# Against all Odds MIT's Pioneering Women of Landscape Architecture \*

Eran Ben-Joseph, Holly D. Ben-Joseph, Anne C. Dodge<sup>1</sup>



Massachusetts Institute of Technology, School of Architecture and Planning, City Design and Development Group 77 Massachusetts Ave. 10-485 Cambridge, MA 02139

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This research is aimed at exposing the influential, yet little known and short-lived landscape architecture program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) between 1900 and 1909. Not only was it one of only two professional landscape architecture education programs in the United States at the time (the other one at Harvard also started at 1900), but the first and only one to admit both women and men. Women students were attracted to the MIT option because it provided excellent opportunities, which they were denied elsewhere. Harvard, for example did not admit women until 1942 and all-women institutions such as the Cambridge School or the Cornell program were established after the MIT program was terminated.

Unlike the other schools of that time, the MIT program did not keep women from the well-known academic leaders and male designers of the time nor from their male counterparts. At MIT, women had the opportunity to study directly with Beaux-Art design pioneers such as Charles S. Sargent, Guy Lowell, Désiré Despradelle, and the revered department head Francis Ward Chandler. Historical accounts acknowledged that a woman could "put herself through a stiff course" at MIT including advance science and structural engineering instruction.

Several of MIT's female students went on to be well known landscape architects, authors and teachers. Rose Standish Nichols (1872-1960), was best known as a landscape gardener and author. She wrote several books including *English Pleasure Gardens* (1902), *Italian Pleasure Gardens* (1928) and *Spanish and Portuguese Gardens* (1924). Nichols was also an accomplished wood carver. Marion C. Coffin (1877-1957), an active practitioner, received her degree from MIT in 1904. Some of Coffin's best known projects include her designs for the grounds of Winterthur, the Henry F. du Pont estate and the campus layout for the University of Delaware. She won the Gold Medal of the Architectural League of New York for her work in 1930. Coffin was highly regarded in the field and perhaps the best known female landscape architect to graduate from MIT. Mabel K. Babcock (1862-1931), received her degree from MIT in 1908. She had not only an active practice but also taught landscape architecture courses at Wellesley College from 1910-1914. Among her best known designs are the MIT President's garden and Great (Killian) Court. She may have also been involved in the design of the Wellesley campus and Bates College in Maine.

Cover image showing the architecture class around 1908-1909 with Francis Ward Chandler and Désiré Despradelle seated in front.

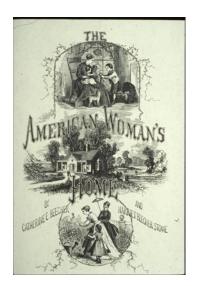
# WOMEN, GARDEN DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

During the 19th century, gardening was a hobby suitable for women in the socially constricted ervironment. Interest in garden design was fostered by many articles and books which encouraged women to get out of their homes and into their gardens. In 1869, Catherine Beecher's book, *The American Woman's Home*, outlined middle-class "gardening" values for American women. Beecher provided specific information that the middle-class wife should be able to not only use a spade but also able to graft trees. One professional magazine stated in 1892, "There is no reason, why women should not enter a calling that brings them into the healthy life of the open air, if no hard manual labor is demanded... Landscape-gardening is suitable employment" Helena Rutherfurd Ely's *A Woman's Hardy Garden* (1904) and Mabel Osgood Wright's *The Garden You and I* (1906) created an upsurge of interest in gardens and "were aimed specifically at women to inspire them to channel their excess creativity into gardening."

Yet, women encountered many obstacles when they tried to transfer their talents of the socially accepted hobby into the professional vocation of landscape architecture. While planting design was seen as 'natural' for women, other aspects of landscape architecture, especially the grading and engineering aspects, were considered masculine work: The general distain for women in the field outside of planting can be seen in Charles Elliot's critical review of art and architectural critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer's 1893 book *Art Out-of-doors: Hints on Good Taste in Gardening* in which she defines the landscape designer as "as gardener, an engineer and an artist, who like an architect considers beauty and utility together." Elliot questions Van Rensselaer's breadth of understanding of the field in the following passage, "Ever since man became man he has been remodeling the face of the earth, but it is to be regretted that no general account of either the breadth or the depth of the subject is to be found in this book. . . . good 'out-of-doors' must be founded in rationality, purpose, fitness. . . the essentially virile and practical nature of the art and profession is ignored."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to general bias in the field against them, women who wanted to learn the professional craft of landscape architecture in its totality- from engineering to Beaux-Arts design theory- at the end of the 19th century had few options. They could either study privately under personal mentors, as did Beatrix Jones Farrand (1872–1959) with Charles Sprague Sargent, founder of the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, or attend the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture for Women which opened in Groton, Massachusetts, in 1901. Other programs such as the one offered at Harvard, did not admit women, and other all-women schools only were established later. (In 1910, Jane Haines began the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women in Ambler, Pennsylvania and The Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture was founded in 1915 by Henry Atherton Frost in Cambridge, Massachusetts.)

In 1900 there was only one option for those women who wanted to study, experience and attain landscape architecture in its contemporary totality, and that was at the coed program offered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



Catherine Beecher's book had influenced many women to choose landscape gardening as a hobby as well as a profession.

## MIT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM 1900-1910

On February 20, 1865, William Barton Rogers founder of The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, opened the Institute's first classes declaring that they are "suited to the various professions of the Mechanician, the Civil Engineer, the Builder and Architect, the Mining Engineer and the Practical Chemist." While the program in architecture, without precedent in American colleges, was immediately offered, the Department of Architecture, the first in the country, was not formally organized until 1868. Classes were held in the Rogers Building on Boylston Street in Boston, with the intention of providing a broad education for architects with an emphasis on the Beaux-Arts.

