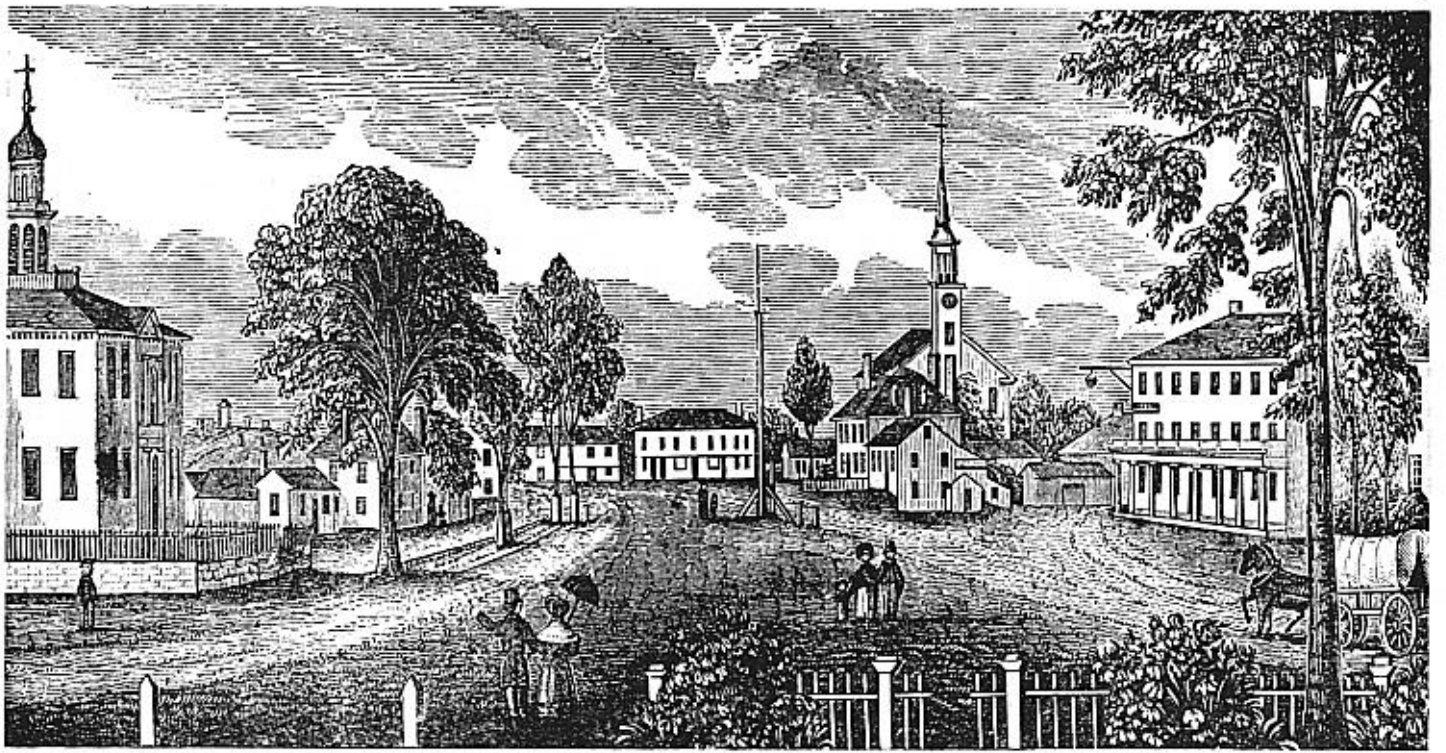

CONCORD CENTER AS IT APPEARED DURING THE EARLY YEARS OF THE LYCEUM
From a woodcut in John Warner Barber's Massachusetts *Historical Collections* (Worcester, 1840).

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The Concord Lyceum

By ALVAH H. LOW

SINCE it arose from the New England soil, it is doubtless only natural that, as a movement, the lyceum should have reached its peak in that area. The lyceum movement was by no means confined to New England, but by 1829 was flung far and wide over the southern and mid-western sections of the nation as well, although it never attained the degree of prominence in those regions which it enjoyed in New England.[1] There is no doubt, however, that, as a true product of the New England mind, the lyceum movement reached its greatest heights upon its home soil, and in no section of New England was there a lyceum which surpassed in success and prominence that which was established in the village of Concord, Massachusetts.

Concord could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a large town. Even today its population does not exceed 8,000.[2] To one entering it for the first time it appears to have changed but little during the last century. Great arching elms still throw their cool shadows over the common, and along its quiet tree-shaded streets stately homes stand primly behind their white picket fences. It was here, in this quiet New England village, that Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott and Hawthorne made their homes. It is little wonder, then, that a town which harbored so many famous American men of letters and which will always remain to such a large degree associated with the nineteenth-century Transcendentalist movement, should have been the home of the foremost American lyceum as well.

