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SAMPLE PROPOSAL

This sample of the narrative portion from a grant is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with staff members in the NEH Division of Public Programs well before a grant deadline. This sample proposal does not include a budget, letters of commitment, or resumes. Please note that this document has been converted from a .pdf file, which may cause formatting errors. Images from the original document may have been removed.

Project Title: Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women: Library Outreach Programs

Institution: American Library Association

Project Director: Susan Brandehoff

Grant Program: America's Historical and Cultural Organizations

Grant Type: Implementation, GI-50186-10

The Nature of the Request

The American Library Association, in association with Nancy Porter Productions, Inc., requests \$193,977 from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to develop innovative library outreach programs to enhance the impact of the documentary film, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*, a co-production of Nancy Porter Productions, Inc. and *American Masters* (THIRTEEN for WNET.org), and the companion biography of the same name written by Harriet Reisen and published by Henry Holt and Company. The film was produced with grants from the NEH, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Public Broadcasting Service, The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and Audrey Simons and the Simons Foundation. The documentary will be broadcast nationally on the PBS series *American Masters* on December 28, 2009. The biography will be published on October 27, 2009. According to a review published by *The Providence Journal*, the documentary is a “remarkably detailed portrait of a strong-minded woman who was far ahead of her time and far more complex than the portrait of the dainty lady that others have previously presented.” Robert Mandel of the American Film Institute states about the documentary, “People think they know Louisa May Alcott through *Little Women*, but her life—especially the dark side—is unexpectedly, extremely interesting. Truly a wonderful story.” In the companion biography, author Harriet Reisen “defly weaves the story of Alcott’s life into the rich social, cultural and historical fabric of mid-19th-century New England,” according to *Kirkus Reviews*.

The ALA library outreach project, titled *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women —Library Outreach Programs*, will offer libraries opportunities to present public humanities programs that explore Louisa May Alcott’s untraditional life, her works and her place in American history. John Matteson, author of the Pulitzer Prize winning biography *Eden’s Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father*, believes that library programs devoted to Alcott will be tremendously appealing. He states in his letter of commitment, “With both her extraordinarily varied body of published work and the dramatic and improbable story of her life, Louisa continues to fascinate and inspire...Louisa May Alcott is an ideal subject for an NEH-funded library program.” Louisa May Alcott was a prolific and versatile author fueled by her passion for the political, social and cultural issues of her day. The film, biography and library outreach programs will re-introduce audiences to Alcott, by presenting a story full of fresh insights, startling discoveries about the author and a new understanding of American culture in the mid to late 19th-century.

In this proposed project, 30 participating libraries will present five different reading, viewing and discussion programs to support the film and biography *Louisa May Alcott*. Libraries will be required to enlist a lead project scholar, with expertise in 19th-century American history or literature, to help plan and present programs. Libraries will receive a DVD of the film as well as public performance rights to show the documentary locally. In addition to the film and biography, libraries will have access to a web site dedicated to the Louisa May Alcott film and biography (www.louisamayalcott.net), a PBS web site devoted to the film, a Site Support Notebook, a lesson plan and other supplementary materials. Libraries will also receive a list of Louisa May Alcott works, most available for free from a variety of online sources. This two-year project will begin in April 2010 and run through March 2012. Public programs in libraries will begin in Spring 2011 and run through Fall 2011. The purpose of the library outreach programs is to build on the content of the film and biography, to educate the public about Alcott’s extraordinary life and to encourage public dialogue on issues closely related to the project, including the evolving role of 19th-century American women, the culture of family, the development of mass publishing and a new reading

public and Alcott's personal connections to the Civil War and to major American cultural movements including Abolitionism and Transcendentalism.

A key element of this project is that program materials developed for the 30 selected libraries will be available on the ALA web site for any library wishing to use them to present locally-funded Alcott programs. ALA will publicize the availability of materials for programs about Alcott on its blog, programminglibrarian.org, and on its general and project-specific discussion lists and social networking sites. The ALA Public Programs Office will also sponsor a program about *Louisa May Alcott* at the 2010 ALA Annual Conference in Washington, DC.

Project Introduction

“She was no little woman, and her life was no children’s book.”

—Harriet Reisen, author of *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*

Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) is recognized around the world for her novel *Little Women*, but Alcott herself is scarcely known as the bold, compelling woman scholars recognize today. The documentary film and biography *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women* shed light on the complete story of Alcott, re-introducing audiences to this remarkable woman and the historical and cultural context that inspired her prolific and diverse range of writings.

In 1943 Leona Rostenberg, dealer in rare books and “literary sleuth,” discovered Alcott’s literary double life when she identified “A.M. Barnard” as Alcott’s pseudonym. Alcott’s secret had been well and wisely kept. Had it been known that the morally upstanding New England spinster and intellectual protégé of Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote scandalous “pot-boilers,” the Victorian equivalent of “racy stories,” she might never have achieved her status as “The Children’s Friend.”

Louisa’s parents, central to the key 19th-century movements of Transcendentalism and Abolitionism, taught their daughter to revere nature as God’s best work. They also encouraged her to cultivate an open mind, a questing spirit and a social conscience. Louisa was ensconced from childhood in the principles of what has been called the American Renaissance. The Alcotts were intimate neighbors of the great thinkers and writers of the age, among them Emerson, Thoreau and Hawthorne, Louisa’s idols and mentors.

