Editor's Pages

We are pleased to present this special issue made up of scholarship, poetry, and artwork drawn from the 2025 Annual Gathering. The theme of the conference was *Thoreau's Revolutions*, in honor of the 250th anniversary of the Concord Fight at the North Bridge on April 19, 1775. Participants offered papers on "the political, social, cultural, economic, and spiritual revolutions" that shaped Thoreau's world, finding numerous, and often ingenious, ways to explore Thoreau's ideas on revolution*s*, plural.[1]

As well as commemorating last year's Patriot's Day, this issue is also intended to mark the 250th anniversary of the Continental Congress's adopting the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. We are grateful to our contributors and reviewers (many of whom read multiple submissions) who helped make this issue possible.

The painting on our cover is "A View of the Town of Concord," a beautifully-rendered copy by Timothy Martin Minot (1757-1837) of one of Amos Doolittle's famous engravings of the events of April 19, 1775. (Figure 1.) Thoreau saw Minot's painting at the home of Mrs. Merry Merrick Brooks, the formidable abolitionist and secretary of the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society. (Minot was a relative of Mrs. Brooks.) It must be said, however, that Thoreau was not so much interested in the depiction of Redcoats in formation than in identifying landmarks of the town; in fact, he calls the painting an "old picture of Concord" (October 24, 1855; *OJT* 19). "A View" now hangs in the Concord Museum. The placard states that it is "a reminder that for America's enslaved, the revolution begun on April 19th remained unfinished." To this point, the 1760 iteration of the North Bridge where the Provincials met the British in 1775 required the work of twenty-eight laborers, some of them abutters on the river—as well as men enslaved by Timothy and Nathan Billings. (These two brothers would later fight with Captain William Smith's company in 1775.)[2] It is

Figure 1. "A View of the Town of Concord, April 19, 1775," after Amos Doolittle, "View of the Center of Concord" (Plate), Timothy Martin Minot, Massachusetts, about 1825. Concord Museum Collection, Bequest of Mrs. Stedman Buttrick, Sr.; Pi414.

worth dwelling on the idea of an *unfinished revolution*, an idea as old as the founding of the nation, for there is something aspirational in it. In 1776, for example, the free Black clergyman and veteran of the Revolutionary War, Lemuel Haynes, expressed this hope as "Liberty Further Extended," the short title of his challenge to the Declaration of Independence.[3] True, *unfinished*, or *incomplete*, acknowledges the shortcomings of America's founding documents: liberty and equality were denied to enslaved and free African Americans, Indigenous people, women, and men who did not own property. But *unfinished* allows for possibility, for revision, rectification—and amendment.[4] In this semi-quintennial year, we stand, as Thoreau said of himself and his moment, "on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future" (*Walden* 17). It is up to us to make that future.

Brent Ranalli reviews the history of economic inequality in "Henry Thoreau, Thomas Paine, and Maldistribution of Land and Wealth," and imagines a provocative solution in Thomas Paine's "prescription for a *fair sharing of common wealth*." Ranalli concludes: "Our job description on this planet is basically 'receiver of free gifts,' and it would behoove us to think of ourselves that way, and to accept and share the gifts of Nature graciously and with humility." Kate Culkin, in "Blazing Bosoms: Louisa May Alcott and Ellen Tucker Emerson on Suffrage and the Concord Centennial," explores the very different views Alcott and Emerson held on women's suffrage while arguing that both were committed to making sure women and their work were recognized, not only behind the scenes at the 1875 Centennial of the Concord Fight, but more widely in the world.

Albena Bakratcheva's "Thoreau's 'Peaceable Revolution' and the Eastern European 'Velvet Revolutions' of the Late Twentieth Century," is particularly timely. (*Velvet Revolution* refers to the peaceful transition of power from the Communist Party to a parliamentary republic in 1989.) Bakratcheva asks: "If the twentieth century was mostly listening and responding to Thoreau the salubrious democrat and the obstructive individualist, which style of Thoreau's dissent, if any, will the twenty-first choose to adhere to?"