On December 3, 1828, "a large and respectable meeting of citizens of Concord was convened ... at the Centre brick school-house, pursuant to public notice given by the Rev. Dr. Ripley after the religious exercises on Thanksgiving Day," the week before, "to take into consideration the expediency of forming a Lyceum in Concord."[3] The Honorable John Keyes was chosen chairman and Lemuel Shattuck was chosen as secre-

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tary. It was unanimously agreed that a lyceum should be formed and a committee consisting of Samuel Hoar, John Keyes, Nathan Brooks, Daniel Shattuck, Daniel S. Southmayd, Samuel Burr, Daniel Stone and Lemuel Shattuck was chosen to prepare and report a constitution for the proposed society. Two weeks later the commission reported a draft of the constitution, which, after full consideration at three later meetings was, with some amendments, adopted on January 7, 1829. The following officers were chosen:

President—Reverend Dr. Ezra Ripley
First Vice-President—Josiah Davis
Second Vice-President—Reuben Brown
Treasurer—Ephraim Merriam
Recording Secretary—Lemuel Shattuck
Corresponding Secretary—Phineas Allen
Curators—Samuel Burr, Cyrus Hosmer, Daniel Stone.[4]

In Article 1 of the Constitution it was provided that "Any person living within the Centre School District in Concord may become a member of the Lyceum by annually paying into the treasury one dollar, and any person living without the limits of said district, by the payment of fifty cents."[5] "Ten dollars paid at any one time shall entitle a person to one membership for life. Persons under eighteen years of age, by paying one half the annual sum above mentioned, shall enjoy all the privileges of the society except voting."[6]

There were fifty-seven original signers of the Constitution of whom Nathan Brooks, Abiel Heywood, Daniel Shattuck, and Samuel Hoar were life members. It does not appear that there were any other life members.

The Concord Debating Club, which had been founded seven years before in 1822, merged with the Lyceum on March 11, 1829. The last question discussed by the club was whether or not the general establishment of lyceums in the Commonwealth would be productive of good to the public. The question was probably answered in the affirmative, since, after a discussion extending through two evenings, it was decided that the field was too small for both societies and the club gracefully yielded by voting "that the Concord Debating Club will cease to hold meetings, and become henceforth united to the Concord Lyceum, agreeably to a vote of the Lyceum."[7] At the time of the union there were fourteen active members of the debating club.

For the first five years nearly all the meetings were held in the old Academy building, but in 1833 it was voted to return to the brick schoolhouse on the square for the reason that the Academy was "too far from the centre of the village."[8] In 1836-1837 the meetings were held in the vestry of the Orthodox meetinghouse, and afterwards for six years in the brick schoolhouse, and then for eight years in the vestry of the First Parish Church. After 1851 the Lyceum met in the Town Hall.

It was customary to meet in September or October and to organize by choosing officers and sometimes a committee to procure subscriptions. When a sum of $75 or $100 had been guaranteed, it was considered safe to proceed to engage lecturers for the coming season. All expenditures were on a small scale at first. Many of the lecturers were townspeople and received nothing, while those coming from other places were satisfied with receiving their traveling expenses. The rest of the money went to pay for rent, fuel, and lights.

One of the purposes of Holbrook's

plan was to promote the establishing of libraries in towns and cities throughout the country. In accordance with this aim, every lyceum, no matter how small, attempted in some measure to build up a small library and also to secure a small supply of simple scientific equipment for the purpose of performing demonstrations as an accompaniment of lectures. Some of the larger lyceums managed to build up libraries of several hundred volumes. More than $50 was spent during the first season by the Concord Lyceum in providing a cabinet, maps, apparatus, and the nucleus of a library. By 1833 the Lyceum library consisted of one hundred thirteen pamphlets and some two or three volumes.[9] To what extent this library grew before it, along with the other Lyceum property, dwindled and eventually vanished with the passage of the years,[10] does not appear in the Lyceum records, but in view of the fact that the Concord Lyceum was such a vigorous, flourishing organization, it is probably safe to assume that its library compared favorably with those collected by other lyceums in towns of similar size.

The first lecture was delivered in the old courthouse on Wednesday, January 28, 1829, by Reverend Bernard Whitman of Waltham, Massachusetts, upon the subject, "Popular Superstitions." *The Yeoman's Gazette*, published in Concord at that time, says that "Full three hundred hearers were present, some of whom came from adjoining towns."[11] The variety of topics presented over the years by lecturers before this lyceum is really quite remarkable, although during the first few seasons the list of lectures seems to have been heavily weighed upon the side of subjects of a scientific or historic nature. Also during this period it is noticeable that the majority of the speakers were from the local citizenry of Concord itself or else from towns in the near vicinity.[12] But this is naturally to be expected in the case of a town organization which had in fact only appeared upon the national scene a scant two years and three months before. At this early date the large number of professional lecturers who toured the country, many of them asking and receiving large sums for their services, was still a thing of the future.

But it was not many years before the list of speakers was indeed an impressive one. Frank B. Sanborn, a resident of Concord and one-time friend of the important members of the Concord circle, and who, until his death in 1917, liked to consider himself the last of the Transcendentalists, has described for us a typical season:

> This ancient institution, founded as a debating society . . . and still meeting every winter in the Town Hall, has reckoned among its lecturers all of our local authors except Hawthorne, Louisa Alcott, and Mrs. Jane Austin (a first cousin of Professor Goodwin of Harvard, and still a popular novelist). Emerson and his brother Charles spoke there more than a hundred times,—Charles three or four times, and Waldo the rest. Thoreau gave nearly twenty lectures, and was for some years an active "curator" or secretary, for the promotion of lectures. In one of his pages, some sixty years ago, he says: "How much might be done for a town with $100. I myself have provided a select course of twenty-five lectures for a winter, together with room, fuel, and lights, for that sum,—which was no inconsiderable benefit to every inhabitant." I had the curiosity to look up this matter, and found it was in the winter of 1842-3 that these lectures were given—and surely a more noteworthy list of speakers could hardly be found in any city course. They were Emerson (three), George Bancroft, Theodore Parker, Horace Greeley, O. A. Brownson (an early friend of Thoreau), Dr. Charles T. Jackson, (the chemist and geologist, Mrs. Emerson's brother), Henry Giles, Dr. E. H. Chapin, then of Charlestown, afterwards of New York, Dr. Edward Jarvis, James Freeman Clarke, Thoreau himself, Wendell