Alcott would have preferred the pursuit of her own interests to the service of her family’s needs, but at an early age she became the devoted breadwinner and emotional stronghold of her destitute family. In an era when the ideal woman was the domesticated “angel at the hearth,” Alcott’s early experiences working in the underpaid, pitiless market for female labor built in her an unshakeable discipline and keen practicality. The Civil War bisected her life chronologically and divided it as it did the nation, redirecting her youthful romanticism into a pragmatic realism. Alcott suffused her postwar novels with the shared longing of a bloodied nation for the comforts and joys of family, setting her stories in households she represented as ideal democracies with progressive values and women at their spiritual centers.

A prolific writer from childhood, Alcott produced a body of work that is enormous, extraordinarily diverse and appealing to a diverse audience. Alcott wrote sensational stories and thrillers, satire and plays. She penned fairy tales and Gothic novels as well as works of domestic realism such as *Little*

Women. Her characters ran the gamut from aristocrats to cross-dressers, opium addicts, revolutionaries and slaves; from murderers to fatherly mentors, courageous mothers and mischievous children. As a skilled professional writer, Alcott had among her resources a sharp eye for character and the truth, an imagination strong on romance and adventure, an ease with plot construction and an authorial voice rich in warmth and wit.

Through her writing, Alcott documented her life and her connection to the events of her time. She wrote among other poems an elegy for her friend Henry David Thoreau and another for John Brown, which William Lloyd Garrison printed in his abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*. Once signing a letter “yours for reform of all kinds,” she passionately expressed her views on women’s rights, dress reform, diet, medicine, racial integration and education. Alcott was a forward-thinking woman who used much of her writing as a platform for the era’s innovative cultural ideas.

Alcott’s writing has joined the canon of American literature, assigned in high school and college courses, the subject of term papers, theses and books. Public programs in libraries will further expand Louisa May Alcott’s impact and build on the content of the film and biography. Participants in these programs will move beyond simply watching the documentary and reading the biography – with the help of an American history or literature scholar, audiences will dig deeply into Alcott’s era and her varied writings to reach a more complex understanding of 19th-century America and its leading thinkers and writers. Louisa May Alcott had a very personal connection to the events of her era, and the many layers of her life and works offer a unique, exciting and important opportunity to explore United States history and culture from the perspective of an untraditional and independent 19th-century woman. Programs in libraries will address the following themes:

- **The evolution of the concepts of women’s nature, social role and rights as individuals**

The 19th-century Victorian cult of domesticity held as its female ideal the nurturing, selfless woman devoted to her husband, home, children and religion. She was the spiritual and moral center of her patriarchal family. Louisa May Alcott’s mother Abigail would happily have spent her life collaborating in her husband’s educational and social experiments. However, the poverty of the Alcott family meant that Abigail, Louisa and her sisters had to take on the few low-paid jobs allowed respectable women in the “woman’s sphere” of the working world.

Although Louisa has been accused by some critics of abetting the cult of domesticity by marrying off Jo March and her sisters in *Little Women*, she was aware of what contemporary intellectuals call “the social construction of gender.” She rejected the Victorian orthodoxy that denigrated women’s mental ability and fitness for work and thereby constricted their lives. Although she was quite accepting of women who freely chose a domestic life, she also fiercely advocated the right of women to pursue whatever talents and interests made them happiest. Alcott’s understanding of women in their variety is apparent in the characters she created.

Victorian ideas clashed not only with Alcott’s view of women, but also with American ideals of equality. The reformist tendency, a prevalent theme in New England intellectual life from its founding, focused in the 19th-century upon extending the ideals of the Revolution to all men (principally by extending the voting franchise and by ending slavery). Enlightened women of Louisa’s generation recognized that all people, male and female, were fully entitled to

fundamental human and political rights. Alcott used her characters' lives and thoughts as vehicles to exemplify and convey her egalitarian views.

- **The concept and the culture of the family in 19th-century America**

Alcott's own "transcendental" family was at one period communal and vegetarian. At all times, in the words of one contemporary, it was "exceedingly impecunious." The family's poverty was largely attributable to Louisa's father Bronson, a man perpetually concerned with the "Oversoul" and "Harmonic Being" but only occasionally with food, shelter and clothing. The difference between Alcott's peculiar childhood and the one she bestowed on her 'little women' roughly parallels the attitudinal difference between transcendentalism and domestic realism, the circumstantial difference between the 1840's and the Civil War period and the material difference between grueling and genteel poverty. While the excessive pursuit of the spiritual that she saw as a child made Louisa allergic to philosophy, the genuine warmth, love and loyalty in the Alcott family made Louisa deeply appreciative of family life. *Little Women* "reformed" the Alcotts into a believable family, one that was immensely appealing to anyone with a "hunger for home...the tender ties...the pleasant duties, the sweet rewards that can make the humblest life happy."