In "Tools of Their Tools: Thoreau on Technology, Abolitionism, and Disobedience," Peter Wirzbiki close-reads Thoreau's metaphorical uses of the word *tool* to describe the "everyday existential despair" of many Americans, whose "thoughtlessness and careerism paved

the way for the willingness of some to collaborate with extraordinary profound injustice." It is remarkable how often Thoreau invoked the vocabulary of mechanized labor in his critique of his time. Such language still resonates.

Eric D. Lehman argues for approaching the video game, *Walden: A Game*, on its own terms in "*Walden: A Game* and the Paradox of the Digital Revolution," in part by using adaptation theory, which, as Lehman says, "allows for the continued transformation of, and, at the same time, continuation of, texts, like Thoreau's writings." Moreover, though a virtual space, the way that the game foregrounds Thoreauvian values "is designed as a tool that could help someone learn wisdom." We're happy to share a number of screenshots in the essay to entice readers into a digital Waldenscape. In "A Walking Revolution: Thoreau's Mountain Excursion," David H. Gordon contemplates the radicalness of Thoreau's walking—an activist and deliberate practice that we might consider emulating. "Driving," Gordon notes, "turns nature into scenery, something one sees through the windshield."

Lois Brown, in "White Hot Rage: Thoreau, John Brown and Revelatory Resistance," quotes the Fugitive Slave Act in some detail—a text worth reading (or rereading) for igniting "white hot rage." Brown argues that the "1850 Fugitive Slave Act tampered with the ways in which Thoreau navigated the world." She explores what she calls Thoreau's "understanding of necessary revolutions," and the distinction between guiltlessness and innocence that both John Brown and Thoreau made in their very different contexts.

Richard Higgins, in "Thoreau's Inner Revolution," offers a florilegium, as it were, of what Thoreau had to say about revolution, which, as Higgins argues, he viewed as incomplete if one did not examine one's own life:

> In order to truly honor 1775, Thoreau believed, another, more interior revolution was needed, similar to the experiment in self-emancipation he would undertake at Walden Pond beginning on Independence Day in 1845.

In "Thoreau and the Revolutionary Indigenous Landscape," John J. Kucich asks, "What does it mean to speak for Nature on stolen land? How can we best understand Native history, and Native presence, in our own backyard?" He answers these questions by telling the story

of the Nashobah and their homeland, located in what is now called Littleton, Massachusetts, and describes how the Nashobah are reestablishing their connection to the land of their ancestors—and what non-Native folks might learn from Indigenous celebrations of place and history.

Alice de Galzain, in "Revolutionary Women: Harriot Kezia Hunt and Caroline Healey Dall on Self-Culture and Women's Health," recuperates the work of these two women who, influenced by Margaret Fuller, made the then-radical argument that women ought to be educated about their own health, which would in turn, they understood, lead to greater bodily autonomy and agency. In short, Hunt and Dall were committed to furthering the revolution begun in 1775.

Jake McGinnis, in "Excursions in the Anthropocene: Henry David Thoreau, Greta Thunberg, and the Revolutionary Potential of Travel Writing," draws some fascinating parallels between Thunberg's travel diary, "Six Months on a Panet in Crisis," and Thoreau's "excursions" (as Emerson apparently named the posthumous collection of essays edited by Sophia Thoreau). McGinnis asks us to think about Thoreau as a travel writer who understands "the value of any trip, whether just beyond the yard or much further afield, is in how it unsettles our view of the world back home."