Phillips, James Richardson, Thoreau's classmate; Charles Lane, the English friend of Alcott, then resident in Concord before going to found the community at Fruitlands; E. W. Bull, then busy inventing the far-famed Concord grape, and half a dozen speakers of less fame.[13]

The financial record of that winter stands on a page of the Lyceum records. Thoreau received and accounted for $109.20, but he left a balance of $9.20 in the treasury.[14] For the lecture room, lighted and warmed, he paid $31.25; to Bancroft, Brownson, Giles and Jackson he paid $10 each; to Dr. Chapin $8.00; to Parker $3.00; to Emerson, Phillips, Greeley and himself nothing.[15]

Many of the lecturers were entertained for the night at Emerson's house, others by the Thoreaus, by Squire Hoar, Mrs. Brooks, and other hospitable people. In his Journal Bronson Alcott mentions one such instance:

> Meet Agassiz at Emerson's. He is here to lecture before our Lyceum. ... The lecture is listened to with profound interest. He is eminently the teacher in his department. After the lecture, meet many of our people at Emerson's, and have further talk with the Professor. With his knowledge of the facts of the world, what might not an idealist like myself accomplish for the mind![16]

Both Thoreau and Emerson were frequent speakers before the Concord Lyceum. Emerson delivered a total of one hundred lectures there—a record not even remotely approached by any other speaker—and frequently came forward and volunteered his services when no speaker could be secured or when the scheduled lecturer could not be present. Thoreau frequently gave chapters from his own books first as lectures. In 1845 he gave a lecture on "Concord River." In 1847, while still living in his hut at Walden, he lectured two weeks in succession on "The History of Myself," the manuscript of which afterward made a considerable part of the book *Walden*, and in 1849 he delivered a lecture entitled "White Beans and Walden Pond."

Perhaps the best available commentaries upon the lectures and the lecturers themselves are to be found in the journals and letters of some of the famous citizens of Concord. Thoreau, with his characteristic penetrating powers of analysis and his caustic wit, has furnished us with some of the finest examples of this sort. For example, in 1843 he writes that "Mr. Chapin lectured this evening, and so rhetorically that I forgot my duty and heard very little."[17] Thoreau, unlike most nineteenth-century Americans, was not often deceived by a flood of rhetorical bombast. Dramatic gestures and pompous phrases did not impress him, and possessors of second-rate intellects or those who dealt with their topic in a superficial manner were castigated in such sentences as the following:

> We have had Whipple on Genius,—too weighty a subject for him, with his antithetical definitions new-vamped,—what it *is*, what it is *not*, but altogether what it is *not*; cuffing it this way and cuffing it that, as if it were an India-rubber ball. Really, it is a subject which should expand, expand, accumulate itself before the speaker's eyes as he goes on, like the snowballs which the boys roll in the street; and when it stops, it should be so large that he cannot start it, but must leave it there. Hudson, too, has been here, with a dark shadow in the core of him, and his desperate wit, so much indebted to the surface of him,—wringing out his words and snapping them off like a dishcloth; very remarkable, but not memorable. Singular that these two best lecturers should have so much "wave" in their timber,—their solid parts to be made and kept solid by shrinkage and contraction of the whole, with consequent checks and fissures.[18]

The Journals of Bronson Alcott also furnish us with some revealing insights into the speakers and their lectures, and

into the personality of the writer as well. Alcott, the most "transcendental" of the Transcendentalists, and a man whose life seems to have been composed of a maximum of dreamy, naïve theory and a minimum of realistic practicality, is known chiefly today as the father of the novelist Louisa May Alcott. Alcott was a great admirer of that other uncompromising idealist, Thoreau, and in his Journal Thoreau records that he read a lecture before the Lyceum the week before on the rights and duties of the individual in relation to government, "much to Mr. Alcott's satisfaction."[19] In Alcott's Journal we find the following entry:

> Thoreau and his lecture on "Wild Apples" before the Lyceum. It is a piece of exquisite sense, a celebrating of the infinity of Nature, exemplified with much learning and original observation. . . . I listened with uninterrupted interest and delight.[20]

In another entry Alcott records that both he and Mrs. Alcott had been to hear Henry James, Sr., lecture on "Carlyle" and had greatly enjoyed "the hearty manner of the lecturer" and the anecdotes "so exceedingly characteristic and witty." James apparently related his anecdotes of more than one interview with great good humor, giving Carlyle's broad Scotch accent as well as his words and sentiments, and the entire audience delighted in his lecture, "Emerson even more, perhaps, than any."[21] But for sheer popularity—in later years amounting almost to veneration—no lecturer could hope for a place in the hearts of Concord's citizens equal to that held by Ralph Waldo Emerson. This esteem was apparently shared by one and all, Alcott not excepted. His views are set forth in a Journal entry which reads:

> Hear Emerson lecture on "Eloquence" before the Lyceum, and, if not eloquent in the popular, he is in the true sense—the rhetoric of transparent winged thought charming his auditors. I think his dramatic genius surpassing. . . . While he lives and speaks the Lyceum will preach the purest doctrine taught in our times.[22]

At a later date, having just heard Emerson deliver a lecture on "Immortality," Alcott records:

