

THE PEOPLE OF CONCORD:

LESLIE PERRIN WILSON¹

2007

July 1: Leslie Perrin Wilson's IN HISTORY'S EMBRACE: PAST AND PRESENT IN CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS was issued by the Hollis Publishing Company.

A new collection of historical anecdotes

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Though tourists fill its streets and sidewalks every day, the town of Concord, Massachusetts (pop. 17,000) is not the kind of static living history museum one encounters in Sturbridge Village (Mass.) or Williamsburg (Va.). Founded in 1635, America's oldest inland town is a thriving community where life has not stopped with a particular year or decade, and where current residents deal with contemporary life and its challenges. The reputation of the town is connected to a number of periods in history; so remembering it merely as the site of the first battle of the American Revolution or as the home of the Transcendentalists results in ignoring other important events. Indeed, History -with a capital H!- intersects with this town so often that we continue to marvel at the assortment of real-life stories that have happened here.

Perhaps no one knows these tales better than Leslie Perrin Wilson, curator of the William Munroe Special Collections at the Concord Free Public Library. Here she presents 20 of her most popular "Historic Concord" columns, pieces that originally appeared in The Concord Journal newspaper. With the publication of this volume, these vignettes can now entertain and enlighten a wider audience. Reproductions of relevant vintage photos are also scattered throughout the pages, lending charm and interest to selected accounts. Readers will enjoy learning about key celebrations of the famous April 19th battle, including the anticipated visit of Robert Frost for the 150th anniversary. They'll see once again the Whipping Post Elm and wonder about its age and disturbing name. Fans of the Transcendentalists will be happy to see a few mentions of Thoreau and Emerson in a tale or two. And of course, the story of William Munroe serves to showcase the founding of the public library, the town's source of historic information. But the true gems of the book are the oddities that jump out to surprise us. Should the whole town have been preserved in time, like Williamsburg was? Why were so many buildings moved from street to street? What happened to the senior citizen who wandered away from Bronson Alcott's School of Philosophy in 1887? And who would ever guess that such a small town had been in the running to host the headquarters of the United Nations?

1. This article is a "stub," to be added to later.

Leslie Wilson provides for us a casual reading experience that will answer some questions about Concord but will raise a few more. IN HISTORY'S EMBRACE serves as a quirky supplement and update to such traditional Concord histories as Ruth Wheeler's CONCORD: CLIMATE FOR FREEDOM (1967) and Lemuel Shattuck's HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF CONCORD, MASS. (1835/1985). The text still doesn't solve the age-old riddle: Why was all this stuff destined to happen HERE???



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Prepared: August 12, 2007

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