in

formed the Concord Museum. Photograph by David Bohl.

by David Bohl.

flag from the Concord Museum's collection was

in the field. "It's the humblest of all possible objects"—a clean towel to wipe one's face—"but it actually meant a lot when too rainy, too dusty, too

movements,

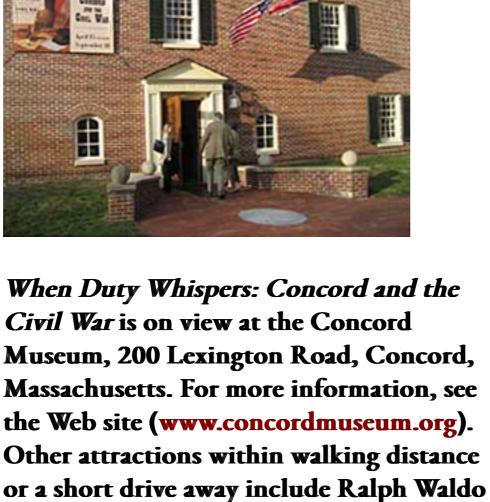
brass by W.H. Horstmann & Sons, Philadelphia, 1861-63. The name Frank Coleman is inscribed on it. There was a Frank Coleman in Company G of the 114th Pennsylvania Regiment, which fought at Gettysburg. Danner Collection, Carlisle Historical Society and Gleason Public Library. Schinto photo.

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example was made of maple, ash, leather, and The Fugitive's Story, John Rogers (1829-1904), New William Lloyd Garrison,

York, 1869, depicts in plaster an imaginary scene in which

When Duty Whispers: Concord and the Civil War is on view at the Concord



Emerson's house, the Alcott family's Orchard House, the Old Manse, and North Bridge. Schinto photo. 55# REGIMENT SSACHUSETTS Vo



the Middlesex School in Concord by the family of Colonel Hallowell. Photograph by Joel Haskell. There are several examples of headgear in the exhibit, including this forage cap made of wool, leather, gilt bullion, and gilt brass. States had to help provide their own uniforms at the beginning of the war, so



