

The Museum Of The Massachusetts Landscape

For the last ninety years, the trustees have safeguarded the splendor of the Bay State

By John Sedgwick

Of the many peninsulas that thrust out into the murky waters of Massachusetts Bay, only one remains as it was when the English colonists first appeared—without streets, houses, motels, or telephone lines. Indeed, it shows up on a road map of the state as a blank white expanse shaped like an hourglass and marked with the forbidding words **WORLD'S END**. Actually, the spot is barely a half-hour drive from Boston, where it shoots off from the

convinced her suitors liked her only for her money. On the land she raised a prize herd of thirty pedigreed Jersey cattle (she named each cow), and she drained a swamp to grow wheat. Fanny's father commissioned Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of New York's Central Park, to lay out the dirt roads around the property, and often, even when Fanny was getting on in years, she would leave her chauffeured limousine behind to ramble along the roads of

well-rounded (almost sensual) drumlins linked by a narrow sandy causeway, its rocky Maine-like shore, and its views of Boston's glassy towers rising up out of the water across the bay, the place is one of the grandest rambling spots in New England.

Trusty Trustees

Founded back in 1891 by nature-loving Charles Eliot, the thirty-one-year-old son of the Harvard president, the Trustees of Reservations made such a splash initially that it inspired the formation of England's famous National Trust three years later, in 1894. The Trustees now owns sixty-seven sites across Massachusetts—18,660 acres altogether. There are mansions, gardens, woods, streams, waterfalls, and, even one fair-sized mountain. (Monument Mountain, in the Berkshires, supposedly the scene where a lovelorn Indian princess plunged to her death; it was also a favorite picnic spot of Melville, Hawthorne, and Oliver Wendell Holmes.) Selected for their natural beauty or historical significance (or both), all sixty-seven are great for a visit, a tour, a walk-through, a picnic, whatever.

The organization has dubbed itself a "museum of the Massachusetts landscape." And many of its holdings do seem to belong under glass. In Ashley Falls, for example, there's Bartholomew's Cobble, just down the street from another T of R property, the 1735 Colonel John Ashley House, which is the oldest dwelling in Berkshire County. The cobble is a small, domelike knoll that is home for over 700 species of plants, with 44 types of ferns alone. Take for another fine example the 150-foot escarpment at Menemsha Hills on Martha's Vineyard, still lying where a glacier dumped it in 8000 B.C. Or the special reservation in Holyoke that displays dinosaur hoof-prints encased in hardened mud from the

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Naumkeag in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, built by Stanford White.

busy and booming suburb of Hingham.

In the nineteenth century, the property belonged to a rich Boston wool merchant named John Brewer. He passed it on to his daughter Fanny, who never married because, it was said, she was

John Sedgwick is Massachusetts-born and bred.

World's End in a horse-drawn carriage.

In 1967, a good many years after Fanny's death, the Brewer family was set to sell the land to developers when a private conservationist group named the Trustees of Reservations stepped in to purchase the peninsula for \$450,000. The Trustees, as is its custom, opened the property to the public. With its two

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Triassic period, 190 million years ago.

But before you get the wrong idea, there are less academic pleasures too, like the four-mile stretch of sparkling shoreline at Ipswich's Crane Beach, on the North Shore, or the terrific trout fishing at Mashpee River on Cape Cod, or the silvery 150-foot cascade of Glendale Falls in Middlefield.

The House Upon The Hill

The mansions are probably the most interesting for the taste they give of an earlier, more extravagant era. The wood-carved interiors of Long Hill, for example, were salvaged from a condemned Charleston, South Carolina, estate and transported piece by piece to Beverly, Massachusetts, during the First World War. Here, Ellery Sedgwick, former editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, constructed a Southern-style brick exterior around the paneling, lintels, and banisters that he'd brought from the South to use for his summer home. The elaborate gardens surrounding the place are no less extraordinary.

Stockbridge, to the west, possesses a couple of wonders. The 1738 home of the first missionary to the Stockbridge Indians, on Main Street, for one, is done in a fancy Georgian style, with a garden of dwarf fruit trees outside.

But Naumkeag, the town's twenty-six-room "cottage"—as even colossal summer homes were quaintly referred to in the nineteenth century—up on its hill is clearly a place out of another time. When the caretakers had to replace some of the scalloped shingles, specially warped to fit the roof's curves, they searched for years before turning up a sixty-year-old Italian woodworker who was able to do the job.