Although *Little Women* is a story of the Victorian era, the March family is far from stereotypically Victorian. Victoria was a British ruler, and the Marches were American. While the American family of Alcott's time was sentimentalized in much the same way as the Victorian era woman, the American family continued also to be conceived as a model republic, and as the Republic in miniature. Families were essential building blocks of the nation, and the unity of the family was critical to the survival of the country. Harriet Beecher Stowe's most powerful argument against slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was that slavery entailed the forced separation of family members. The Civil War was interpreted as a family breakdown, and the defeat of the South was wisely analogized by a forgiving Lincoln to the return of the Prodigal Son.

Perhaps in all families, the need for independence contends with the need for acceptance and connection. This conflict within the family, and especially among women in the family, is played out in Alcott's fiction, as in her life, without resolution. When Jo March, the tomboy writer in *Little Women*, casts aside her girlish dreams of independence and adventure to marry Professor Bhaer and nurture the next generation, the development mirrors the lives of many of Alcott's middle-class readers. Alcott never married or gave birth. Nevertheless, at one time or another, she played almost every conceivable role in her family, acting as caregiver for her aging parents, as breadwinner for her orphaned nephews and even as mother, when her deceased younger sister left her infant daughter in Louisa's care. While the prevailing social ideal held that happiness was found only in family, Louisa recognized that the family realistically could be a gilded cage or a dungeon, a setting for sickness, loss and disappointment, a showcase for inadequacy, pettiness and vice, a den of secrets and repressed desires. In her writing, she expressed the beautiful ideal of family as well as its many inherent contradictions.

- **The new 19th-century American literary milieu: mass culture, literacy and the rise of the professional writer**

Before Louisa May Alcott's time, the writing and reading of literature was largely the non-profit

pursuit of a small, educated class. But when Alcott came of age as a writer in her late twenties in the mid-19th-century, the benefits of royalty payments, serial publication and copyright laws were being introduced. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, now widely-distributed magazines, journals and popular books were becoming catalysts for the creation of mass culture. Publishing could be a profitable business. Professional writers could make a living and even become rich and famous.

A prime example of a writer making a living, Alcott became a one-woman literary business. Having learned from her early business mistakes, she negotiated a shrewd contract for *Little Women*, a move that eventually earned her a fortune that today would be counted in the millions. She also timed some of her publications to coincide with the Christmas season and used her “Aunt Jo” persona to commercial advantage. She managed her money prudently, providing generously for herself and her family, and leaving her collateral descendants well-off to this day.

Alcott trained herself to write through conscious experimentation, commenting in her journal, for instance, that she considered thrillers a “good drill for fancy and language.” She wrote hundreds of stories for magazines, on commission and on “spec.” She published in the prestigious *Atlantic* and contributed articles to *The Saturday Evening Gazette*. She taught herself to tailor narratives to audiences, space considerations and deadlines. She juggled genres and pseudonyms for different markets. Wryly remarking she would do “anything to suit the customers,” she gave them subjects such as race hatred and interracial love, madness, suicide, bigamy, sexual power struggles, mind control and drug addiction, in stories that proved popular with readers. She honed her skills reworking manuscripts as editor of *Merry’s Museum*, a magazine for children.

In the 1860’s Louisa began selling work regularly to publishing magnate Frank Leslie, the Rupert Murdoch of his day. Leslie covered the lucrative women’s reading market with the weekly story magazines *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated News* and *Frank Leslie’s Chimney Corner*. For them, Alcott supplied “sensational” stories of murder and narcotics addiction for \$50 to \$100. For *Frank Leslie’s Lady’s Magazine*, in which “Is Marriage a Lottery?” was debated and “What Should be Worn and What Not” dictated, Louisa received \$25 for four-page stories suitable for illustration. She made them easy to read, taking care to make them daring enough to titillate but never lurid enough to shock. Indulging her flair for the romantic, she selected costume items such as mourning robes, mantillas and fans to play important roles in the plots.

An essentially private person, Louisa enjoyed her financial success much more than the attention and adulation that came with it. Like it or not, however, Alcott became one of the first literary celebrities. Like Charles Dickens and Mark Twain in roughly the same era, everywhere she went she was sought out, lionized, interviewed and publicized. Before *Little Men* was even published, it had sold 50,000 copies. Like Dickens and Twain, “Louisa May Alcott” was a “brand,” her name a label denoting a certain kind of reading experience. Alcott’s successful career in literature was a tribute to her ability to gauge and satisfy the tastes of her audience, as well as her astuteness in exploiting the new publishing and mass market conditions of her time.

Relevance for Humanities Scholarship:

“Alcott’s position in American culture is so secure that it’s surprising that a documentary film on her has never been produced.”

—Joel Myerson, Distinguished Professor Emeritus and Distinguished Research Professor of American Literature, University of South Carolina

At the time of her death and for decades afterwards, Louisa May Alcott was categorized as a writer of juvenile fiction. By definition she was thus deemed a minor author, although Henry James’s remark that she was “the Thackeray, the Trollope, of the nursery and the schoolroom” was hardly dismissive. Even that reputation did not survive the judgments of the disillusioned intellectuals of the 1920’s, who thought her sentimental, naïve and didactic. But Alcott’s novels survived and flourished as mothers passed them down to daughters. By 1947, when a history of popular literature was published, *Little Women* was listed among the 100 Overall Best-Sellers in the United States.