> Our people heard with eager interest, and what they did not apprehend clearly they were charmed into loving and admiring as something in itself lovely and charming. Could we have more preaching of this kind, our churches would stand for far more than they do now, and divinity have name and deserved repute. I could not but think our village preacher must have received some hints not only of a nobler doctrine but of a nobler method of address.[23]

Alcott noted that what Emerson said upon the lecture platform sometimes went over the heads of Concord audiences. Yet among twentieth-century people, particularly those living in sections of the country other than New England, there seems to be a rather heightened opinion of the intellectual level of the average New Englander of the nineteenth century. No doubt this assumption is a natural one, and has been readily fostered by the virtual monopoly which that section of the country then held in the field of literature, and by the reputation for culture acquired by Boston, which survives to the present day. The truth is, however, that despite the fame which Concord has acquired as the result of a considerable number of philosophers and literary lights living in its midst and in its general vicinity, the citizens of Concord were like the people of any other village of the time. For the most part they were practical, hard-working Yankees, who, while willing to hear an instructive or entertaining lecture upon geology or Switzerland, had little knowledge of or sympathy with the ideals of Transcendentalism, and were consequently apt to

be a bit restive when some nineteenth-century visionary mounted the rostrum and rhetorically soared into the blue empyrean. The average Yankee mind had little use for such "nonsense." In the pages of his Journal Thoreau often gave vent to his ire at the stubborn resistance to such idealistic philosophy exhibited by the audiences which he from time to time addressed:

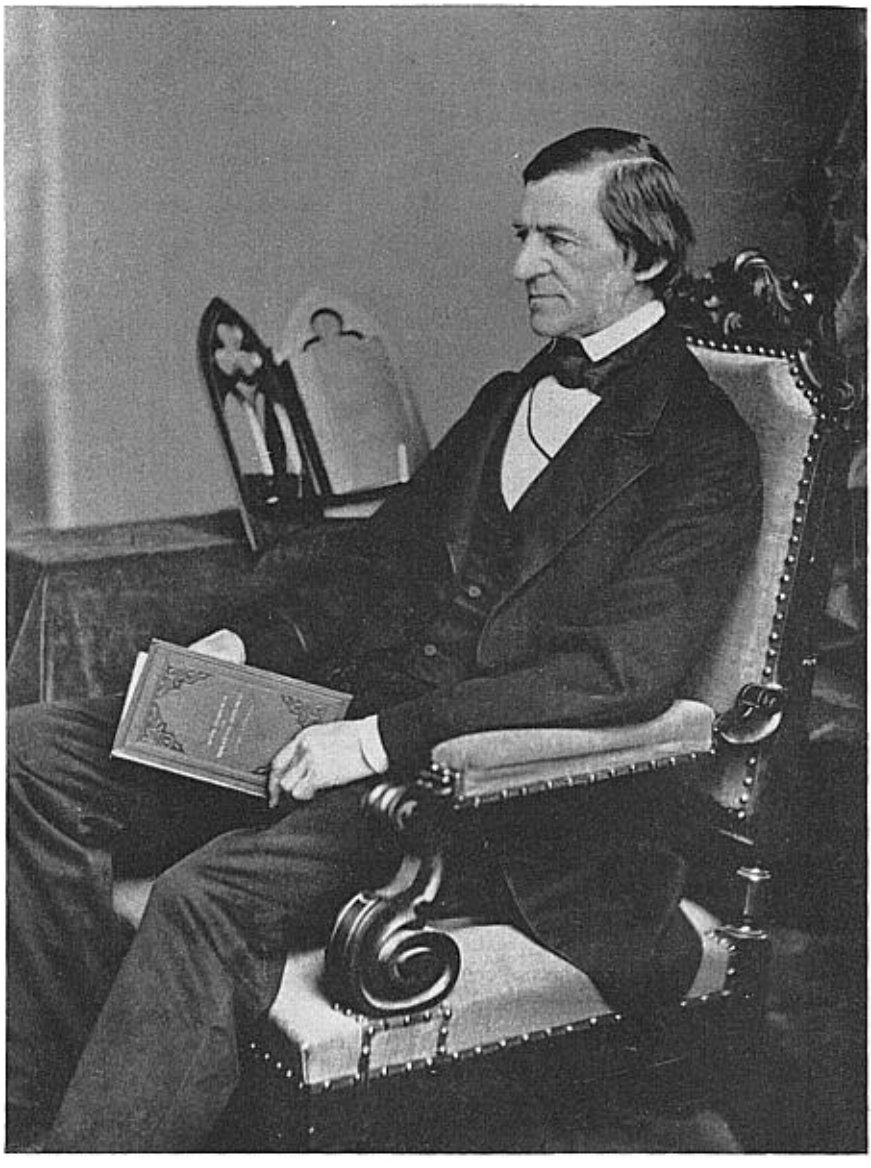
> After lecturing twice this winter I feel that I am in danger of cheapening myself by trying to become a successful lecturer, i.e., to interest my audiences. I am disappointed to find that most that I am and value myself for is lost, or worse than lost, on my audience. I fail to get even the attention of the mass. I should suit them better if I suited myself less. I feel that the public demand an average man, —average thoughts and manners,—not originality, nor even absolute excellence. You cannot interest them except as you are like them and sympathize with them. I would rather that my audience come to me than that I should go to them, and so they be sifted; i.e., I would rather write books than lectures. That is fine, this is coarse. To read to a promiscuous audience who are at your mercy the fine thoughts you solaced yourself with far away is as violent as to fatten geese by cramming, and in this case they do not get fatter.[24]