of all kinds across the An 1852 conté crayon-on-paper portrait of

thing [the war and its Anti-Slavery Society. For more information

Mary Merrick Brooks (1801-1868) by

about the organization, including its

original members, see the Web site of the

Drinking Gourd Project, a newly formed,

Concord-based nonprofit organization

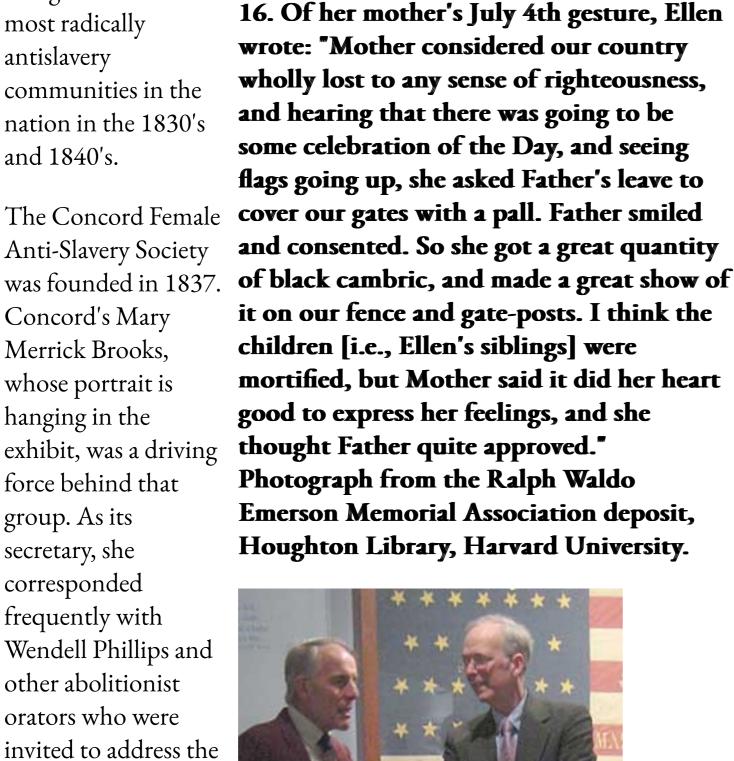
Alonzo Hartwell (1805-1873). Brooks was

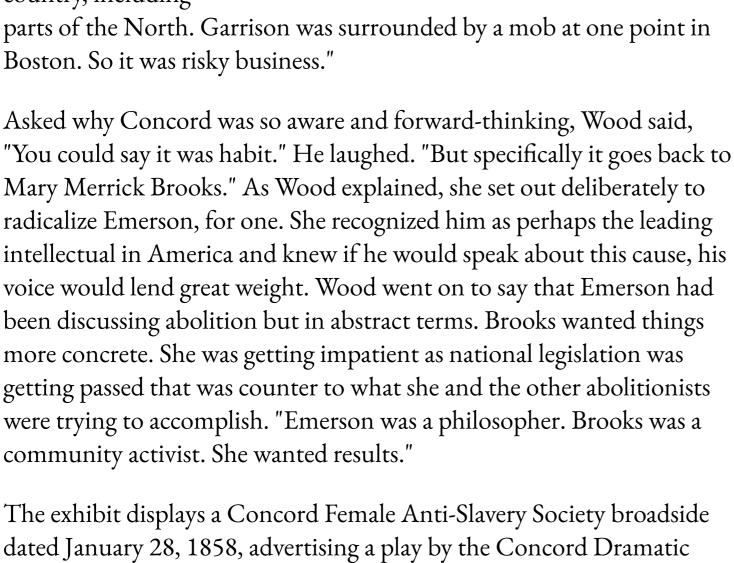
a founding member of the Concord Female

focused on raising awareness of Concord's African and abolitionist history from the 17th through the 19th centuries (http://drinkinggourd.cchumanrights.org). Photograph by David Bohl.

Ellen Emerson, eldest daughter of Lidian

and Ralph Waldo Emerson, in 1855 at age





Concord Museum curator David F. Wood

Massachusetts, makers of the wooden case

that houses the 55th Regiment's flag

(on right) and Will Twombly of

Spokeshave Design, Watertown,

behind them. Schinto photo.

said to have been a gift to Henry David Thoreau from a former slave he helped escape that way. The piece is on display. "As people in Concord stated over and over again, 'It's just like 1775.' They were breaking the law, and they knew it, but in favor of a higher law," said Wood. Norwood Penrose Hallowell of Concord said it was the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law that made an abolitionist of him, recounted Wood, who often speaks of historical, bygone Concordians as if he were personally acquainted with them. "Hallowell was a Quaker, Specifically, Hallowell led the 55th Massachusetts Volunteers, the less

between the two-but it's further proof of Concord's progressive nature as

undertaking illegal activities, such as helping people get to Canada via the

Underground Railroad. A Staffordshire figure depicting two of the main

characters in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is

After passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, Concordians began

with his integrity and abilities." The list includes the pledges of Ralph Waldo Emerson (\$50), "A Lady" (\$25), and "a child" (\$.55). The total (\$991.55) helped finance John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry four months later. That's conviction, but there's something else in the exhibit that's even more compelling on the subject of Brown and his Concord supporters. It's an invoice dated December 1860-July 1861. Following the raid on Harpers Ferry, after Brown was executed for treason, those in Concord who helped finance the uprising went on to finance the education of the younger Brown children. This invoice is for 14-year-old Sarah's expenses

as a student at Frank Sanborn's school in Concord, including such things

as a gymnastic dress, a cloak, bonnet, shoes, food, and pocket money.

In May 1859 Brown visited Concord, and the exhibit includes a pledge

weapons and money. Bronson Alcott wrote of the evening that many of

of his plans without asking particulars, such confidence does he inspire

the "best" people in town came to hear him, and some contributed "in aid

list for the "Relief of the Free State Citizens of Kansas" that was made

shortly afterward. Brown spoke in Concord's Town Hall, asking for

bird's-eye view of the event. It is based on a painting by J.B. Bachelder, who later became the leading historian of the Battle of Gettysburg. "Governor Banks was arming the troops because he knew war was coming," said Wood. "He knew; everybody knew. When you look at the patent dates on many of the firearms in the exhibition, they have 1859 on them." Objects in the exhibit came not only from the Concord Museum's collection, but also from the William Munroe Special Collections at the Concord Free Public Library; the Carlisle Historical Society; the Concord Art Association; the Middlesex School; and private collections,

including a significant group of Springfield arms. There are also swords,

Among those pieces is one of the pistols presented to every officer upon

Concord's Billiards, Chess and Whist Club to these men who heeded the

his departure from Concord on April 19, 1861. They were a gift from

scabbards, a saber, uniforms, hats, and other accoutrements of the

battlefield.