Besides her achievements as a writer, Alcott was strongly connected to some of the major social and political philosophers of her time—transcendentalists, abolitionists, suffragists alike. These contacts, as well as her firsthand experience as a Civil War nurse, placed her at the intellectual forefront of American activism and reform. An abolitionist by heritage, conviction and deed, she wrote that she was “glad I have lived in the time of this great [antislavery] movement, and know its heroes so well.” Louisa joined New England abolitionists in their outrage against and resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act, which made it a crime to shelter a runaway. Volunteering as a Civil War nurse at age 30, she wrote about the horrifying conditions of the crowded, filthy, understaffed and underequipped hotel-turned-hospital in Georgetown where she ministered to the wounded from the Battle of Fredericksburg. She joined with her mother to petition for women’s suffrage, and the theme of women’s rights is interwoven throughout her writing. Alcott was the first woman to proudly register to vote in Concord, Massachusetts.

The revision of Alcott’s reputation began in the 1940’s, when Leona Rostenberg unmasked “A.M. Barnard,” a pseudonym Louisa used for five of her thrillers. Although the sensational stories remained out of print, they were described and quoted in the first “full-length” portrait of Louisa May Alcott, a 1950 biography by Madeleine B. Stern. Marking the beginning of serious modern study of Alcott, Stern’s book, *Louisa May Alcott: A Biography*, remains a model and an invaluable source for today’s readers.

With the 1974 publications of *Behind a Mask* and several others of the thrillers attributed to Alcott, the “second wave” of the women’s movement picked up the author’s banner and ran with it, frequently to universities, libraries and archives. Historians such as Dr. Sarah Elbert, Associate Professor of History and Women’s Studies at SUNY Binghamton, devoted their efforts to documenting Alcott’s cultural significance. Elbert’s assessment noted, “Alcott’s great gift lay in reaching ordinary women with the broad-ranging program of nineteenth-century feminists.” That program, as Elbert described it in *A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott’s Place in American Culture*, stressed that women “should...have significant public roles in a democratic society and...also share...in creating warm egalitarian homes.”

With each decade the interest in Alcott has grown. By the 1980’s, when scholars Dr. Joel Myerson and Dr. Daniel Shealy (with Madeleine B. Stern) edited both *The Journals* and *The Collected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*, the author was already the subject of several dissertations and was making her way

onto college curricula. Dr. Myerson and Dr. Shealy have agreed to serve as advisors to the ALA project.

Another resurgence of interest in Alcott took place in the 1990's with the appearance of two previously unpublished novels, *A Long and Fatal Love Chase*, and *The Inheritance*, Alcott's first novel, written at age 17 (and brought to light by Daniel Shealy and Joel Myerson). While *A Long and Fatal Love Chase* was not top-drawer Alcott, it proved compelling enough to land on *The New York Times* best-seller list a century after its creator's death.

In the new millennium, both the popular and scholarly interests in the Alcotts have entered a new and fascinating phase. In 2006, Geraldine Brooks' novel, *March*, inspired both by *Little Women* and the life of Louisa's father Bronson, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Two years later, the Pulitzer Prize committee again recognized the Alcott family, awarding the Pulitzer Prize for Biography to John Matteson's *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father*. Along with their contemporaries the Beechers, the Alcotts are the only non-Presidential family to be the subject of three Pulitzer Prize-winning books. Professor Matteson has also agreed to serve as an advisor to this project.

More significant to humanities scholarship than her continuing popularity with readers is Alcott's growing reputation as an important writer. As the presumptions of the American literary canon have been questioned and reconsidered, intimate settings such as Alcott's are no longer seen as "minor." Domestic metaphors are no longer belittled as "narrow." "The place of Alcott in the 'canon' is becoming more secure," says Dr. Shealy, Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, "partly because of the interest in women's fiction, partly because of the revelation of the lurid tales and partly because of the realization that she wrote so much in so many genres." At the author's 150th birthday in 1982, Madeleine B. Stern wrote, "her books are no longer regarded simply as primers for childhood but as works that display the New England family in compassionate versions of the domestic novel. As she moves from the nursery to the study, Louisa May Alcott is at last attaining a niche in American literary history long owed to her." Now, twenty seven years later, Louisa May Alcott's "niche" contains more rediscovered work and gets more crowded with visitors every year.

A light-hearted but telling observation from Harriet Reisen's biography of Alcott further emphasizes Louisa May Alcott's place in the literary canon: "There is a card game called 'Authors,'" she notes. "The male writers are Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert Louis Stevenson, William Shakespeare, James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Sir Walter Scott, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Edgar Allan Poe. There is only one female: Louisa May Alcott."

History of the Project:

Nancy Porter and Harriet Reisen for Nancy Porter Productions, Inc., the producers of the documentary film *Louisa May Alcott*, have received major grants for the documentary from various funding sources, including the National Endowment for the Humanities (a total of \$690,000 in planning, scripting and production grants), the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Public Broadcasting Service, The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and Audrey Simons and the Simons Foundation. The documentary is a co-production of Nancy Porter Productions, Inc. and *American Masters* (THIRTEEN for WNET.org).