Naumkeag, or "Haven of Peace," was designed in 1886 by Stanford White. He drew up this shingled palace for Joseph Hodges Choate. A renowned lawyer, Choate personally held off the imposition of the federal income tax for two years. And indeed his "haven" looks as though it could have withstood quite a siege, with its stout stone walls, hefty turrets, high-pitched roof bristling with chimneys, and commanding view of any populist movements in the countryside.

On The Veranda

It's easy to imagine the imperious Choate sipping sherry on the Afternoon Porch under the imitation Venetian-gon-

dola hitching posts, crowned with red and gold, and garlanded with woodbine, as the sun drifted away. (He had the beams dredged up from Boston harbor where they'd lain for seventy-five years acquiring their ancient, weather-beaten look.) Or perhaps he might have taken his gin and tonic with his wife in wicker chairs on the terrace, peonies at his feet and the massive, sculptured hedges of the Evergreen Garden off to his side. For exercise, he may have strolled the Linden Walk, over to the Japanese Pagoda, down to the strangely art deco fountain, and back around to enter the Chinese Garden, with its ginkgo trees, by the Moon Gate. Ah, what a life.

A Manse With Charm

The most popular abode on the Trustees' list is far simpler: Hawthorne's Old Manse, hard by the famous Concord Bridge where the "shot heard round the world" was fired in 1775. But it's not really fair to call the place Hawthorne's, since he lived there only three years out of its 211 and, besides, he only rented.

A charming, creaky old place with a mansard roof, the house was built as a rectory by Ralph Waldo Emerson's grandfather, the Reverend William, and stayed in religious hands (hence the name Manse, or minister's residence) through 1842, when Hawthorne moved in with his bride, the talented and beautiful Sophia Peabody, on the afternoon of their wedding. "It was awful to reflect how many sermons must have been written here," wrote Hawthorne in his diary. But the house was filled with flowers for their arrival, and the couple brightened it up further by pasting up new wallpaper.

Paneful Etchings

Although Sophia had a history of mysterious headaches and depressions, they cleared up after their wedding night. "I feel precisely like an Eve in Paradise," she declared. Nathaniel was no less pleased, exclaiming in his diary: "I have married the Spring!—I am husband to the month of May!" Possibly referring to their unexpected happiness together, Sophia inscribed the words "Men's accidents are God's purposes" with her diamond ring on the windowpane of Nathaniel's second-floor study, and signed it "In the golden light, Sophia Amelia Hawthorne." Scribbling on the windows became a habit. After observing the trees outside the breakfast-room window

caked with ice one winter morning, she scrawled "The trees are glass chandeliers." All her engravings are still visible.

Hawthorne himself found the view out to the trees, and the Concord River beyond, too distracting. In his study, he purposely turned his back to it, to write at a tiny desk—barely big enough for his notebook—of his own construction that folded out from the opposite wall. Even so, he composed few stories at the Old Manse, preferring to go on long walks with his bride. With the aid of his neighbor Thoreau, whom Hawthorne at first pronounced "as ugly as sin" but grew to like, he planted a garden. The two authors also skated together on the river. He sold Thoreau the skiff that the naturalist used to paddle down the river for his famous "Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers." Hawthorne, however, found the wide Concord, when not under ice, quite unappealing. The water crept by so slowly, it took him three weeks to decide which way the current flowed. "I can find nothing more fit to compare it with," he wrote, "than one of the half torpid earthworms. The worm is sluggish and so is the river—the river is muddy and so is the worm—you hardly know whether either of them is alive or dead, but still, in the course of time, they both manage to creep away."

And so did the time allotted to the happy couple at the Old Manse. Hawthorne's writing was itself going so sluggishly—and the few publishers that bought it were so slow to pay—that he couldn't even meet the modest rent charged by his parson landlord and had to take a government job in Salem. The Hawthornes were never so happy again.

Visitors can recreate the merry couple's bliss, though, just as they can ponder Joseph Choate's wealth, or compare shoe sizes with a dinosaur, or classify ferns, or look back at civilization from World's End—simply by securing a copy of the Trustees of Reservation's brochure (write them at 224 Adams St.; Milton, MA 02186), and driving out. ■

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