More than just a 19th-century architectural style, the Beaux-Arts established a professional practice. Indeed, the professionalization of American architecture in the early 1890s was directly tied to the impact of the Beaux-Arts curriculum at all of the leading universities.<sup>6</sup>

The Beaux-Arts curriculum at MIT gained momentum with the arrival of Constant Antoine Désiré Despradelle from Paris in 1893 to assume the post of Rotch Professor of Architectural Design. Despradelle attracted international attention after a successful course of study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and under the guidance of his patron Jean Louis Pascal. Working closely with Department Head, Francis Ward Chandler, Despradelle continued an educational approach initiated by the Department's founder William Robert Ware, which relied heavily on the French model. It was during Despradelle's tenure that most of the Department's early goals were realized. Many students and colleagues felt it was Despradelle who successfully transplanted certain key aspects of the atelier to the Department. Among them was Guy Lowell, a former student and fellow instructor of Despradelle's. Lowell was a strong advocate of competitive camaraderie, collaboration and an exchange of ideas in a field that showed rapid increase in specialization. Changes in construction technologies, growing interest in natural sciences, and the diversity in public and private commissions, spurred curriculum adjustments. In 1898 MIT initiated additional components, called options, to augment its regular architectural program. 7

# Guy Lowell and Landscape Education<sup>8</sup>

Guy Lowell was born in Boston in 1870 and died at age 56 in 1927 on a voyage to Maderia. Lowell graduated from Harvard College in 1892 and from MIT's Architecture Department in 1894. He subsequently spent five years in Europe from 1895-1899, during which he entered the atelier of Jean Louis Pascal and enrolled and was awarded a degree from the École des Beaux Arts. As an architect, Lowell produced both modest and large residential designs, often laying out the grounds and plantings as well. His best known projects include the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the New York County Courthouse.

As an author, his 1902 volume entitled *American Gardens* was a central text in the burgeoning formal garden movement, documenting work in landscape architecture of the 1880's through 1900. His later books on Italian villas and farmhouses also provided examples of and models for landscape design from circa 1900 to 1920. While still completing his European studies, Lowell married Henrietta Sargent in May 1898, which brought him into closer contact with Professor Charles S. Sargent, his father-in-law and the director of the Arnold Arboretum. Perhaps this family link had





Professors Francis Ward Chandler (left) and Désiré Despradelle (right).

some influence on his decision to learn more about landscape architecture while abroad or increased his interest in promoting its study, for he writes the following in his MIT classbook of 1904:

During the five years I lived abroad, I made frequent trips to this country, and since my return to America I have made a yearly trip abroad....While studying abroad I gave a good deal of attention to landscape architecture and studied one summer in the Arboretum at Kew. On my return I was asked to help take charge of a course on Landscape Architecture... The first students in that course were graduated in 1902.9

Lowell's book *American Gardens* (1902) reveals those elements with which he was concerned in landscape architecture. In addition, the introduction may be seen as Lowell's curriculum and course outline for the landscape architecture option at MIT. He comments:

We shall find that the special elements of beauty in the best and most characteristic of our American gardens are simplicity of line, harmony of form and color, and richness in the details of planting. The judicious study of the best examples of this and other countries, the aim to keep within the limits set by one's surroundings and one's purse and above all the patience born of a love for flowers, will make possible a garden which may be a well-spring of delight, even to him who owns the smallest plot of land. There is no spot so small that cannot bring forth new flowers, no rock so barren that it cannot be made to bloom.<sup>10</sup>

Lowell notes the revival of interest in the formal garden and advocates not one approach over another but flexibility in using formal or informal in a given situation. He says: "It is wholly a question of appropriateness and of personal and individual art....It is the appropriate adaptation of the established European principles of gardening to American surroundings that will perfect an American style." This statement clearly indicates his debt to his École des Beaux Arts training. Through his book, through his practice and through his role as educator at MIT, it becomes evident that Lowell perceives landscape architecture not only as one of the many talents needed by an architect, but a field in which an architect could excel.

## The Landscape Architecture Curriculum

It is in the area of education that Lowell leaves his lasting mark on the profession of landscape architecture. He took charge of and shaped the landscape architecture option at MIT, shortly after his return from Europe.

In 1899 MIT Annual Report of the President and Treasurer provides a first glimpse at the newly to be formed landscape option. The full page titled New Courses and Instructions notes:

An optional course in Landscape Architecture has been planned to diverge from the architectural course in the second year, and Mr. Guy Lowell, who graduated from the Institute in 1894, and has recently received a diploma at the French government school of Fine Arts, has been appointed to lecture upon this subject, which he has made an object of special study while in Europe.

In addition to the programme elaborated by our own departments, engineers, landscape gardeners, and architects have been consulted, and our thanks are due for the very carefully considered projects of work which have



Guy Lowell head of the landscape architecture program at MIT.



MIT architecture studio. Note the woman in the back.

been made for us. Each author has shown a tendency to multiply studies in his favorite branch, so that the only difficulty has been in reducing the number to a suitable course, of which a schedule will be issued later. A main feature of the new option will be a very thorough course in Horticulture at the Arnold Arboretum, which is under the direction of Mr. Charles S. Sargent. Horticultural and botanical studies in the laboratory and the field will extend through three years, and ample opportunities will be offered not only to learn the habits of trees, shrubs, and plants, but also to study landscape gardening effects in the park of the Arboretum, which is of easy access from our Institute. Excursions will also he made for the same purpose to suitable localities. The engineering practice required for grading, masonry, and other work will be taught, so that correct plans and estimates can he made. Architectural studies and skill in design and composition are 'most essential parts of the course.

The consultations referred to above give added proof that a course in Landscape Architecture, which has now become one of the professional demands of our country, can be best given in conjunction with a strong school of architecture and engineering, and we are fortunate in being able to establish a connection with the Arboretum, which Mr. Sargent's publications have made known throughout the world as a great horticultural station. <sup>11</sup>

In the same year the Architecture Department reports the following regarding the new option: "The course of study is the result of the fullest cooperation between the Institute and practising architects of the highest rank in their profession. The value of this assistance will be better understood when it is known that no precedent exists on which to base such a course, and that the prescribed studies represent the result of personal experience during years of active practice. The schedule has been under consideration for some time and now approaches complete form. Next term the department will be prepared to receive students in the second-year work of this option" 12

Indeed by 1900 the program was fully operational as the 1900-01 Annual Catalogue indicates:

Course IV. —Architecture — Option 3, Landscape Architecture — This option meets the demand for trained landscape architects, due to the steadily increasing attention now paid to all questions concerning the designing of public and private grounds. The profession is most closely allied with architecture and civil engineering; and these two departments are largely drawn on for instruction. The fundamental biological, botanical, and geological subjects are taught in their several departments.