Porter and Reisen sought the guidance of experts to ensure they have presented the best scholarship and the most accurate and complete account of Louisa May Alcott possible in the documentary and biography. Distinguished scholars in the areas of Transcendentalism, Alcott, 19th-century literature, publishing and women's studies were members of the documentary project advisory board. They included: **Gregory Eiselein**, Associate Professor, English Department, Kansas State University; **Sarah Elbert**, Associate Professor of History and Women's Studies, SUNY Binghamton; **Elise V. Lemire**, Assistant Professor of Literature, Division of Humanities, Purchase College, State University of New York; **Megan Marshall**, Emerson College; **John Matteson**, John Jay College, CUNY; **Joel Myerson**, Distinguished Professor Emeritus and Distinguished Research Professor of American Literature, University of South Carolina, co-editor of several editions of Alcott's writings including *Selected Letters*, *Journals* and *The Inheritance*; **Anne K. Phillips**, Associate Professor, Children's Literature, English Department, Kansas State University; **Shirley Samuels**, Professor of English, Cornell University; **Daniel Shealy**, Professor of English, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, co-editor of several editions of Alcott's writings including *Selected Letters*, *Journal* and *The Inheritance*; **Leona Rostenberg**, antiquarian book dealer and discoverer of Alcott's pseudonym A.M. Barnard; and **Madeleine Stern**, antiquarian book dealer, author of *Louisa May Alcott, A Biography*.

To convey the film's message, the producers used archival documents from a number of locations in the Boston area, including The Houghton Library at Harvard University, the Concord Free Public Library manuscript and photography collections, Fruitlands, the Boston Public Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society and Orchard House.

Among materials used as sources for the documentary were Bronson Alcott's daily observations of Louisa's character in infancy, the papers of Bronson and Abigail Alcott, Anna Alcott Pratt, May Alcott Niereker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, educator Elizabeth Peabody, memoirs of friends and colleagues of Louisa May Alcott and, of course, Alcott's published and unpublished papers. Other materials informing the documentary include manuscript compositions, journals, diaries, correspondence, business papers and clippings, as well as diaries, account books, financial records relating to publishing and Alcott's autograph compositions.

The documentary team researched archival photographs, illustrations, newspapers, periodicals, magazines (such as *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newsletter*, etc.) at the following archives: Library of Congress, National Archives, Smithsonian, Brown Brothers, Culver Pictures, Archive Photos, Corbis Bettmann Archives, Getty Archives and the New York Public Library.

The film was shot in HD at a number of historic locations connected with the Alcott family. These sites include Orchard House in Concord, Massachusetts; Fruitlands in Harvard, Massachusetts; and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Home in Concord, Massachusetts.

The result is: "A wonderful, heartfelt, inventive and brave telling of an inspiring and poignant story. The directing is divine, the animation is inspired and [Reisen and Porter] managed to make a very contemporary film about the 1800s and the Transcendentalists," Denise DiIanni, Boston Media Productions, WGBH; "Beautiful. An extraordinary work of art. Brilliantly crafted, it did not have a slow moment," Diane Mason, Artistic Director, *Through Women's Eyes Film Festival*; "Alcott is due for a reassessment, and luckily for us others are hard at work correcting the historical record. A new film by Nancy Porter and Harriet Reisen, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*,

which will air on PBS in the fall, renders Alcott's life in all its complexity," Anne Trubek, Associate Professor, Oberlin College.

The completed documentary is scheduled to premiere on *American Masters* on PBS on December 28, 2009, starring three-time Obie-Award-winner Elizabeth Marvel as Louisa May Alcott and featuring Oscar nominee Jane Alexander. The film has received a Cine Golden Eagle Award, the Grand Award of the Providence Film Festival, the Audience Choice award of the Cape Cod Filmmaker Takeover, Best Feature Documentary at the L.A. Reel Women Festival and Best Family Feature at the Garden State Film Festival. It is an official selection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Guangzhou Documentary Film Festival; the Santa Fe Film Festival; and the Through Women's Eyes Film Festival.

Already receiving praise, the companion biography, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*, by Harriet Reisen, is scheduled for publication on October 27, 2009 by Henry Holt and Company. The biography will also be available as an audiobook from Tantor Media Audiobooks. Among the reviews: "Harriet Reisen's *Louisa May Alcott* is terrific. . . an absorbing narrative, in many ways the best ever, of Alcott's own life. . . The utterly compelling force of Alcott's personality has never been better described. I found the book compulsively readable; I couldn't put it down," Robert Richardson, biographer of Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James; "Harriet Reisen is to be congratulated for her fine work on Louisa May Alcott, which is brilliantly researched and brings to light significant new information on the author of *Little Women*. Beautifully and sympathetically written, her biography will occupy an essential place on any Alcott bookshelf," John Matteson, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father*.