That the people of Concord were willing and even eager to listen to the lectures of Emerson, many of which later became some of his philosophical essays, which are generally obscure enough, is an eloquent tribute to the lofty regard in which Emerson was held in the thoughts of Concord's citizens. No doubt this was in large part due to the warm, kindly smile, the benevolent manner, and the genial optimism which radiated from him as he spoke and which endeared him to the hearts of his listeners—characteristics in which Thoreau, however, seems to have been somewhat lacking. The secret of Emerson's hold upon audiences was his faith that all differences in human beings are only superficial and that they all have one fundamental nature, which it was for him to find and awaken. And his confidence seems to have been justified upon occasion. There is the story of the Concord farmer who said he had heard all Mr. Emerson's lectures before the Lyceum—"and understood 'em too."[25] The people of the village felt his friendly and modest attitude toward them. Mrs. Hoar, seeing a neighbor who came in to work for her drying her hands and rolling down her sleeves one afternoon somewhat earlier than usual, asked her if she was going so soon. "Yes, I've got to go now. I'm going to Mr. Emerson's lecture," was the reply. "Do you understand Mr. Emerson?" Mrs. Hoar enquired. "Not a word," was the answer, "but I like to go and see him stand up there and look as if he thought everyone was as good as he was."[26]

But not every speaker was endowed with the personality of an Emerson. That this fact sometimes had an adverse effect can be seen from the following entry in the Lyceum records:

> Rev. Thos. L. Stone delivered the first of a course of *Six Lectures*, upon *English Language and Literature*—to be given on successive Wednesday evenings. This "course" has been something of a *failure*, the audience tiring of the same voice & subject, & demanding a variety & more popular style of lectures.[27]

Although the interest of audiences may have sometimes flagged, yet the general tenor of the meetings seems to have been upon a uniformly high level. At the annual meeting of the Lyceum in 1842 Dr. Jarvis and Mr. Alcott argued in favor of giving the meetings "a more social character" and thought that an intended change would better promote the objects of the Lyceum. The record does not show what the proposed innovation was,



RALPH WALDO EMERSON
From a photograph by Frank Rowell, Boston, 1865.

but it appears that the plan was opposed by Dr. Tewksbury, who thought that it was "detracting somewhat from the dignity of the association to introduce soft talk and courting times into our meetings."[28] The matter was finally referred to the directors, but there is no further record of what action—if any—was taken. We may be fairly certain, however, that the board of officers did not allow their Lyceum to degenerate into an occasion for light-hearted gossip and merriment.

By its very nature, and also because it was partially composed of the members of the Concord Debating Club, the Lyceum became an ideal vehicle for discussions and debates on topics of timely or general interest. Each year a committee of three was chosen to select questions for discussion and to make a list of those persons who would consent to take a part in the debates. The volunteers were called upon by the committee in alphabetical order and were given a topic upon which they were expected to debate at a future meeting. Two were assigned to the affirmative side of the question and two to the negative. It was the usual custom for the president to give his own opinion on the topic at the conclusion of the debate. Sometimes he called upon the members of the audience to voice their opinion by a show of hands, but it was not until 1837 that the following resolution was passed by the society, after a protracted discussion: The president shall give his opinion on all questions, this opinion subject to an appeal to the society.[29]

During the season of 1830-1831, extending from September to May, the Lyceum listened to 30 lectures and 12 debates.

Discussions of one question were frequently continued through several evenings, and elicited some of the greatest talent in town, bringing information of importance to everyone. During the intervals before and between the exercises the Concord Band occasionally volunteered their services to heighten the enjoyment of the evening. This exercise introduces variety into Lyceums and, it is hoped, will be continued.[30]

This, incidentally, was the first appearance of music in the Concord Lyceum.

Like the subjects of the lectures, the questions which were debated—often hotly—present a varied and sometimes amusing list. After arguing through four successive evenings, the society decided by a vote of two to one that imprisonment for debt ought not to be abolished.[31] They also felt that corporal punishment should not be abandoned in the discipline of schools;[32] that the light of nature teaches the immortality of the soul;[33] that theatrical exhibitions do not have a good moral tendency.[34] They flattered themselves that a dense population is more immoral than a scattered one,[35] and that a fertile soil is not calculated to bring forth the best energies of a people.[36] They were firmly of the opinion that income ought not to be taxed;[37] that liberty of the press ought not to be restrained by law;[38] that it would be expedient for the state to construct a railroad from Boston to the Hudson River, near Albany.[39] It was also thought that the conferring of literary and scientific degrees upon women would not be desirable.[40] This last decision was resolutely confirmed upon appeal to the Lyceum.

During the year 1833 the question of whether or not the morals of the people were better than formerly presented itself for debate. This was obviously a question of deep-seated interest, and one upon which even the most shy, retiring soul might be tempted to expound at some length. Needless to say, the debate

ran overtime on the first night, "some other gentlemen signifying a wish to be heard on the subject."[41] At the succeeding meeting the debate was continued "with some warmth until past the usual hour, when the President decided the question in the affirmative."[42] This apparently settled the matter—at least for the record.

The members could not always come to a decision, however, for although it was agreed that money might be judiciously spent in the erection of national monuments,[43] no decision was reached on the question of whether the legislature ought to grant a lottery for the completion of Bunker Hill monument;[44] nor was it decided whether the pulpit or bar afforded the greater field for eloquence.[45] President Ball ventured to decide that the national debt was a blessing, but a vote of the society reversed this opinion.[46]

For the first few years debating flourished, but toward the end of the 1830's, when the list of speakers began to include the names of more and more of the famous men of the period, it started to wane. The members of the Lyceum seem to have simply lost interest in it, and during the 1840's it disappeared entirely.