The professional work of this option begins in the second year with elementary architectural design. Under horticulture are comprised not only the study at the Arnold Arboretum of all that relates to planting, and the use of plants and trees, but also the lectures on the history of landscape architecture.

In the third year, an extension of the same general line of work is followed, with the addition of architectural history. In the fourth year, landscape design, lectures on practical work, and horticulture are the main features.

Freehand drawing, pen and ink, and water color extend through the three years, nearly as in the-general course, with the usual requirements in physics, languages, and history.

Not only as a profession in itself does this option offer unusual opportunities, but it gives to both the architect and the civil engineer a chance for special studies which cannot fail to be of the greatest value.

Persons applying for admission as special students in architecture must be college graduates, or twenty-one years of age, with not less than two years' office experience. They will be required to pass, before entrance, examinations1 in plane and solid geometry and freehand and mechanical drawing (including projections, isometric and the elements of descriptive geometry); and must include in their work at the Institute the regular courses in freehand drawing and descriptive geometry, unless already proficient in these subjects.<sup>13</sup>

# The Landscape Architecture Decade

In the 1900 Annual Report of the President and Treasurer the Architecture department reports that the new Landscape Architecture concentration attracted 10 students – five in the second year and five in the third. About the program, the report states confidently that,



The strong influence of the architecture curriculum and the Beaux-Arts style, can clearly be seen in the gardens designed, by MIT's graduates.

Bayberry Land Garden by Marian

Coffin.

"we have daily proofs of the unrivalled advantages that we can offer for this study in our close proximity to the Arnold Arboretum, where much of our regular work is done, and to Brookline and other suburbs where many fine estates have been thrown open to our students through the courtesy of their owners." <sup>14</sup>

Subsequent reports describe the progress of the program and its slow decline until the option was cancelled in 1910.

In 1901 the Report claims that the option will have completed its first four years in the following June, and that "these years have fully proved that we have made no mistake in adding this option to our course." However, the next sentence hints that the Landscape Architecture program was having some trouble establishing its identity, particularly in the absence of comparable programs at other universities; "Notwithstanding the entire lack of precedent of a well-defined course of study for the landscape architect, the results of the year show need of only slight changes in that laid down. These will be carefully considered and attended to." <sup>15</sup>

1902 – This year, the Landscape Architecture program graduated its first student, who then became a candidate for a Master's of Science degree. Beyond this, there is no further mention of the Landscape Architecture program in this year's Report, either as an undergraduate or a graduate course of study.

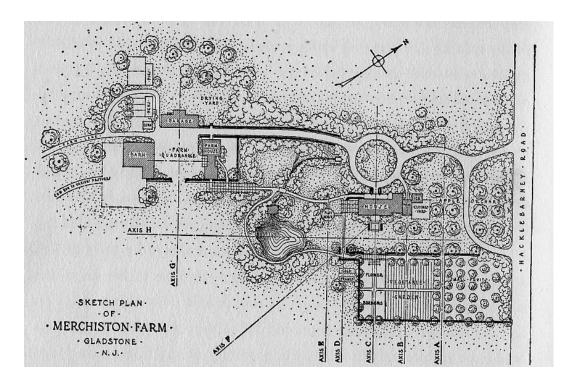
1903 – In 1903, the graduate course for Architecture was "filled", and a new instructor was added to the staff in response to this increased demand for graduate architecture training. The Report also notes that, "through the continued generosity of Mr. Guy Lowell [the founder of the Landscape Architecture course], the department was enabled...to offer attractive money prizes for sketches and more serious work, to be made during the summer vacation." Other than this unrelated mention of Lowell, no reference is made to the Landscape Architecture concentration.

1904 – More mention is made of the success of the graduate program, particularly as a "good influence" on the undergraduate classes. However, the Report makes no mention at all of the Landscape Architecture concentration. It does, however, note that a woman, Miss Eliza Codd, won the Rotch prize of \$200 for the best academic record for a regular student. Again, the annual Report hints that the new graduate program required a shifting of departmental resources that may have left the Landscape Architecture program shortchanged. Its is during this time that the Landscape option is no longer available to undergraduates, but is continued as a graduate option.<sup>16</sup>

1905 – No mention of the Landscape Architecture option this year. The Report indicates that the physical space of the department was very crowded, saying that students are enrolled in "numbers that have tested the full capacity of our floors."

1906 – No mention of Landscape Architecture. A reference is made to "Option I" (Architectural Design) and "Option II" (Architectural Engineering). The Report states that "More applications [for employment] come for graduates from Option II than it is possible to meet, and the reputations of those offering these positions are sufficient proofs of the high consideration in which these graduates are held."

1907 – This year saw an unusually large fourth-year class of Architecture undergraduates. It was also the first year in which the Perkins Traveling Fellowship was awarded to a woman, Miss Ida A. Ryan (winner of the Rotch Prize in 1905).



A garden site plan by Martha Brookes Hutcheson showing the strong influence of the Beaux-Arts.

1908 – The Report mentions that Mr. George E. Burnap, "a graduate in the Option in Landscape Gardening and a beneficiary of a Travelling Fellowship from the Austin Fund", was hired as an instructor in the "Rural Art Department" of Cornell University. This is the only mention of the Landscape Architecture program. The Report states that "No radical changes have been made since last year," although the report calls for "continuous exertion in the Option in Architectural Engineering", due to the demand for these graduates and the "rapid progress in the methods of scientific construction".

1909 – Again, no mention is made of the Landscape Architecture option, although the Report states that, "the Option in Architectural Engineering is being taken by an unusually large number of students. Its graduates are always in great demand…".

1910 – The appeal for the traveling fellowship funding is reiterated, and there is no mention anywhere of the Landscape Architecture program or courses.

1911 – This year began with the resignation of Professor Francis Chandler, the head of the department, after twenty-three years of "most able leadership". The new department head, William H. Lawrence, makes no mention of the Landscape Architecture option. However, it is the final year in which Guy Lowell offered instruction in landscape architecture at MIT, even though it was no longer offered as a concentration as of 1909. Apparently, Lowell taught his course free of charge, asking that his salary be turned over to the Architecture Department.

