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*Abroad Inspirations, American Realities: European Influences on Rose Standish Nichols's
(1872-1960) American Garden Landscape Designs*

Introduction

At the turn of the century, Rose Standish Nichols (1872-1960) pioneered early American landscape design. With the storied Beacon Hill area of Boston, Massachusetts as her home base, Nichols travelled Europe, gaining inspiration from abroad gardens. Each country she visited had a differing approach to the curation of gardens, and Nichols was keen to comprehend and make note of these distinctions. Using Nichols's relationship with her uncle, famed Beaux-Arts sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907), as an origin point for her interests, this paper aims to explore the landscape architect's inspirations for her American garden designs and claim that the exposure she gleaned from her uncle was the stimulus for her career.

By diving into her correspondence with Augustus Saint-Gaudens and comparing her work at Cornish Colony with her *English Pleasure Gardens* (published 1902), her work at Havenwood with *Italian Pleasure Gardens* (published 1928), and her work at the Mason House with *Spanish and Portuguese Gardens* (published 1924), it becomes clear that Nichols's abroad travels and musings directly impacted her work in the United States. Each of Nichols's books provides an intellectual grounding point for the sections of this paper and as such, this investigation is accordingly structured. Then, from these writings, this paper connects these geographic principles with an American garden which allows for a visual understanding of the landscape architect's thought being put into action. This localization provides clarity and a more

cohesive organization for this project. Her articles published in *House and Garden*, provided by the Nichols House Museum, afford prodigious insight into Nichols's thought processes, and ground this project in the decisive actions of her career. Furthermore, these articles bring her lofty philosophies and writings documented in her books into professional practice. Split up into three main sections and bookended by an introduction and conclusion, these mini-chapters highlight Nichols's three greatest European influences: England, Spain, and Italy. Then, this paper pairs each geographic region with an American garden, which reflects her inspirations, travels, time spent, and discussions with her uncle.

Use of her diary and letters from Houghton Library at Harvard University offers imperative contextual information which aides in the achievement of these goals. Her books, articles, and letters incontrovertibly prove that Rose Nichols's travels in Europe were a central inspiration for many of her projects in the United States. Through her social networking, travels, and writings, Nichols established herself as a prominent aesthetic intellectual of the early twentieth century, impacting the way Americans conceived of nature in growing urban environments in not solely the Northeast, but throughout the country. Through Nichols's ability to maintain high society clients, she sold the European garden ideal, in its popular forms, to the wealthiest in America and cemented herself as a professional landscape architect who succeeded in transferring European garden designs to the United States.

Nichols's relationship with her famed uncle, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, is well documented through their mutual correspondence. From discussing health, weather, Europe, and gardens, their association was based on all topics of interest, from the mundane to the exceedingly aesthetic. Their correspondence indicates that it was Saint-Gaudens who initially

encouraged Nichols to explore landscape design as a career.¹ His letters to Nichols are filled with not only descriptions of places and spaces in Europe, but they are also visually grounded in his own sketches of specific European gardens and estates (Figures 1 & 2). Looking at these sketches shows the lively interest of both people for gardens and landscape. Saint-Gaudens articulated the landscape design at this French castle through pictures, suggesting that words were not enough of an accurate depiction for the burgeoning Nichols. He stated when describing the French garden, “an avenue of approach 1 kilometer long formed of two rows of linden trees widening out which looked from the home in an effective manner makes a court.”² This statement expresses the minutiae of the garden that interested both Nichols and Saint-Gaudens. Not only does he attenuate for and appreciate the beauty of nature in its cultivated state, but there is also a consideration made for how these spaces were constructed. The fact that he articulated the specificities of how this garden was assembled and that he noted the dimensions of the trees and their placement suggests that he knew Nichols was fascinated by more than aesthetics and the end result of this work. The physical construction of this space was of significance to his niece, and Saint-Gaudens’ discussion of how gardens were composed shows a level of curiosity in landscape architecture that spans beyond simply experiencing a garden and entertaining in the space. Beyond frivolity, this conversation indicates an interest in the intricacies which make up a garden. This correspondence informed Nichols’s practice and instructed her in the amount of effort and attention to detail which was required for successful landscape designs, worthy of their place in magazines and the properties of America’s most elite individuals. Both the home and the

¹ Louise A. Mozingo and Linda Jewell, *Women in Landscape Architecture Essays on History and Practice* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2012), 92.