Description of the Project in Libraries

For the ALA program series, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women – Library Outreach Programs*, libraries will receive a copy of the biography and a DVD of the documentary film with educational materials and interviews. Libraries will also have access to a web site dedicated to the Louisa May Alcott film and biography (www.louisamayalcott.net), a PBS web site devoted to the film, a Site Support Notebook, a secondary school lesson plan and other supplementary materials. Libraries will also receive a list of Louisa May Alcott works, most now available for free from a variety of online sources, including:

www.classicauthors.net/Alcott/

www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/a#a102

www.online-literature.com/alcott/

Library programs will begin in Spring 2011, and run through Fall 2011.

Through the NEH, grants of \$2,500 will be offered to 30 libraries to present five programs focused on Alcott. The grants will be used for scholar honoraria, book purchases, publicity and other program-associated costs approved by the NEH. Applications will be open to public, academic and special libraries across the United States. Libraries will be asked to enlist a lead project scholar from a local college or university, with expertise in 19th-century American history or literature. The chosen scholar will help present and plan programs, ensuring program content conveys intended humanities themes. The project scholar will also work with local media and other partners in

planning. A planning workshop will be held in Boston for the library project coordinator and scholar from each of the 30 libraries to plan programs and discuss humanities themes and resources. The project Advisory Committee members and scholars will make presentations to the group at the workshop.

Libraries and their local project scholars will be required to collaborate with at least one of the following in planning their programs: a local public television station, a state humanities council, a college or university library, historical society or a museum. Collaborating with more than one partner will be encouraged in the application guidelines.

Programs in Libraries:

Libraries will present the following programs, which have been developed to 1) represent the broad scope of Louisa May Alcott's works, 2) encourage scholar-led discussion about the project's major humanities themes and 3) promote in-depth discussion of the documentary and biography, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*.

1. Viewing and discussion of the documentary

The screening of the Louisa May Alcott documentary will be followed by a discussion led by the project scholar about Alcott's life and writings, her impact and legacy and how her stories and life can inform our understanding of American history. A particular focus of the discussion will be the evolving role of women during the 19th-century and how Louisa May Alcott's understanding of this progress is evident in the characters she created.

2. Reading and discussion of the biography

Harriet Reisen's biography, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women*, provides a rich opportunity for discussion of Alcott. The biography details Alcott's early influences, including her exceptional family life and her Transcendentalist upbringing. During Louisa May Alcott's time, the idea of family was linked with nationhood, survival and happiness. Alcott found the idea of family appealing and enduring, but also recognized the loss and disappointment of family life. This inherent contradiction between familial love and conflict are evident in her writing and life choices. Reisen's in-depth study of Alcott will allow library communities, with the help of the project scholar, to explore her compelling family story and its impact on her writing and her readers.

3. Reading and discussion program about the following Alcott works – *Transcendental Wild Oats; Hospital Sketches; and Behind A Mask, or a Woman's Power*

Louisa May Alcott is best known for her children's novel *Little Women*, but she authored many other stories including *Transcendental Wild Oats* – a satire on her family's life in a 19th-century Utopian community; *Hospital Sketches* – an account of Alcott's time spent as an army nurse during the Civil War; and *Behind A Mask, or a Woman's Power* – one of Alcott's best recently discovered thrillers. The project scholar will facilitate a discussion exploring these three short works, which together help to display the creative range of Alcott's writing and exemplify her strong and dynamic connections to the culture in which she lived.

The texts are available online, free of charge at:
Transcendental Wild Oats: www.classicauthors.net/Alcott/trancendental/
Hospital Sketches: www.gutenberg.org/etext/3837
Behind a Mask, or a Woman's Power: www.gutenberg.org/etext/8677

4. A program focusing on Alcott's personal connection to the events of her time

Louisa May Alcott and her family were at the center of the defining movements of the 19th-century, including the Transcendentalist and Abolitionist movements. Alcott idolized Margaret Fuller, admired the work of her next-door neighbor Nathaniel Hawthorne, spent hours in Ralph Waldo Emerson's library reading books he recommended, and accompanied Henry David Thoreau on walks, where she learned to understand and appreciate the processes of nature. The works of leading writers and thinkers of the time create a picture of the culture in which Louisa May Alcott lived and influenced her own thinking and writing. For this program, library communities will read texts written by Alcott's contemporaries. Among the texts suggested by Advisory Committee member Dr. John Matteson are *Experience* by Ralph Waldo Emerson; *A Plea for Captain John Brown* by Henry David Thoreau; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe; and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* by Frederick Douglass. Other works will be suggested during the project planning period, many of which are available free on the Internet. Libraries may choose two or three for use in programs. The local project scholar will lead a discussion of selected works, to foster a deeper understanding of Alcott's connection to the political, social and intellectual movements of her time.

5. A program focusing on the changing role of women during the mid-19th-century and how changes in distribution created a mass audience for magazines and books directed at women.

With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, magazines, journals and popular books were more widely distributed and became catalysts for the rise of mass culture. Early women's magazines, such as *Graham's Magazine*, *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Monthly*, were important to 19th-century American literature and influenced the evolving role of women in society. Publishing could be a profitable business and professional female writers, including Alcott, could make a living through their writing. The project scholar will lead a program about Louisa May Alcott as a pioneer, discussing her influence on mass culture and women's daily lives through her articles and essays.