## Competition and Decreased Resources

Guy Lowell, as the founder, and the heart and soul behind the MIT program, had a strong commitment to teaching, practicing and promoting landscape architecture. He recognized an inseparable connection between architecture design and landscape design. At MIT he

saw a perfect combination of synthesizing the formal Beaux-Art design, engineering requirements and horticulture. The importance of horticulture was stressed by the major role of the Arboretum in the curriculum and by the presence of John G. Jack on the faculty. Jack was engaged solely to teach horticulture, as is indicated by the fact that he taught at MIT only from 1900-1909, the years which the department ran the option. The importance of engineering for grading, constructing retaining walls, and building bridges was evident in the required courses for satisfying the graduation requirements.

Still Lowell and MIT's approach differed from the program offered at Harvard during the same time. Led and dominated by F.L Olmsted, Jr. and Arthur Shurcliffe, Harvard held up landscape architecture as a separate and distinct profession, in which one must be trained specifically. It was not perceived as simply another skill to be mastered by an architect, as at MIT. Rather, Harvard pursued the granting of a separate degree associated with the Lawrence Scientific School, while at MIT, students received a degree in Architecture, regardless of whether they pursued the option of landscape or architectural engineering. From 1900 to 1908, students of Landscape Architecture at Harvard received a Bachelor of Science, but, from the beginning, it was envisioned as a unique and separate profession. In 1906, the Graduate School of Applied Science was founded and in 1908 landscape architecture became exclusively a graduate program within that school awarding a Master of Landscape Architecture degree. By 1914 Harvard instituted the Faculty of Architecture as a separate faculty, and the School of Landscape Architecture was established.

The diverging attitudes toward the education of landscape architecture proved detrimental



Women students at MIT in 1888. At the extreme left in the rear is Ellen Swalllow Richrad, the first women to be awarded a degree at MIT in 1873.

to the program at MIT. Unable to compete with a specialized degree at Harvard, the program suffered from low enrollment and was terminated in 1910.

With the ceasing of the landscape architecture program at MIT fewer options remained for those seeking this specialized education. Furthermore, women, who were always a strong part of the program, were left with no co-ed educational opportunities for professional training in the field. Women interested in pursuing professional landscape design had to attended all-women institutions such as the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, founded in 1917 or the Lowthorpe School, founded in 1901 in Groton. While the all-women schools offered course work and training, they kept women from the acknowledged academic leaders in the field, the technical know-how and experience of a technological institute like MIT and a unique setting open to both sexes.

#### **CO-EDUCTAION**

MIT's founder, William Barton Rogers, envisioned MIT in 1846 as a place which would "draw all the lovers of knowledge of both sexes to the halls of the Institute." Although MIT has been open to women from its inception, the faculty of the new school were not as open-minded: admission of female students was not consistent with the present condition of the school and the organization of the classes. When Ellen Swallow (1842-1911) applied as a full time student in 1870, the faculty admitted her without tuition, as they still saw the admission of women in the nature of an experiment. Still, President John Runkle wrote upon her admission: I consider the introduction of ladies to the Institute a consummation devoutly to be wished... I congratulate you and every earnest woman upon the result. <sup>17</sup> Ellen wrote during her student days: "I hope I am winning a way which others will keep open. Perhaps the fact that I am not a radical and that I do not scorn womanly duties [cleaning, sewing]... is winning me stronger allies than anything else." In 1873 Henrietta Swallow became MIT's first woman graduate (and later its first woman instructor).

In 1876 Ellen Swallow Richards and the Women's Educational Association (WEA), a Boston women's group dedicated to the higher education of women, raised funds for a "laboratory, balance and reception rooms" devoted exclusively to instructing women in Chemistry. In return for the support, MIT changed its admissions policy: "Special students shall be admitted to advanced instruction in Chemistry ... without distinction of sex." (In 1882, the Institute finally accepted women as regular students.)

By the mid-1890's women were about 6 percent of the total enrollment at MIT, with first Bachelor degrees awarded to women in Architecture (1888), Chemistry (1873), Biology (1889) Physics (1888), General Science (1885), and Geology (1891).

There were various reasons for the low enrollment of women at MIT during its earlier years. Some have argued that few women were interested in engineering and sciences, more significantly, few were adequately prepared in mathematics and physics, and they were not likely to be encouraged by parents and teachers. Career expectations were limited, and MIT with its reputation for high standards and "tech-is-hell" tradition did not attract coeds. Another common argument of the time was that the admission of women would deprive men of places at the institute, and that women were likely to get married and 'waste' their technical education.<sup>19</sup>

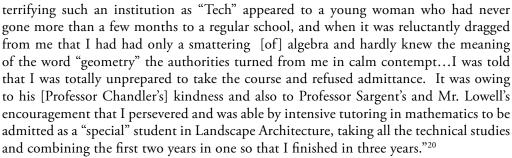
Marian Cruger Coffin who graduated from the Landscape Architecture program in 1904 painted a vivid picture of the initial difficulties she encountered, "You can imagine how



MIT architecture graduate of 1909 Florence Luscomb selling suffragette papers at Boston Common.



MIT architecture studio around 1902. Note the single woman in the back.





Architect Lois Lilley Howe

#### Women in the Architecture Department

It is important to mention the presence of women in the architecture department. As women had been admitted to MIT since its founding, architecture studies including the landscape architecture option were also open to them. Women students were attracted to the MIT option because it provided excellent opportunities for them which they were denied elsewhere. At MIT, woman students had the opportunity to study directly with noted architects and be trained in engineering, construction as well in contemporary design, equal to their male counterparts. Noted women graduates paved the way to a new branch of education and professionalism including the opportunity to form their own practices. Many drew inspiration from noted alumnae such as Lois Lilley Howe (1864-1964) who entered the program in 1888 and later became one of the founding partners of Howe, Manning & Almy the first woman-owned architectural firm created in Boston, and only the second such firm to be established in the country.

The beginnings of the firm can be traced back to 1894 when Lois Lilley Howe started to receive commissions. In 1913, Lois Lilley Howe asked Eleanor Manning O'Connor

(1884-1973), one of her draftspersons and a fellow MIT graduate, to be her partner and the firm of Lois Lilley Howe & Manning resulted. The firm's success and growth lead to another office draftsperson and MIT graduate, Mary Almy (1883-1967), to join the partnership and Howe, Manning & Almy officially began on April 1, 1926.