² Correspondence from Augustus Saint-Gaudens to Rose Standish Nichols, MS Am 2656, Box 4, Folder 3, Rose Standish Nichols Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

garden are attenuated for in her uncle's letter, and it is this exchange between landscape and structural architecture that continued to inform Nichols's professional approaches throughout her career.

Nichols edited her uncle's personal correspondence for publication. She writes, "these familiar letters from Augustus Saint-Gaudens show the artist as his intimate friends knew him. They are interesting as the record of a critical period in his career."³ Her understanding of the value of her uncle's work on a professional level, rather than merely personal relationships, displays her intellectual ability to comprehend his career's impact. Augustus Saint-Gaudens was famous during his life and his career has certainly been appreciated after his death. Nichols's connection to learning from her uncle and inserting herself into the publication of his correspondence cements the landscape architect as a true player in the world of design, and it is these social and professional choices which shaped her career and the opportunities which she received throughout the beginning of the twentieth-century. She used her relationship with her uncle to project herself through an important connection, much like aspiring professionals on the job market today. Knowing that people knew of the famous Saint-Gaudens, Nichols attached her name with his in order to publicly connect herself with her chosen professional field.

By connecting herself with a prominent artist and architect of the era from the beginning, Nichols projected herself above her upper middle-class Beacon Hill home and stature into the upper echelons of landscape architecture and those in society who had the disposable income to spend upon gardens and landscaping. Knowing that people respond to popular names which have impacted larger society, the actions of maintaining a personal and professional correspondence

³ Rose Standish Nichols, "Familiar Letters of Augustus Saint-Gaudens. *McClure's Magazine* (1893-1926), 10, 1908, 603, <https://ezproxy.bu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.bu.edu/docview/135780618?accountid=9676>.

with her uncle and inserting herself into the memorialization of his career existed as a strategic action which propelled Nichols into an occupation of garden design. Throughout her uncle's life, Nichols visited his homes in Cornish, New Hampshire as well as in New York City, exposing herself to other prominent designers of the era and wealthy circles of both artists and patrons. Through networking and using her strong relationship with Saint-Gaudens as a social baseline, Nichols happily found her way into design classes taught by Thomas Hastings (1860-1929), of the celebrated architectural firm Carrere and Hastings, and architectural drafting classes at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology taught by renowned French born architect Constant-Désiré Despradelle (1862-1912).⁴ Again, strengthened by these relationships, Nichols gave herself intellectual clout as she entered this field, foundationally shaped by the most sought after and prominent individuals existent within the design and aesthetic world of the early twentieth-century.

Origin Points, English and Italian Inspirations, Cornish Colony, and Mastlands

In a May 1924 article in *House and Garden*, Nichols stated, “the home of the late Augustus Saint-Gaudens [in Cornish, New Hampshire] ... commands one of the loveliest prospects imaginable and contains, in its unaffected lines and simple surfaces, a quiet and appealing beauty.”⁵ Nichols fell in love with Cornish Colony after staying with her uncle and aunt in 1889.⁶ Her initial foray into one of her most famous landscape designs began with this important relationship. Again, her writing displays her sensitivity towards the assemblage of gardens, her interest in the subject matter, and her attention to the details of landscape design.

⁴ Judith B. Tankard, “Rose Standish Nichols, A Proper Bostonian,” *Arnoldia*, 1999, 26.

⁵ As found in Alma Gilbert-Smith and Judith B. Tankard, *A Place of Beauty: The Artists and Gardens of the Cornish Colony* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2000), 57.

⁶ Alma Gilbert-Smith and Judith B. Tankard, *A Place of Beauty: The Artists and Gardens of the Cornish Colony*, 89.

Her love of quiet beauty was expressed in many of her commissioned gardens, and it is clear that without Saint-Gaudens's guidance, her interests would not have developed, and she would not have cultivated such an impactful career.