In addition to the five requirements, libraries will be encouraged to present additional programs if possible. For example, libraries and local scholars may choose to develop a program comparing the documentary and biography, addressing the means of storytelling and the concept of media literacy. Libraries and local scholars will also be welcome to hold an additional program only about *Little Women* if they choose, but the focus of the program series described above is on Alcott, her connections with the era in which she lived and the wide range of her writing beyond her novels for young people.

Educational and Interpretive Materials for Libraries:

The following materials will help libraries develop local programs with scholars, attract an audience and present the humanities themes of the film and biography to the public. Many of these materials will be available on the ALA web site for the use of libraries and scholars who are not selected for this project, but would like to present programs in their communities:

***Louisa May Alcott* DVD and biography**

Libraries will receive a DVD of *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women* with educational materials and interviews. Film clips are available to view at: www.louisamayalcott.net/video-clips/. Libraries will also receive Harriet Reisen's *Louisa May Alcott* biography for their collections and for program use. The preface and chapter one of the biography can be found at: www.louisamayalcott.net/the-book/chapter-one/.

Site Support Notebook

Each library will receive a notebook developed by the project team containing discussion questions to guide local scholars in presenting humanities programming, suggestions for organizing programs and recruiting local partners; lists of books, films and recordings; an annotated list of web sites containing *Louisa May Alcott*'s works, materials about *Alcott* and her time period; a press kit with photos, sample press releases and PSAs; reporting forms and other materials. A key feature of the notebook will be explication of project humanities themes and discussion questions designed to bring out these themes in public programs. The notebook will also be available on the exhibition web page on the ALA main web site. **(ATTACHMENT 9: Table of Contents Page from Past Site Support Notebook)** and **(ATTACHMENT 10: Discussion Questions/Resources from Past Site Support Notebook)**

Brochure for distribution to the public

The project team will create a brochure about *Louisa May Alcott* for libraries to distribute to public audiences. The brochure will describe *Louisa May Alcott* and her connections to the culture of her time. The brochure will also list a selection of the best materials available in print and on the web for further reading and research. Information about the biography, documentary and the project web sites will be prominently featured as well as links to sites with online access to *Alcott*'s works, including www.online-literature.com/alcott/. This brochure will be printed, but will also be available in digital format for downloading by libraries. **(ATTACHMENT 11: Brochure from Past Exhibition)**

Publicity poster

A color poster will be designed for the library program series; each library will receive 25 copies and the poster files will be available online for downloading. **(ATTACHMENT 12: Poster from Past Exhibition)**

Companion web sites

The documentary filmmakers have created a web site (www.louisamayalcott.net) to complement the film and biography, with interactive features to allow exploration of topics in greater depth. The web site highlights information about the project, and includes content about *Louisa May Alcott*'s life and works. The *Louisa May Alcott* online flash-animation timeline (www.louisamayalcott.net/louisa-may-alcott/timeline/) allows visitors to learn more about *Alcott*'s personal history and places her within the context of American history. The PBS web site, to be launched during the Fall 2009

premiere, will provide audiences with information about Louisa May Alcott and the documentary film.

Bibliography of Louisa May Alcott works

Selected libraries will receive a bibliography of Louisa May Alcott works to assist in program planning and library collection development; this bibliography will also be available on the ALA website. Most of Alcott's works are available free of charge from a variety of online sources including:

www.classicauthors.net/Alcott/

www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/a#a102

www.online-literature.com/alcott/

(ATTACHMENT 5: Bibliography)

Book discussion guide and school lesson plan

A book discussion guide for the biography will be developed, with scholar input, for library use. Nancy Porter Productions, Inc. is developing a secondary school lesson plan for classrooms. These resources will be available in digital format for downloading by libraries. Libraries will also receive a list of web sites with curriculum materials and lesson plans for teachers. Libraries may give this information to local schools, hold teacher workshops or have programs for students in the library. There are many curriculum materials available about Louisa May Alcott from various sources, including the following web sites:

www.artsedge.org/content/2479/

www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1009

Selection of Libraries for the Project

The ALA will invite applications from public, academic and special libraries in the U.S. through electronic e-mail lists, the library press and selected mailings. The RFP will be featured prominently on the ALA Public Programs Office web site and promoted through other ALA divisional publications such as *Public Libraries*, *College and Research Libraries News* and *American Libraries Online*. The Public Programs Office anticipates high interest in this unique project because of the popularity and lasting impact of Alcott's writings, the desire to learn more about her compelling story and the array of materials available for programs. A number of libraries have expressed their interest in the project. **(ATTACHMENT 13: Letters of Support from Libraries)**

Thirty libraries will be selected based upon the following criteria: recruitment of a qualified lead scholar for local programming and to work as a major project partner; collaboration with local organizations and institutions; evidence that the library has investigated local Louisa May Alcott materials; commitment to a publicity plan that will make the widest possible audience aware of the project; evidence of library administrative support for the project; and enthusiasm and ideas for connecting the community with Louisa May Alcott materials. There will be a minimum of 150 required public programs presented during the project, but based on ALA's past experience with libraries in other cultural programming projects, most libraries will present more than five programs. Also, libraries not selected for the project will have access to most of the project materials so that they may present locally-funded programs about Alcott. **(ATTACHMENT 14: Past Program Examples)**