Professionally, Lois Lilley Howe was a forerunner because there were few women architects at that time. In 1901, she became the first woman to be officially elected to the A.I.A, when Robert Swain Peabody sponsored her for membership.. She was also one of the first women admitted to the Boston Society of Architects. Perhaps her greatest honor came in 1931, when she was elected a Fellow of the A.I.A., the first woman ever to be selected. She retired from Howe, Manning & Almy in 1937, after practicing for more than forty years.<sup>21</sup>

Women who practiced landscape architecture at the time, may have not faced as much opposition or as many obstacles as their female colleagues practicing architecture. Society historically associated women with gardening and plants and therefore their connection to landscape architecture or landscape gardening was not as difficult to make as to associate women with the profession of building design and construction. Deborah Nevins, architectural and landscape historian noted, "In terms of fame and influence in their time, women landscape architects were far ahead of their sisters in architecture, no doubt in part because women and gardening, as opposed to women and building, were naturally connected in the public mind. It was all right to five a women a commission for a garden but women were not supposed to know anything about construction. Moreover, a building involves more money than a garden, and our society traditionally has been reluctant to allow women to spend large sums of someone else's money to exercise their creativity."

On the other hand, women were not only trusted to do garden design, but their careful dispositions made them superior designers for gardens. Such attitudes are illustrated in Guy



MIT architecture department graduating class 1907.

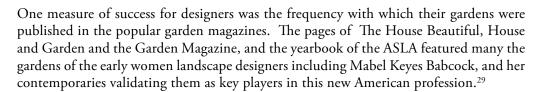
Lowell's remarks: "A woman will fuss with a garden in a way that no man will ever have the patience to do. If necessary, she will sit on a camp stool and see every individual plant put into the ground. I have no hesitation in saying that where a relatively small garden is concerned, the average woman will do better than the average man." <sup>24</sup>

The struggle of women architects and landscape architects of that time cannot be taken lightly. Even after graduating from Landscape programs, it was almost impossible for women to get apprenticeships as is noted in the Outlook magazine in 1908 "There is a general feeling among established landscape architects that the young women now preparing for the profession are impatient of acquiring so much detail. There are rumors that some of them decline to learn to draw, proposing to stake out their plans on the ground, and that others scorn to learn draughtsmanship since they can always command the services of make underlings to do the stupid work." In this same article, Marion Coffin described the difficulties she encountered after graduation, "It is hard to get a start, as there is a prejudice in many offices against employing women.... A woman has to solve many problems and learn the ropes entirely by herself, while a man has the advantage of long office training and experience" 26

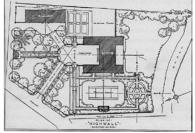
In speaking about the financial difficulties Coffin elaborates, "Unless a woman has capital or influence, or is able to get into a good office, she is very foolish to take up the profession as a means of support."<sup>27</sup>

#### NOTED WOMEN OF MIT LANDSCAPE PROGRAM

Several of the women who studied in the Landscape Architecture program at MIT went on to become gifted leaders in the field and helped shape the American landscape as professionals, writers, critics and educators. Ellen Shipman, not a part of the MIT program, but one of the women pioneers summed up women's influence in a New York Times feature: "Before women took hold of the profession, landscape architects were doing cemetery work...until women took up landscaping [she said] gardening in this country was at its lowest ebb. The renaissance of the art was due largely to the fact that women, instead of working over their boards, used plants as if they were painting pictures. Today women are at the top of the profession."<sup>28</sup>



The following briefly highlights the lives and careers of the more well-known and influential women MIT graduates, who shaped the nascent field of American landscape architecture.



Garden by Martha Brookes Hutcheson.

### Mabel Keyes Babcock (1862-1931)

Mabel Keyes Babcock received her graduate architecture degree from MIT in 1909, at the age of 47, years after completing her undergraduate studies at Northwestern University. Babcock was a native Bostonian; she was descended from a lieutenant who fought in the Battle of Lexington, and her father had been the Principal of the Somerville High School.

After leaving MIT, Babcock not only had an active landscape architecture practice but also taught horticulture courses at Wellesley College from 1910 to 1914. During WWI, Babcock was an instructor in conservation at the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture for Women, which was founded in 1901 to instruct women in the art of gardening. During wartime, she also served as a member of the central committee of the MIT War Service Auxiliary, and from 1916 to 1920 as the President of the MIT Women's Association. This commitment to public life led to her longstanding role as the Dean of Women Students at MIT.





MIT President's Garden design by Mabel Babcock.

Babcock was equally prominent as a design practitioner. Among her best-known designs are the MIT President's Garden and MIT's Great Court, where her work augmented that of another woman graduate of MIT's landscape architecture concentration, Elizabeth Greenleaf Pattee. This original commission for the President's garden was expanded to the entire campus. Her work was admired in a 1917 Herald article which describes the transformation of the grounds of the newly constructed 'Tech' campus from "gauntness increased by the unkempt condition of the land..." and "the central court looked like a vast, empty hole..." into something much nobler than an 'educational factory'. The article comments that "Under Miss Babcock's supervision some quite exciting operations have been going on since last May in the great court of the educational group."30 The article continues with detailed descriptions of the size and planting methods of the maple trees to the newly planted rhododendron beds. The article concludes "Not only are the vistas becoming wonderfully attractive as one looks into Tech's domain from the esplanade, but the outward view over the basin, perhaps, including a gigantic pylon in one corner of the foreground is sure to be spectacular" 31 Babcock may have also been involved in the designed of the campuses at Wellesley and Bates College in Maine. She died in 1931, at the age of 69.

#### Education

- A.B. Northwestern University.
- 1908 S.B. MIT (Architecture)
- 1909 S.M. MIT (Architecture)

#### Career/ Accomplishments

- Designed the MIT President's garden and MIT's Great Court
- May have worked on the campus design of Wellesley and Bates College
- During WWI, Babcock was an instructor in conservation at the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture for Women, later becoming director of agricultural courses in 1918.
- Taught horticulture courses at Wellesley College from 1910 to 1914
- During wartime, she also served as a member of the central committee of the MIT War Service Auxiliary
- President of MIT's Women's Assoc. 1916-1920
- Member of the ASLA, Massachusetts Historical Society, Farm and Garden Assn.

