

Roseland Cottage Landscape Guide



Sylvia Holt, granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bowen, in the parterre garden, c. 1900.

The gardens at Roseland Cottage, the summer home of Henry Bowen and his wife, Lucy, were first laid out in 1850. The bill from Dyer's Nursery in neighboring Brooklyn, Connecticut, came to the considerable sum of \$550 for plant material and labor for the grounds and formal garden, shrubs, trees for an orchard, and six hundred yards of boxwood hedge. The boxwood, most of which survives to this day, borders twenty-one flower beds, which are threaded with paths and arranged in an ornamental pattern, comprising a "parterre" garden. Originally, a four-foot-high lattice fence surrounded the boxwood as protection from harsh New England winters. Roses covered trellises on the house and an arbor that was the primary entrance to the garden.

The grounds at Roseland Cottage were carefully planned to create a serene and romantic setting for the home's Gothic Revival-style architecture. Joseph C. Wells, the Bowens' architect, followed the theories of Andrew Jackson Downing, noted landscape designer of the mid-nineteenth century. In his influential books, Downing showed how to design settings for houses to achieve a picturesque effect, using curved walks and drives, patterned flower beds, and groups of asymmetrically placed trees, with decorative urns, garden furniture, and gazebos punctuating the composition.

At Roseland Cottage, Downing's technique of planting masses of annuals in ribbons and solid blocks of color—"carpet bedding"—is employed to create patterns of color, which are especially impressive when viewed from the second-floor windows. Vines, which Downing said "express

domesticity and presence of heart," were once plentiful. Akebia is trained along the sides of the c. 1920 garden house.

In 1978, Rudy Favretti, a faculty member at the University of Connecticut with specialized knowledge of landscape history, supervised the restoration of the gardens. This project included stabilizing the boxwood hedge and flower beds, taking an inventory of surviving Bowen plant material, and researching original documents and records. During this process, the boxwood was pruned and some plants were reintroduced.

Today, Historic New England's gardener and several volunteers plant 3,500 annuals each year—all of them varieties known to have been used by Bowen. When possible, plant material surviving from Bowen's era is propagated to maintain a bank of historic specimens for future use.

Several trees and shrubs are worthy of note: a tulip tree, ginkgo tree, Japanese maple, Chinese wisteria, and a rhododendron that was moved from the garden to the south lawn. There are, in addition, dogwood, hawthorn, smoke bush, shagbark hickory, crabapple, pear, hemlock, pine, and weeping willow. A Wye Oak Tree, offspring of the largest white oak in the United States, was donated and planted on the grounds in 1994. A Homestead Elm, a disease-resistant variety, was planted in 1998 as a gift from the Woodstock Academy graduating class to replace the many elms lost to blight. Both of these trees are located near the ice house.

Historic New England continues to improve the garden and grounds at Roseland Cottage every year. As Henry Bowen so eloquently said at the Woodstock Fair in 1875, "You can at least plant an elm or a rosebush every year and you will not have lived entirely in vain."



Exterior view of Roseland Cottage, c. 1865.