Project Meetings during the Implementation Period

Meetings during the implementation period will include the following:

1. A one-day meeting of the project Advisory Committee, including the project scholars, a librarian programmer, the Louisa May Alcott project team of Nancy Porter and Harriet Reisen and ALA staff in Boston in May 2010 to review project humanities themes, to develop a plan for developing suggested discussion questions related to project themes, to confirm a final plan for library programs, to confirm local scholar qualifications required, to review available Louisa May Alcott resources, to outline the project brochure and to organize the planning workshop for librarians and scholars from selected libraries.
2. A one-day planning workshop in Boston in February 2011 for a librarian and the lead project scholar from each selected library. Presenters at the workshop will include project scholars, the documentary producers and ALA Public Programs Office staff. A sample agenda follows:

Morning Session

- Introduction to the project goals for broadening public engagement in the humanities and project humanities themes
- Overview of Louisa May Alcott and her works by project scholar
- Discussion of the historical and cultural context in which Louisa May Alcott lived, including her relationship to Transcendentalism, Abolitionism and her ideas for cultural reform.
- Review of the program formats and the humanities content to be included in each program; suggestions for other programs

Afternoon Session

- Discussion of Louisa May Alcott materials: discussion questions, documentary film, biography, web site, online resources, related documents from her time period, related films
- Project partners: Working with them and what the library should expect from them
- Local project fundraising: who can help; who should be approached
- Publicity: methods and materials, targeting special groups
- Review of interpretive and educational materials for libraries

(ATTACHMENT 15: Past Workshop Agenda)

Planning workshops have been very successful for previous ALA cultural programming projects. Librarians and scholars are enthusiastic about meeting others who will be developing programs for the same project. They stay in contact with one another, exchange ideas and resources, and in general, help to make the project successful for all libraries involved. An e-mail discussion list dedicated to the project will be available through ALA for librarians and scholars.

The ALA Public Programs project staff, and through them, the project advisory committee, will be available throughout the selected libraries' planning periods for consultation about programs and materials.

Audience

The evidence of Alcott's importance to a diverse, multi-generational audience is found in many places. Each year, more than 35,000 national and international visitors wait patiently in long lines to visit Orchard House, the Alcott home in Concord, Massachusetts. Alcott's work has been adapted for film (there have been at least seven film adaptations of *Little Women*), plays, a Broadway musical, an opera and a Japanese manga. Most of her works—even the lesser known ones, are available free on a number of web sites. Spoken word versions of Alcott's works are available at every library and from every audiobook source. *Little Women* has been translated into some 50 languages and the Alcott family has been featured in two recent Pulitzer Prize-winning books – *March* by Geraldine Brooks and *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father* by project Advisory Committee scholar John Matteson.

Even former United States' First Lady Laura Bush acknowledged the important impact of Louisa May Alcott when she made Alcott's home the site of her first appearance to promote the work of the Save America's Treasures program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. As a former librarian who sponsored White House symposia on American literature, Mrs. Bush's high valuation of the modest home of "one of America's favorite storytellers" indicated Alcott's iconic status. "*Little Women* was the first book I really remember. It has been an important part of my life," Mrs. Bush said in her speech at Orchard House.

The primary audience for this project will be out-of-school adults in 30 communities of various sizes across the United States. The ALA will encourage libraries applying for the project to develop a plan to reach the widest possible audience through programming and public relations efforts, and to work with local and regional civic, humanities and other special interest organizations to reach that goal. The project application will also ask libraries to include plans for reaching out to underserved populations in their community. All libraries will receive a media kit prepared by the ALA to develop publicity and to market the project to their communities. Libraries selected will be encouraged to work with local schools to incorporate project content and themes into the curriculum.

The nation's more than 16,000 public libraries attract audiences that are diverse in race, cultural background, ethnicity, age and educational and economic levels. Characteristics of library users in a recent survey reveal a broad, inclusive audience: 1) more than 6 in 10 adults (66%) use a public library at least once a year; 2) libraries are used almost equally by men (63%) and women (68%); library audiences are racially diverse: a majority of European Americans (67%), African Americans (58%), and Latinos (62%) are library users (NCES, 2006).

This project will serve that demographic profile, but it will also reach new audiences by asking academic libraries to apply for the project. Academic libraries are increasingly becoming involved in cultural programs which bring together campus and community and expose students and faculty to a new role for the academic library. Cultural programs in which university faculty lead discussion groups that include students and community residents help colleges and universities fulfill goals of outreach to the community and wider use of library collections.

The ALA will construct a web site for the project that will make the project resources gathered for selected libraries available to all Internet users. Bibliographies, film lists, web site lists, speaker contacts, study guides and other materials about Louisa May Alcott will be available. Materials on

the ALA Public Programs web site are used by the library and non-library community alike. For example, discussion guides for four past ALA StoryLines America radio book discussion projects (funded by the NEH) have been downloaded more than 10,000 times since 2006 by libraries and non-library organizations.