### Martha Brookes Hutcheson (1871-1959)

Martha Brookes Hutcheson was born in New York City in October of 1871. She grew up in a family of avid gardeners, and as an adult, fondly recalled the summers she spent working in the gardens and fields of the family farm in outside of Burlington, Vermont. As a young adult (1893-1895) she studied fabric and book cover design and mechanical drawing at the New York School of Applied Design for Women. It is not known if she actually aspired to be a decorative artist. In the late 1980's she augmented her formal education with a tour of Europe where she studied the gardens in England, France and Italy.<sup>32</sup>

1900 was a pivotal moment in Hutcheson's life, when she decided to enter MIT's fledgling landscape architecture program. Hutcheson's discovery of the program and the beginning of her lifelong interest in social reform through landscape architecture is recalled during a hospital visit, "About 1898, one day I saw the grounds of Bellevue Hospital in New York, on which nothing was planted, and was overcome with the terrible waste of opportunity for beauty which was not being given to the hundreds of patients who could see it or go to it, in convalescence. In trying to find out how I could get in touch with such authorities as those who might allow me to plant the area of ground, I stumbled upon the fact that my aim would be politically impossible, but that there was a course in Landscape Architecture being formed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the first course which America had ever held." 33

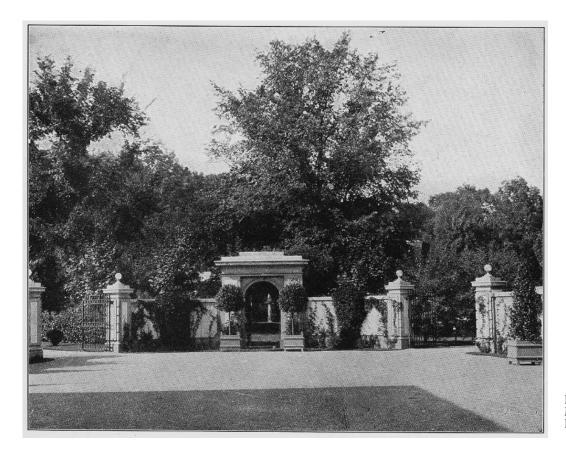


Martha Brookes Brown and William Hutcheson at their wedding party 1910.

She at once began studying the required courses for entrance. Her decision to enter MIT program was over the strenuous objections of her own family, and even over her own misgivings about "the fact that it was considered almost social suicide and distinctly matrimonial suicide for a woman to enter any profession." At the time, Hutcheson was already twenty-nine years old, well past the age at which young women of her social class were supposed to have married and had children. Hutcheson left MIT in 1902 without a degree, it is not clear if discontinued her studies over dissatisfaction with the program as she states, "I saw at once that the curriculum did not give nearly enough time to what must be known of the plant world" or because of personal or professional disagreements with Guy Lowell.

Later, Hutcheson was to marry, despite the odds, at her home in Gladstone, New Jersey, then called "Merchiston Farm" which is now preserved as the Bamboo Brook Education Center. Unlike most of Hutcheson's other private landscape commissions, the design of the 100-acre Bamboo Brook has survived the last century and become one of her most enduring landscape designs.

Establishing clientele was difficult, as it was for most young designers both male and female, and it is assumed that family connections and friends helped her gain early commissions. Her training at MIT and her informal work at the arboretum probably also helped to provide introductions to well-heeled clients in the Boston area. She worked on several residential estates in the area, the most important of these commissions being Maudesleigh, the Frederick Moseley estate in Newburyport, Massachusetts (now Maudsley State Park) due to its size and visibility within the wealthy New England garden builders.<sup>35</sup> Hutcheson considered this garden to be among her finest efforts.



Highwall Estate at Pride Crossing, MA designed by Martha Brookes Hutcheson

Like Guy Lowell, Hutcheson's career gained prominence through her writings, which she published concurrently with her professional work. In her 1923 book, *The Spirit of the Garden*, which was a critical and commercial success in its time, Hutcheson explains her first theories on landscape design. She also benefited from exposure in popular magazines of the time, the 1901 issue of *The Cosmopolitan* magazine featured her article 'The Garden Spirit.'<sup>36</sup>

Hutcheson is becoming more well-known for three of her landscape designs: Maudesleigh, Longfellow House Garden, in Cambridge (now a National Park Service site); and her home in Gladstone, New Jersey, now the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center. Hutcheson was one of the first three women members of the American Society for Landscape Architects. She died in 1959 at the age of 88.

#### Studies/MIT

- 1893-1895 Studied at the New York School of Applied Design for Women
- Private instruction in watercolors from Rhoda Holmes Nicholls.
- She entered the landscape architecture program in 1900
- 1900-1902 Studied in the Landscape Program but left without degree

#### Career/ Accomplishments

- Wrote the commercially successful book The Spirit of the Garden in 1923 which
  is still in print The Spirit of the Garden (1923), which was recently hailed as the
  "first account by a woman practitioner to combine a discussion of design with
  an extensive visual presentation of her own work."
- Designed Maudesleigh, the Frederick Moseley estate in Newburyport, MA
- Designed the Longfellow House Garden, in Cambridge (now a National Park Service site)
- Designed her home in Gladstone, New Jersey, now the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center
- In 1935 she became a fellow in the ASLA, the only 3<sup>rd</sup> woman to be so honored, for her more than 40 years as a lecturer and author on the importance of good design as a force for social and civic betterment.

# Marian Cruger Coffin (1876-1957)

Perhaps MIT's most well-known landscape architect, Marian Cruger Coffin graduated as a special student from the university's architecture program in 1904, at age 28. Although Coffin's father died when she was seven years old, her mother's well-connected family and friends enabled Marian to live in relative ease and pursue her studies as a special student at MIT.