In 1902, Nichols wrote *English Pleasure Gardens*, an in-depth look at private gardens which cemented her as a true professional of landscape designs.⁷ She wrote, "Nature supplies the living material, and this is the best part of a garden; craft can vary its growth, art can accentuate and frame its charm, but its ever changing beauty is the gift of God."⁸ Perhaps most indicative of English influences, and certainly reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts movement which was concurrently flourishing throughout England and the United States, her statement evokes the balance between nature and art which she focused upon throughout her career. It also expresses the thoughtful approach Nichols had towards viewing her work. Nature was always at the heart of Nichols's designs. Controlling nature and cultivating its beauty for private use was central to both Nichols's garden plans and the field as a whole. Understanding that she was molding and shaping something that was inherently wild, Nichols foundationally grounded her gardens in the idea that she was merely accentuating these attributes through her landscaping and additions of sculptures and other ornaments.

Nichols stated in an 1912 article published in *House Beautiful*, "The charm of any composition depends largely upon its being harmonious even as to trivial details... the style of the garden should obviously correspond to its environment, especially to any permanent architectural features such as an adjoining house or to the marked characteristics of the

⁷ Smith and Tankard, 90.

⁸ Rose Standish Nichols, *English Pleasure Gardens* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd, 1902), vii.

landscape.”⁹ This statement expresses the dependent relationship between architecture and landscape which was integral to Nichols’s landscape design philosophy. How she approached a garden was entirely contingent upon the physicality of the land and the style of the material buildings, the garden existing as a representation of both, evoking and highlighting the aesthetics of each through cultivated nature. A balance between the wild and the cultivated is again described as necessary for the composition of any garden. Understanding the environment and the place upon which the garden rests was central to her construction of a space. No detail was too small for her to focus upon, and each aspect of the garden had an important reason for existing within the plan.

After her family purchased a summer home in the area and renamed it Mastlands in 1892, Nichols transformed the garden to her tastes and referenced many influences informed by her initial writings and travels in Europe (Figure 3). Indicating and reinforcing her claims in *House Beautiful* she wrote, “few parts of New England bear so strong a resemblance to an Italian landscape as the hills rising above the banks of the Connecticut River opposite the peaks of Mount Ascutney.”¹⁰ The statement indicates that she had knowledge regarding Italian vistas and sought to bring what she had seen abroad to New Hampshire. Nichols makes note of the balance between place and Cornish Colony. Thus, nature and the man made bring forth reminiscences of Italy which Nichols connected through her garden design at Mastlands (Figure 4). Furthermore, it becomes clear that she was looking for ways to elevate the American landscape by seeing abroad references in its vistas. Connecting New Hampshire with Italy may seem rather arbitrary when thinking about these two places with today’s perceptions. Nevertheless, Nichols relished

⁹ Rose Standish Nichols, “How to Make a Small Garden.” *The House Beautiful*, 1912. The Nichols House Museum Collection, 88.

¹⁰ Rose Standish Nichols, “A Hilltop Garden in New Hampshire,” *House Beautiful*, March 1924, 237.

uplifting spaces to the styles and desired tastes of the early twentieth-century. Connecting the mundane with the foreign suggested that Nichols was well travelled and educated in the world, and furthermore, that she had the means to afford these experiences.

Nichols's Mastlands garden was described as,

...enclosed in a low stone wall, not of smooth masonry, but built of rough flat stones, and is separated from the house by a broad grass terrace. Although the paths are laid out with proper regularity, there is a charming, half-careless grace in the planting. The color schemes are lovely, and over the pool in the center bend the twisted branches of an old apple-tree, giving a touch of quietness and repose to the whole garden.¹¹

Here, Nichols references the Italian inspirations which shaped the garden at Mastlands. The invocation of terraces and masonry to highlight and define an area for private outdoor use was a characteristic commonly used in historic Italian gardens.¹² A large piazza off the home, added by Nichols's father, gave the structure a decidedly Italian feel and marked the landscape as a place in transition from farmyard to European inspired garden, enjoying many influences and inspirations from the physicality of the land and personal remembrances of the architect.¹³ These attributes contributed to Nichols's design. Using her own perception of the landscape, home, and area affected how she interpreted the space and the types of stimuli she drew upon to construct the cultivated garden.