first whispered call to duty just five days after the Battle of Fort Sumter. That phrase of the exhibit's title comes from an Emerson poem, "Voluntaries," written in 1863 to honor the men of a later regiment, the Massachusetts 54th. It says, in part: "So nigh is grandeur to our dust,/ So near is God to man,/ When duty whispers low, Thou must,/ The youth

description of a particularly frustrating moment: "I am dressing Sam Dammer's shoulder; and, having cleansed the wound, look about for some strips of adhesive plaster to hold on the little square of wet linen which is to cover the gunshot wound; the case is not in the tray; Frank, the sleepy, half-sick attendant, knows nothing of it; we rummage high and low; Sam is tired, and fumes; Frank dawdles and yawns; the men advise and laugh at the flurry; I feel like a boiling tea-kettle, with the lid ready to fly off and damage somebody."

The black-draped gate at the entrance to the exhibit. Schinto photo.

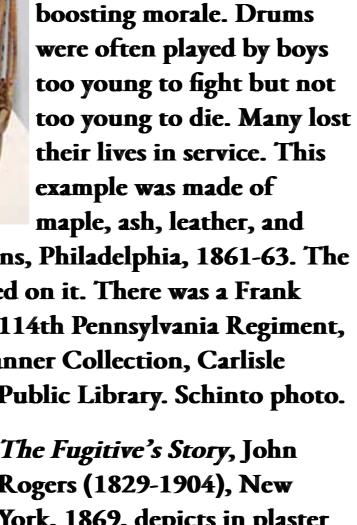
probably made for patriotic rather than military use, as it is not of regulation size for national colors. The label pinned to it—"From Baltimore April 19, 1861"—is undoubtedly a fictional touch, said David Wood. Photograph So-called crash towels like this one were made of a very coarse plain-weave

the soldiers got them," said David Wood. "It was always hot, too cold." No, it's never a good day for war. Schinto photo. War drums played an important role at camp and in the field, regulating

linen by students at Miss

Concord and sent to troops

Dillingham's School in



Greenleaf Whittier listen to the story of a fugitive slave mother with child in arms. Gift of Russell H. Kettell to the Concord Museum. Schinto

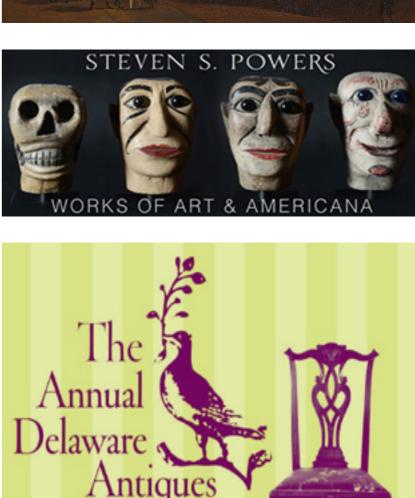
photo. (For more about John

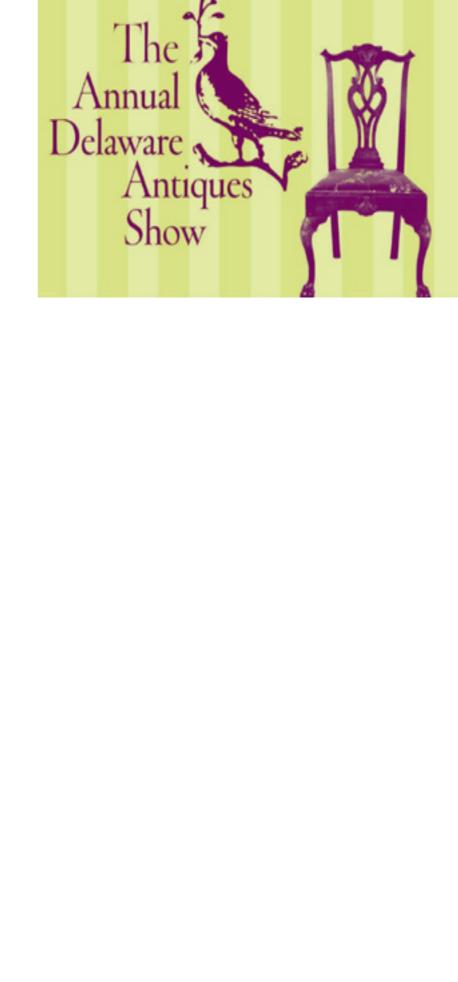
Rogers see p. 24-C).

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RACHEL DAVIS FINE RTS









communicating messages,

Henry Ward Beecher, and John

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