We include three poems that address the theme of revolution in its multiplicities. Catherine Staples, in "Spring Turnover," meditates on the phenomenon known as *lake stratification*, when, in spring, ice melts, and surface water warms and sinks; the deeper, colder water rises, which then stabilizes and warms; this process reverses in the fall. This happens at Walden Pond, as open-water swimmers well know. Staples writes: "The dark heart of the kettle pond surges upward. /An unseen revolution." Alexander Levering Kern, in "Non-retaliation," urges us to "step aside" and let the (Sisyphean) unmovable object roll unimpeded. Kern dedicates "Walden's Trees" to his Quaker grandparents—activists, I want to note, who were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for their work as citizen diplomats advocating for the Law of the Seas Treaty.

We also offer two creative-nonfiction pieces. The nation, declared Thoreau in *Walden*, "lives too fast." Worse, we "do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us" (92). In "'It Lives Too Fast.' Henry Thoreau and the Revolution of the Railroad," Richard Piccarreto, in serious play, wonders "Do we ride on our revolutions or do our revolutions ride on us?" Piccarreto takes *revolution* as not only referring to the turning

wheels of the locomotive—the "cars," as Thoreau called them—but also to the costs, social and moral, of the railroad as it clattered through Concord.

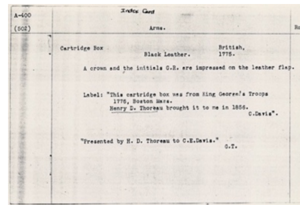
Both elegiac and hopeful, Alireza Taggarreh's piece, "Evolution for Revolutions," can be profitably read alongside Bakratcheva's "Peaceable Kingdom" discussed above: Thoreau's revolutions had, and have, a global reach. Taggarreh thinks through Thoreau's choice to live at Walden Pond and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's lack of choice as he endured eight years in the Russian Gulag. Quoting Thoreau's well-known declaration that he "had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society" (*Walden* 140), Taggarreh describes Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* as revealing "a society where the first and second chair—those representing solitude and friendship—have been sacrificed on the altar of collectivism. In the Gulag privacy is a crime and friendship a risk."

The Thoreau Society sponsored its first juried art exhibit at the 2025 Annual Gathering and displayed the artwork at the conference. We're pleased to include some of that art here. (The original color versions can be found on the Thoreau Society website; see "Publications and Resources" and click on "Learn about the Saunterer.") In the woodcut, *More Day to Dawn*, Erin Kahn depicts Thoreau's house at Walden as a font of blazing light. In his collage, Michael Mazenko riffs on the 80s punk rallying cry, *fight the power*, by transferring that power to the pencil in *Write the Power, No.1—Thoreau.* Suzanne Revy, in *Greenough Wetlands*, puts together a photographic triptych of tranquil waving grasses—three scenes that Thoreau could have encountered on any one of his walks. John Roman, in *Henry Thoreau, August 1847*, portrays a young Thoreau on a height, gazing over the landscape: all potential and possibility.

This issue's essays, poetry, creative non-fiction, and art demonstrate how the idea of revolution can be expressed in multiple and varying ways. I want to add to this trove by describing two examples of the material history of that revolution begun in Concord—and their connection to Thoreau. The Concord Museum, in its rooms dedicated to the Revolutionary War, includes a British cartridge box dated to 1775 that Thoreau gave to his quirky neighbor, E. Cummings Davis, an assiduous collector of all thing Concord (Figures 2a and 2b.) His collection forms the core of the Concord Museum's holdings—he is the one who preserved and then donated Thoreau's desk and bed to the

Museum. Thoreau mentions this cartridge box in a Journal entry in which he rails against the idea of private ownership of "the natural features which make a township–handsome." Rather, rivers, meadows, and forests should be common to all, and actively preserved. Conflicted, and with some bitterness, he adds: "We cut down the few old oaks which witnessed the transfer of the township from the Ind. To the White man–& commence–our museum with a cartridge box taken from a British soldier in 1775" (January 3, 1861; *OJT* 33). Alas, we do not know how that box came into Thoreau's hands.