After leaving MIT, experiencing difficulty in gaining employment in any of the established firms, like many other women graduates, Coffin capitalized on her family's social connections to obtain her first commissions. Coffin's strong connection with her childhood friend and cousin, Henry Francis du Pont, developed while they both studied in Boston, she at MIT and he at Harvard. It was logical that Francis du Pont turned to his good friend when he inherited the family's Delaware estate, Winterthur , in1908.<sup>37</sup> At Winterthur, her comprehensive scheme involved an exceptional degree of design responsibility, going well beyond the limitations of garden design.<sup>38</sup> Her friendship with du Pont and other family connections brought her many wealthy clients. Her obvious talent combined to make her one of the most well-known high society landscape designers

of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century specializing in large private gardens. In addition to her work for the DuPont family (she also was commissioned to work on the du Pont estates in Mount Cuba and Gibralter), Coffin designed estates for the Senator H. Alexander Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Field, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Hutton, the Vanderbilts, and Hattie Carnegie.

Coffin was first recognized professionally in 1906 when she was accepted as a junior member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. In 1918, she was made a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects, one of only two women to achieve this status. Then, from 1918 to 1952, Coffin was appointed the University of Delaware's landscape architect, a position which required Coffin to unite the university's two separate campuses into one cohesive design. Coffin's other commisions include work for the New York Botanical Garden and the Pavilion at Fort Ticonderoga in New York. For these projects, as well as a large body of estate work in Long Island, Coffin was honored with the Gold Medal of the Architectural League of New York in 1930.

Marion Coffin's broad view of landscape architecture and her capability to 'do it all', as she articulated "...landscape architecture covered the design of the entire grounds of an estate instead of merely putting proper flowers in the garden," and her career spanning 53 years established her position as a female trailblazer of the field of landscape architecture.

#### College Studies/MIT

- 1901-1902 MIT special student, she studied Architecture, Biology, and Drawing.
- 1903-1904 graduated in the Class of 1904 as a special student from the Landscape Architecture program
- 1946 received an honorary doctorate form Hobart and William Smith Colleges Career/ Accomplishments
  - Original plan and layout for the grounds for the University of Delaware in Newark
  - Committee member of NY Botanical Garden in the Bronx
  - Pavilion at Fort Ticonderoga in New York



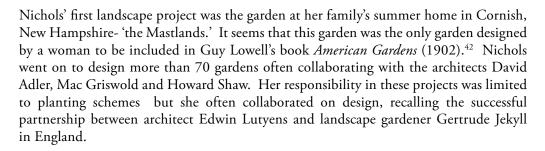
Marian Coffin at her Rhode Island Home

- Connecticut College
- Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven
- The duPont family estates at Winterthur, Mount Cuba and Gibraltar
- Gibraltar, the former Rodney Sharp estate, in Wilmington, Delaware, which has recently been restored
- Marian Coffin also wrote one book: Trees and Shrubs for Landscape Effects (1940).
- Fellow of the ALSA 1918 (Second woman to become a fellow, the first was a founding member Beatrix Jones Farrand)

# Rose Standish Nichols (1872–1960)

Rose Standish Nichols is best known as a landscape gardener and author. She was born to Dr. Arthur H. and Elizabeth Fisher Homer Nichols in 1872. Her family summered at the artists' Colony in Cornish in the 1890's where her uncle, American Renaissance sculptor, Augustus Saint-Gaudens and also lived. She was a favorite niece of Saint-Gaudens, it is believed that he encouraged her interest garden design. It is also likely that she was influenced by the many artists, architects and writers that surrounded her in Cornish. <sup>40</sup>

Nichols completed only a few courses at MIT as a non-degree, special student. She studied with Desire Despradelle while at MIT. She left in 1899 just before the landscape architecture program was officially instituted under the leadership of Guy Lowell. She also received private tutoring from Charles Platt in Cornish, from Inigo Trigs in London and spent time at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.<sup>41</sup>



Although she was trained as a designer, she is better known as a writer. Her extensive travels abroad enabled Nichols to become an astute critic and historian of gardens and the landscape. Her 1902 book *English Pleasure Gardens* was followed by two more volumes, *Italian Pleasure Gardens* and *Spanish and Portuguese Gardens*. As their titles suggest, these books were intended as guidebooks to Europe's lesser-known gardens, with photographs and line drawings by Nichols. A thoroughly independent woman and world traveler, Nichols took advantage of her social connections to access and document private gardens all over Europe. She parlayed these experiences into a career as a landscape architecture critic, publishing over fifty articles on European landscape design. After a notable career as a designer of small gardens and as a writer, Nichols died in 1964 at the age of 92.



Rose Standish Nichols

#### Studies/MIT

- Enrolled at MIT in 1899 as a special student
- Studied with architect Charles Platt.
- Studied at the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris
- Studied with Inigo Trigs in London

# Career/ Accomplishments

- Her first garden, for her family's summer home in Cornish, New Hampshire, was included in Guy Lowell's American Gardens (1902), the garden is now part of the Cornish Colony Gallery and Museum.
- English Pleasure Gardens (1902), her first book, is one of the first comprehensive treatments of the subject garden design
- Spanish and Portuguese Gardens (1924)
- Italian Pleasure Gardens (1928)

## Elizabeth Greenleaf Pattee

A graduate of MIT's class of 1916, Elizabeth Greenleaf Pattee designed the landscaping of MIT's Killian Court. Her bachelor's thesis was entitled "A Design for the Main Building of a Day School for Girls."

Patte as a professor of Landscape Architecture at Rhode Island School of Design from 1945-65.





Great (Killian) Court at MIT designed by Elizabeth Pattee and Mabel Babcock

## **Appendix**

COURSES OF INSTRUCTION. IV. - ARCHITECTURE. - (Landscape Option.) (Sec also page 39.) FIRST YEAR. SEE PAGE 31. SECOND YEAR. THIRD YEAR. SECOND TERM. FIRST TERM. 625 Landscape Design . . . . . 631 Design Architectural History . . . . 626 Horticulture . . . . Freehand Drawing . . . . 119
German (or French) . . . 201 (191)
Political Economy . . . . 245 FOURTH YEAR. SECOND TERM. FIRST TERM. 643 Landscape Architecture . . . 643 Landscape Architecture . . . . 644 Landscape Design . . . . . . ings : Landscape Gardening . . 646 Sanitary Engineering and Drain-481 age: Masonry . . . . . . 637 639 Water Color . Photography . . . . . . 410 European Civilization and Art . 228 European Civilization and Art

Landscape Architecture Courses - 1900 (Option 3)

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Students practicated from Architecture Dept to date 176 197 236 251 275 287 309 330 349 367
Students         Students grad grad grad at drop graduated from Architecture         Architecture           Dept to date         that year           176         22           197         21           218         21           236         18           251         15           275         24           287         12           309         22           349         19           367         18

Enrollment statistics MIT 1989-1911

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Eran Ben-Joseph is a Professor of Landscape Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, City Design and Development Group. Holly D. Ben-Joseph RLA is practicing Landscape Architecture in the Boston area, Anne Dodge is a city planner and historian residing in Boston.