Like any other organization, the Concord Lyceum had its troubles. Though generally harmony and good feeling characterized the meetings, occasionally the whole structure and organization of the Lyceum was threatened with ruin by a division of opinion on a question upon which feeling was strong. One such issue was slavery. As early as 1833 it was debated by the society and decided by Dr. Bartlett, then president, that the Anti-Slavery Society ought not to be encouraged. Again, in 1835, the decision was rendered by Reverend H. B. Goodwin, acting as president, that the immediate abolition of slavery would be inexpedient, and an appeal to the members of the Lyceum resulted in a vote of fourteen to three sustaining the presiding officer. Feeling ran high upon this point, as can be seen from the following excerpts from the Lyceum records for the year 1842:

> After Greely had spoken, was announced that Wendell Phillips would lecture on slavery at the next meeting. Thereupon Hon. John Keyes offered following resolution;
>
> Resolved that as this Lyceum is established for social & mutual improvement, the introduction of the vexed or disorganizing question of Abolitionism or Slavery should be kept out of it.[47]

The next entry states simply but eloquently:

> Lyceum met and heard the above alluded to Lecture from W. Phillips Esq.[48]

The "vexed question" arose again in 1845, when the curators were, by a vote of twenty-one to fifteen, requested to invite Mr. Phillips to lecture again on slavery. Two of the three curators, believing the Lyceum no place for a one-sided presentation of a hotly disputed question of public policy, resigned.[49] What occurred next is recorded in the Lyceum records:

> It was then moved to adjourn sine die, which motion was submitted to the Lyceum by the President & declared to be a vote, which vote was immediately doubted, but without calling for the contrary minded or in any way settling the vote, the President left the chair.
>
> After calling for the vice president, Col. Wm. Whiting took the chair. On motion, Col. Whiting was chosen President pro tem. The Lyceum then proceeded to fill the vacancies made by the resignation of Messrs. Frost & Keyes. Thereupon Messrs. Ralph W. Emerson, Saml. Bassett & David H. Thoreau were chosen curators by ballot.[50]

Phillips, upon invitation of the new

curators, came and lectured as desired, resulting in much bitter feeling and unjust criticism.[51] The probable truth is that the members of the Lyceum were opposed to the institution of slavery, but they believed as well in the fundamental principles of law and order, and that, as a whole, the Constitution of the country was a good one and worth preserving.

In addition to the slavery issue, there was also the New England weather to be dealt with, no small obstacle in winter, as numerous entries in the Lyceum records show. Thus, in 1840, Thoreau, then secretary of the Lyceum, wrote, "A small audience having assembled, owing to the inclemency of the weather—the lecture which had been expected from Mr. Keyes was deferred till the next meeting—and in accordance with a vote from the Lyceum, Mr. William Robinson read the message of Governor Morton."[52]

But, despite the New England weather, the boys were always the severest trial a lecturer had to encounter. One year, 1839, in addition to the regular complement of officers, a special committee of three was chosen "to regulate the behavior of boys."[53] Six years later we have the following entry made by the secretary in the Lyceum records:

> Dea. Reuben Brown made some remarks concerning the annoyance suffered by the members of the Lyceum, caused by the whispering and playfulness of certain boys. He suggested that some effectual measures should be taken to put a stop to such disturbances. Mr. Keyes then rose & said that it was impossible for the Curators to keep order & therefore he moved that six persons be chosen for the express purpose of keeping order among the boys & others disposed to disturb the lecture. His motion was carried and the following were chosen to carry the plan into effect.
>
> Charles Bowers — James Adams
> Chas. B. Davis — Jacob Farmer[54]
> Dan'l Clark

Trouble arose also from another source. The by-laws adopted soon after the organization of the Lyceum had provided that "each member may admit two ladies, and, if married, his children in addition";[55] and that "those ladies of the town, widows and others, who are so situated that they cannot be admitted to the Lyceum by the right of any person who is a member, may be admitted gratuitously."[56] Strangers were admitted on invitation, and persons not members might receive tickets of admission for one or more evenings on such terms as the curators might fix upon. For a long time the lectures and discussions were open and free to all inhabitants of the town, but as early as the third season much dissatisfaction was being expressed on account of the conduct of those who were able to buy tickets or membership but failed to do so, and night after night took possession of the hall to the exclusion of those who were legal members. Therefore, to distribute more fairly the burden of expense, and as an easier method of raising the funds necessary for carrying out the purposes of the society, the ticket system was finally introduced in 1856. The results of this move are seen in the secretary's entry in the records:

> The "Ticket System" which was adopted somewhat as an experiment, has proved quite as successful as was anticipated.
>
> Without any special effort to procure subscribers or dispose of Tickets. [*sic*] The very finest Lecturers have been engaged and a full course of lectures of the highest order given —while all who have subscribed have felt that they were having their just proportion of the expense, & have enjoyed the lectures as they never have before by being as they have so free from the disturbances of all former ones.[57]

Occasionally an unintentional element of humor slipped into the pages of the Lyceum records, and the modern reader

is sometimes entertained with whimsical entries of various sorts, which, although they do not adhere strictly to the business at hand, nevertheless do give us a more vivid picture of some of those gatherings which took place a century or more ago. The following entry is illustrative of this:

> George Sumner had just commenced a lecture upon "*France*" when the cry of *Fire* started up his audience, the flames from which issuing from the Jos. Bartlett house, could be seen from the Hall. The gentlemen generally withdrew leaving a select audience of Ladies, who were entertained with a fine lecture. (Note, the House was destroyed!)[58]

One of the aims of lyceums everywhere was to work for the improvement of common-school education. Although I have been unable to determine precisely what effect the Concord Lyceum had upon its local schools, there is no doubt that during the period when the Lyceum was at the height of its vigor and influence common-school educational facilities in Concord improved steadily.