Figure 2a. *Label on box:* "This Cartridge Box was from King Georges Troops 1776. Boston Mass. Henry D. Thoreau Brought it to Me in 1856."
Nine-round Cartridge Box, England, 1765-1770. Concord Museum Collection, Gift of Cummings E. Davis; A400.



Index Card

A-400
(502)

Arms.

Cartridge Box — Black Leather. — British, 1775.

A crown and the initials G.R. are impressed on the leather flap.

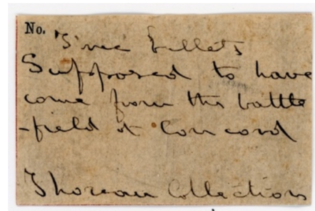
Label: "This cartridge box was from King George's Troops
1776, Boston Mass.
Henry D. Thoreau brought it to me in 1856.
C.Davis".

"Presented by H. D. Thoreau to C.E.Davis."
G.T.

Figure 2b. Accession card: "Presented by H. D. Thoreau to C. E. Davis." (A400 catalog card, Concord Museum 20250001)

The Museum also includes a display of three musket balls, a gift of the children of Daniel Ricketson. Concord Museum curator David Wood told me that it has been rumored that Thoreau found the musket balls while plowing a field owned by Emerson. And in fact, they are a part of the Thoreau collection. I'm wondering (with no factual basis!) that, if this is the case, Thoreau had given the musket balls to Ricketson, and his children in turn made a gift of them to the Museum (Figures 3a and 3b.)

Figure 3a. Musket balls, Massachusetts, 1774-1775. Concord Museum Collection, Gift of Mr. Walton Ricketson and Miss Anna Ricketson; Th69a-c.



No. Three bullets
Supposed to have
come from the battle
-field at Concord

Thoreau Collection

Figure 3b. Cardstock Label: "Three bullets Supposed to have come from the battle-field at Concord Thoreau Collection."
(Th69abc label, Concord Museum 20250001)

As I contemplate the material remains of war, especially those musket balls, I think, as readers may be doing, of Thoreau and his ability to find arrowheads, artifacts that memorialize the presence, and then the absence, of the First Peoples of Concord. Though Thoreau mentions examining a cannon ball discovered by "an Irishman . . . digging a ditch" (March 31, 1857), I cannot find anything in Thoreau's works about finding musket balls. Perhaps it is just an apocryphal story—one that, I must confess, I want to believe.

Kathleen Coyne Kelly

April 22, 2026

Notes

[1] I quote the 2025 program, which can be accessed here: www.thoreau-society.org/wp-content/uploads/Annual-Gathering-2025-Preliminary-Program-22June2025.pdf.
[2] See Coburn (14) and Concord Town Records, November 7, 1760 as included in Leonard, *Historic Structure*: "Timothy Billing for Ten Days and half two of it by his Man His own at 2s-5d per Day his Man at Two piflerenes Per Day" and "Nathaniel Billing by his Man four Days one of it in the water" (between pp. 5-6).
[3] Haynes' complete title: "Liberty Further Extended: Or Free thoughts on the illegality of Slave-keeping: Wherein those arguments that Are useed in its vindication Are plainly confuted. Together with a humble Address to such as are Concearned in the practise." Ruth Bogin discovered the essay in 1983. See her essay, "Liberty." Most recently, *The Atlantic* published a special issue in November 2025 titled *The Unfinished Revolution* because, in editor Jeffrey Goldberg's words, "we are indeed motivated by the idea that the American Revolution represents one of the most important events in the history of the planet, and its ideals continue to symbolize hope and freedom for humankind." Press release at https://www.theatlantic.com/press-releases/archive/2025/10/the-atlantic-presents-the-unfinished-revolution/684485/. October 8, 2025.
[4] Historian Jane Kamensky, "Everybody, on every side, including people who were denied even the ownership of themselves, had the sense

of possibility worth fighting for" (qtd. in Ward and Burns, *American Revolution* xiii; also as spoken in an interview in the documentary).

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