

Louisa May Alcott

1832 - 1888

“Most heartily yours for woman suffrage and all other reforms” was one of Louisa May Alcott’s favorite salutations.

The author Louisa May Alcott is beloved by generations for her novel *Little Women*. Her own family life was more complicated.

The Alcotts of Concord and Other Venues

Louisa’s father, Bronson Alcott, failed in several attempts to make a living. An aspiring “philosopher,” he exempted himself from responsibility for the financial support of the family. Mired in poverty, the Alcotts moved twenty-two times over a thirty-year period. Louisa’s mother Abigail supported the children with help from family and friends and hard work in menial jobs. Highly literate, Abigail encouraged her daughter to read, keep a journal, and publish her writings.



Louisa’s mother, Abigail May Alcott, had distinguished and wealthy relatives but endured a life of poverty. Her central role in supporting, nurturing, and developing her daughters’ talents has often been overlooked.



Amos Bronson Alcott: Louisa once said of her father that a philosopher is “a man up in a balloon with his family and friends holding the ropes, trying to haul him down.” NYPL DIGITAL GALLERY



Louisa May Alcott as a young woman. At the age of fifteen she wrote: “I will do something by and by... Don’t care what, teach, sew, act, write, anything to help the family; and I’ll be rich and famous and happy before I die, see if I won’t.”

Fruitlands

Fruitlands in Harvard, Massachusetts was a utopian community promoted by Bronson Alcott. It quickly failed, as chronicled in Louisa’s later account, Transcendental Wild Oats. Her father attained wider recognition as a lecturer after his daughter became famous from Little Women.



The family moved into Orchard House in Concord when Louisa was in her twenties. It is revered by visitors as the setting for the fictional March family in *Little Women*.

Literary Career

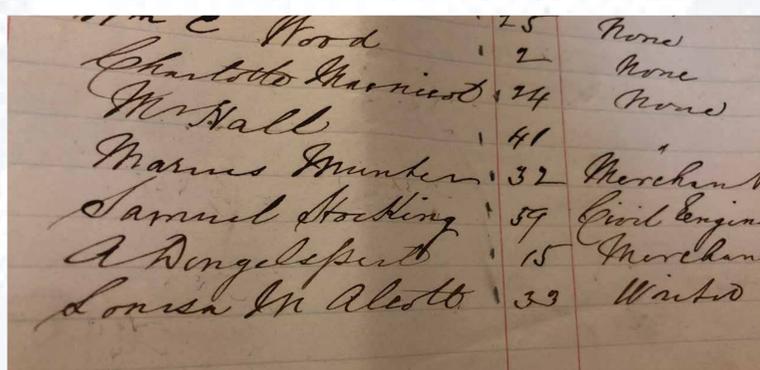
While aspiring to be a writer, Louisa worked in a variety of difficult jobs, including service as a Civil War nurse. Using assumed names to hide the fact that she was a woman, she wrote “lurid” stories for adults. Although tame by 21st century standards, her stories reflect anger at the limitations placed on women and their efforts to overcome them. After *Little Women* became a sensation, she focused on children’s stories and became America’s best-selling author.

After attaining wealth and fame as an author, Louisa May Alcott bought a townhouse at Number 10 Louisburg Square in Boston. ALAMY



Suffragists: Like Mother, Like Daughter

In 1853 and 1875 Abigail May Alcott submitted petitions to amend the Massachusetts constitution and allow women’s suffrage. One petition was “set aside with as little regard as the stump of a well-worn cigar,” she wrote. Daughter Louisa May Alcott wrote articles advocating female suffrage in *The Woman’s Journal*, based in Boston. In 1879 she was the first woman to register to vote in Concord after women were allowed to vote in school committee but not general elections.



Louisa May Alcott’s name and her occupation of “writer” appear on a passenger list for the ship S. S. Africa, returning to Boston from a European voyage on July 7, 1866. MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES



Louisa May Alcott died at the age of 55, two days after her father. Perhaps disillusioned by her parents’ marriage, she concluded that it was not possible for a woman to marry and pursue a career.