During the early years of the nineteenth century Concord was divided into seven school districts, each district having its own little one-room schoolhouse. The seven district schools differed little from what they had been one hundred years before. During the two- to three-month winter session the teacher was usually an undergraduate released from college to earn money for tuition. Discipline was of greater importance than instruction. In summer there was a session of ten weeks, attended mostly by girls, and employing women teachers because the town could get them cheaper. The grammar school in the center of town was supposed to prepare for college, but it was so overcrowded that no girls were allowed to attend beyond the elementary grades in order to save the seats for boys. All grades sat packed together in one room. In an attempt to remedy the situation, Concord Academy, a private institution, was founded in the early 1820's to furnish a better education than that publicly provided. But it was this very type of educational class division which lyceums were working to prevent.

That Thoreau was aware of the value of the lyceum in the field of education is evident from the following sentences in his book, *Walden*:

> We boast that we belong to the nineteenth century and are making the most rapid strides of any nation. But consider how little this village does for its own culture. . . . We have a . . . system of common schools, schools for infants only; but excepting the . . . Lyceum in the winter, and latterly the puny beginning of a library suggested by the state, no school for ourselves. We spend more on almost any article of bodily ailment . . . than on our mental ailment. . . . This town has spent seventeen thousand dollars on a town-house thank fortune or politics, but probably it will not spend so much on living wit, the true meat to put into that shell, in a hundred years. The one hundred and twenty-five dollars annually subscribed for a Lyceum in the winter is better spent than any other equal sum raised in the town. . . . New England can hire all the wise men in the world to come and teach her, and board them round the while, and not be provincial at all. That is the *uncommon* school we want. . . . If it is necessary, omit one bridge over the river, go round a little there, and throw one arch at least over the darker gulf of ignorance which surrounds us.[59]

There can be little doubt that during the years of its existence the Lyceum continued to work for better educational facilities in Concord. Of course there were the inevitable delays and opposition, but the sentiments of the majority are clearly shown by the fact that in 1864 the town's citizens voted in town meeting to put up a new high school building as soon as possible. The Civil War raging at the time prevented immediate action, but soon after the cessation of hostilities the

new high school was built. To celebrate the occasion, pay for teachers was raised all around, salaries for female teachers being raised from $6.00 to $7.00 weekly for the thirty-nine-week year.[60]

But by this time some of the one-room country schools used by elementary pupils were becoming overcrowded. It was proposed to consolidate the various one-room schoolhouses in the rural sections of the town and to erect for the younger children a large, central, well ventilated, adequately heated building in the village. The pupils were to be graded like those in the high school, but in eight divisions instead of four, with separate room and teacher for each grade. The plan was put into effect, and the new school was named in Emerson's honor. Specially built horse-drawn carriages, curtained all around against stormy weather, with parallel seats from front to rear, carried the children daily to and from the school. The culmination of this plan came in 1891 when by a unanimous vote the citizens of Concord authorized the town's selectmen to sell the last of the one-room schoolhouses, now standing empty and desolate in the rural area outside the village.[61]

The Concord Lyceum had times of depression as well as prosperity, and until the 1870's there appears to have been a rather frequent struggle to present a balance in the treasurer's accounts at the end of the season. As witness to this fact we have a letter from Thoreau to Daniel Ricketson in New Bedford, Massachusetts, written in 1856:

> You have done well to write a lecture on Cowper. In the expectation of getting you to read it here, I applied to the curators of our Lyceum; but, alas, our Lyceum has been a failure this winter for want of funds. It ceased some weeks since, with a debt, they tell me, to be carried over to the next year's account. Only one more lecture is to be read by a Signor Somebody, an Italian, paid for by private subscription, as a deed of charity to the lecturer. They are not rich enough to offer you your expenses even, though probably a month or two ago they would have been glad of the chance.[62]

Yet the necessary funds seem to have always appeared from some quarter or other to prevent a threatened deficiency.[63] By 1879 the curators, in their annual report to the Lyceum on the season which had just closed, could proudly state that the receipts had been larger than ever before in the history of the organization, amounting to $874.60. The year's expenses were $818.46, leaving a clear balance of $56.14 to be added to the surplus fund. This had been accumulating at a gratifying rate: in 1877, $120, and in 1878, $72. These sums were deposited in the bank and with the accrued interest amounted to $260.63.