We are grateful for the assistance and help of the staff at the MIT Museum and the Institute Archives & Special Collections especially Laura Knott and Gary Van Zante of MIT Museum Architecture Collection and Research

- <sup>2</sup> Deborah Nivens. April, 1985, "The triumph of Flora: Women and the American landscape, 1890-1935," Antiques 913
- $^3$  Judith B. Tankard. "Women take the Lead in Landscape Art" pg 2
- <sup>4</sup> Judith B. Tankard. "Women take the Lead in Landscape Art" pg 3
- <sup>5</sup> Cited in Francis E. Wylie. 1975. MIT in Perspective. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. P. 7.
- $^6$  Advanced Studies in the HTC of Art and Architecture—Beaux Arts in America MIT seminar by Prof. Mark Jarzombek
- <sup>7</sup> MIT Museum Architecture and Design archives- Constant Antoine Désiré Despradelle
- <sup>8</sup> The following section on Guy Lowll is taken from Kimberly Alexander Shilland, Curator, Architectural Collection Unpublished report on Guy Lowell and Landscape Architecture at MIT, 1900-1910, MIT Museum 1992. See also Lowell Guy in *Pioneers Of American Landscape Design II: an annotated bibliography* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural

Resources, Heritage Preservation Services, Historical Landscape Initiative, 1995. edited by Charles A. Birnbaum

- <sup>9</sup> Cited in Kimberly Alexander Shilland, 1992 page 3
- <sup>10</sup> Guy, Lowell, 1902. American Gardens. Boston: Bates and Guild Company. Introduction.
- <sup>11</sup> MIT Annual Report of the President and Treasurer 1898 pg. 35
- <sup>12</sup> MIT Annual Report of the President and Treasurer 1898: pg. 44
- <sup>13</sup> MIT Annual Catalog 1900-1901 pp. 38-41
- <sup>14</sup> MIT Annual Report of the President and Treasurer 1900-1901 pp. 38-41
- <sup>15</sup> MIT Annual Report of the President and Treasurer 1901-1902 pg. 30
- <sup>16</sup> Kimberly Alexander Shilland, Curator, Architectural Collection
- <sup>17</sup> Source Association of MIT Alumnae
- <sup>18</sup> Source Association of MIT Alumnae
- <sup>19</sup> In Francis E. Wylie. 1975. MIT in Perspective. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. p. 145.
- <sup>20</sup> Martha Brookes Hutcheson, *The Spirit of the Garden* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001)
  Introduction by Rebecca Warren Davidson, xi
- $^{21}$  MIT Institute Archives & Special Collections Howe, Manning & Almy, 1913-1937. Papers, 1883-1972., Manuscript Collection MC 9
- <sup>22</sup> Deborah Nivens. April, 1985, "The triumph of Flora: Women and the American landscape, 1890-1935," Antiques
- <sup>23</sup> Deborah Nivens. April, 1985, "The triumph of Flora: Women and the American landscape, 1890-1935," Antiques 905
- <sup>24</sup> Cited in Kimberly Alexander Shilland, 1992 page 5
- $^{25}$  Mary Bronson Hartt. March 28, 1908, "Women and the Art of Landscape Gardening," The Outlook New York, Vol. 88, No. 13 701
- <sup>26</sup> Mary Bronson Hartt. March 28, 1908, "Women and the Art of Landscape Gardening," The Outlook New York, Vol. 88, No. 13. 701-02
- <sup>27</sup> Mary Bronson Hartt. March 28, 1908, "Women and the Art of Landscape Gardening," The Outlook New York, Vol. 88, No. 13. 703
- <sup>28</sup> Judith B. Tankard. "Women take the Lead in Landscape Art" pg 1
- <sup>29</sup> Deborah Nivens. April, 1985, "The triumph of Flora: Women and the American landscape, 1890-1935," Antiques 913

- <sup>30</sup> Sunday Herald, 10/21/1907. No title or page
- <sup>31</sup> Sunday Herald, 10/21/1907. No title or page
- <sup>32</sup> Martha Brookes Hutcheson, *The Spirit of the Garden* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) Introduction by Rebecca Warren Davidson, ix
- <sup>33</sup> Martha Brookes Hutcheson, *The Spirit of the Garden* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) Introduction by Rebecca Warren Davidson, xi
- <sup>34</sup> Martha Brookes Hutcheson, *The Spirit of the Garden* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) Introduction by Rebecca Warren Davidson, xii
- <sup>35</sup> Martha Brookes Hutcheson, *The Spirit of the Garden* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) Introduction by Rebecca Warren Davidson, xiii
- <sup>36</sup> Martha Brookes Hutcheson, *The Spirit of the Garden* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) Introduction by Rebecca Warren Davidson, xiii
- <sup>37</sup> Bayberry Land Biography. Marion Cruger Coffin 1876-1951, http://www.town.southampton.ny.us/specialgallery/bayberry/marion\_poster.pdf
- <sup>38</sup> Judith B. Tankard. "Women take the Lead in Landscape Art" pg 6
- <sup>39</sup> "Marion C. Coffin, Designed Estates," The New York Times, (Feb. 4, 1957)
- <sup>40</sup> Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site. http://www.sgnhs.org/Augustus%20SGaudens%20CD-HTML/Cornish/FamilyFriends5.htm
- <sup>41</sup> Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site. http://www.sgnhs.org/Augustus%20SGaudens%20CD-HTML/Cornish/FamilyFriends5.htm
- $^{42}$  Judith B. Tankard. "Women take the Lead in Landscape Art" pg  $10\,$