

Codman Estate Landscape Guide



The Codman Estate, now sixteen acres, covered almost seven hundred acres before the American Revolution, and included what is now Drumlin Farm and the Town of Lincoln's business district. The terraces in front of the house are probably contemporary with the original mid-eighteenth-century structure. John Codman was responsible for enlarging the house into the present Federal-style mansion, its design attributed to Charles Bulfinch. Inspired by the English country seats he observed in 1800 while traveling, Codman planned to adapt his Lincoln landscape to conform with English models. His early death in 1803 cut short his plans, but the meadows, the pond, the ha-ha wall, and the curving drives all date to his lifetime.

The circular flower beds on the front terraces, planted with colorfully massed annuals, were first laid out about 1870. At that time, Ogden Codman Sr. had become the owner of his ancestral estate. He embarked on an ambitious improvement program at The Grange, as he named his family's new summer home. Following the dictates of A.J. Downing, a nineteenth-century landscape designer, Codman lavishly planted evergreens, deciduous trees, and masses of rhododendron, mock-orange, and spiraea.

Ogden Codman's wife, Sarah, developed into a passionate gardener. Her major accomplishment was the walled Italian garden, which was begun at the turn of the century in a wet hollow behind the house. The design of the garden is attributed to Ogden Codman Jr., then a rising classical architect. Another son, Tom, built the pergola. An arbor, was built at the far end of the garden using fragile marble columns from a building that Ogden Codman Sr. had owned in Boston. Statues of Bacchus and Flora, huge oil jars, potted trees, and stone benches furnished the garden. Sarah and her daughter Dorothy traveled to local nurseries in their chauffeured car, buying lupines, phlox, daylilies, and dozens of other native and imported perennials. Sarah ordered bulbs for spring and waterlilies for the canal in the Italian garden.

Beside the carriage house, Dorothy made her own English cottage-style garden, inspired in part by her reading of Gertrude Jekyll. Her garden's chief feature was a series of arches festooned with roses and clematis.

In their heyday, the last generation of Codmans maintained a greenhouse, raised their own fruit and vegetables, and played tennis on a court now lost in the woods. Maintenance slipped as the family aged and members died. Dorothy Codman bequeathed the property to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, now Historic New England, which operates it as a house museum open to the public.

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Lincoln, Massachusetts