In the year 1880 Emerson delivered his last lecture before the Concord Lyceum. He was then almost seventy-seven years of age and his mental powers had been slowly failing for some time. Some idea of the veneration in which he was held by the people of Concord, after over half a century of unselfish service to the Lyceum, may be gained by the following excerpt from the Lyceum records:

> This was Mr. Emerson's 100th lecture before the Lyceum. A very large audience was present and, as Mr. Emerson advanced to the front of the platform, the audience rose en masse to receive him. Mr. Emerson read his lecture with a clearness and vigor remarkable, considering his advanced years.[64]

By this time the lyceum movement had begun to wane, and the general level of its programs likewise declined. But that the aims and objects of the movement were still being closely adhered to in the Concord organization can be seen

from the Curator's Report for the 1878-1879 season. In part, it reads:

> The management during this period has been in some degree experimental, aiming to provide not only a variety of instruction on scientific, historical and literary subjects and upon the topics of the times, but, also, entertainment of a high order. No pains have been taken to ascertain in advance what a lecturer *believed*, but rather what he *knew* or had *done* to make it appear worth our while to listen to him. . . . Not only is the Lyceum enjoying financial prosperity, and, therefore, the ability to procure the best talent in the lecture field, but, from an intellectual point of view, it is believed that the people of our town have gained new vigor of thought with the increased vitality of this institution, and will insist upon keeping this platform fearlessly free and independent of every narrowing influence. In this way only can the Lyceum continue to influence the community for good as it has already done for fifty years.[65]

But the Concord Lyceum was not fated to last for another fifty years. The lyceum movement had ceased by the 1880's to have any significant educational purpose. Its job was done, and now a dry rot began to eat away at the foundations. The lyceum was no longer the New England conscience bound on a voyage to convert the world, but a starring exhibition of elocutionists, musicians, and actors, approaching very nearly the theatricals. It was, of course, inevitable that the Concord Lyceum should sooner or later accompany the lyceum movement in its gradual decline, although it probably resisted more stubbornly than most. By the turn of the century the downward trend had set in, and the coming of World War I sounded the death knell of this illustrious organization.

NOTES

[1] Cecil B. Hayes, *The American Lyceum . . .*, U. S. Department of Interior Office of Education Bulletin, Nos. 10-16, 1932, p. 5.

[2] In 1820 its population was 1,788; in 1840 it was 2,017.

[3] *Concord Lyceum Records*, Vol. 1, Dec. 13, 1828, hereafter cited as *Records*.

[4] *Ibid.*, Dec. 31, 1828.

[5] *Ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1829.

[6] *Ibid.* In 1831 this age limit was raised to 21.

[7] *Ibid.*, Jan. 7, 1829.

[8] *Ibid.*, Oct. 9, 1833.

[9] *Semi-Centennial Proceedings on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Organization of the Concord Lyceum, Tues., Jan. 7 1879* (Concord, Mass., 1879), p. 8, hereafter cited as *Proceedings*.

[10] *Proceedings*, p. 8. By 1879 all of the Lyceum's worldly goods consisted of a blackboard and a deposit of $260.63 in the savings bank.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[12] Five of the first speakers were from out of town, but thereafter, until the spring of 1831, the great majority of them were from Concord.

[13] Frank B. Sanborn, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Boston, 1909), II, 568-570. Hereafter cited as *Recollections*.

[14] *Records*, Vol. 1, Oct. 11, 1843.

[15] *Recollections*, p. 171.

[16] *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*, ed. Odell Shepard (Boston, 1938), p. 355. Hereafter cited as *Alcott Journals*.

[17] *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. F. B. Sanborn (New York, 1894), X, 72, hereafter cited as *Thoreau Writings*. Thoreau was at this time a Director of the Lyceum.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

[20] *Alcott Journals*, p. 326.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 368.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 390.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 425.

[24] *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, ed. Odell Shepard (New York, 1927), pp. 210, 211.

[25] Edward Waldo Emerson, *Emerson in Concord* (Boston, 1889), p. 147.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 148.
[27] *Records*, Vol. 1, Dec. 23, 1857.
[28] *Ibid.*, Nov. 8, 1842.
[29] *Ibid.*, Jan. 11, 1837.
[30] *Ibid.*, Sept. 21, 1831.
[31] *Ibid.*, Jan. 26, 1831.
[32] *Ibid.*, Jan. 11, 1832.
[33] *Ibid.*, Jan. 23, 1833.
[34] *Ibid.*, Mar. 27, 1833.
[35] *Ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1834.
[36] *Ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1832.
[37] *Ibid.*, Feb. 10, 1830.
[38] *Ibid.*, Apr. 12, 1831.
[39] *Ibid.*, Mar. 4, 1829.
[40] *Ibid.*, May 15, 1833.
[41] *Ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1833.
[42] *Ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1833.
[43] *Ibid.*, Dec. 25, 1833.
[44] *Ibid.*, Dec. 30, 1829.
[45] *Ibid.*, May 22, 1833.
[46] *Ibid.*, Nov. 23, 1836.
[47] *Ibid.*, Dec. 19, 1842.
[48] *Ibid.*, Dec. 21, 1842.
[49] The two in question were Rev. Barzillia Frost and Hon. John S. Keyes. The third curator was Ralph Waldo Emerson.
[50] *Records*, Vol. 1, Mar. 5, 1845.
[51] For Thoreau's account of this see "Wendell Phillips Before the Concord Lyceum," *Thoreau Writings*, X, 76-80.
[52] *Records*, Vol. 1, Jan. 22, 1840.
[53] *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1839.
[54] *Ibid.*, Feb. 12, 1845.
[55] *Ibid.*, Sept. 2, 1829.
[56] *Ibid.*, Nov. 15, 1839.
[57] *Ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1857.
[58] *Ibid.*, Feb. 13, 1857.
[59] Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston, 1893), pp. 171-173.
[60] Townsend Scudder, *Concord: American Town* (Boston, 1947), p. 286.
[61] *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.
[62] *Thoreau Writings*, X, 323.
[63] *Proceedings.*
[64] *Records*, Vol. 11, Feb. 4, 1880.
[65] *Ibid.*, Mar. 12, 1879.