Nichols was proficient in the attributes of Italian gardens. Her 1928 book, *Italian Pleasure Gardens*, detailed specific features of landscape design which were used across that country. The book also cemented Nichols as an authority upon the subject matter, further asserting her commitment and intellectual prowess within the field. Although of a later date, the

¹¹ Frances Duncan, "The Gardens of Cornish," *The Century*, October 1906, 3.

¹² Mary Palmer Dargan and Hugh Graham. Dargan, *Timeless Landscape Design: the Four-Part Master Plan* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2011), 59.

¹³ Smith and Tankard, 90.

rhetoric used in her writing easily corresponds to Nichols's designs at Mastlands. She wrote, "the typical Tuscan country-house was a square or oblong block built of stone or masonry covered with stucco. A central court and an outside loggia added to its beauty and comfort... Simple enclosures were refurbished with grottos, fountains, and statuary."¹⁴ Mastlands was marked by a central court and tree lined avenues which delineated spaces to walk and sit within the garden. Traditional of Italian gardens of the past, the use of the central court leading to a circular fountain grounded Nichols's design in references she had witnessed first hand throughout her travels abroad.

The invocation and acknowledgement of the garden's relationship with the home encouraged that the two spaces were not separate but rather, congruent and dynamically existing in a working relationship between each other. Rather, they were living in harmony and the home, with its Italian piazza, easily fell downward from the stone masonry into the garden. The recognition of a need for coherence between these two spaces was a central component of historic Italian landscape designs, and it was an element that Nichols's undoubtedly considered. The need for privacy as well as comfort was integral to the Mastlands garden and the traditional Italian tree lined pathways created a sense of intimacy within which an individual could comfortably experience nature and beauty. Controlled wildness was a theme noted by Frances Duncan and was expressed throughout Nichols's design at Mastlands.

Nichols stated of another garden in Cornish that, "the flower-pots planted with dwarf apple-trees furnish just the right vertical accents in contrast to the horizontal lines dominating the landscape."¹⁵ Clearly attenuating for linear garden components, Nichols highlights not only her

¹⁴ Nichols, *Italian Pleasure Gardens*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1931), 113.

¹⁵ Rose Standish Nichols, "How to Make a Small Garden." *The House Beautiful*, 1912. The Nichols House Museum Collection, 88.

ability to visualize landscape, but she also displays her knowledge of each spaces construction. By creating pathways and using these apple-trees to acknowledge pathways and sections, Nichols transformed the garden to a place defined by specificities and a removal of total randomness. Understanding placement of plants and flower beds affirms that Nichols took her role as a landscape architect seriously and that she was captivated by more than simply how beautiful the flowers and trees were within the garden. Often deemed a man's field, her discussion of the linearity and horizontality of the garden projects her career and Mastlands into the realm of professional commission and beyond merely a social woman's hobby.

Mastlands also enjoyed English characteristics. The space was divided into sixteen beds with vertical paths spaced in between. This construction was inspired by English walled gardens.¹⁶ Stonework was also a common feature in historic English gardens, and while the masonry displayed Italian penchants in the way the rocks extended from the home, its physical construction within the garden relished a more English feel. In *English Pleasure Gardens* she wrote, "the carved stonework...as used to surround the beds, remained in fashion with but slight variations throughout the reigns of the Tudors," to describe the popular attributes of an English garden. This statement corresponds to her design at Mastlands, and she used stones to delineate between beds and pathways and subsequently invoked English features into her design (Figure 5). This inspiration is imperative to note because it reminds scholars that each of Nichols's gardens was amalgamative. While there may be one overarching influence prescribed to a space, the nature of the work and the location of these gardens in America suggests that concessions be made which were dependent upon the geography, climate, and location of the space.

¹⁶ Judith B. Tankard, "Rose Standish Nichols, A Proper Bostonian," *Arnoldia*, 1999, 27.

The Tapestry Room inside Mastlands also corresponds with the stylistic attributes of the Tudors (Figure 6). This fact supports that Nichols created cohesion between the home and garden. She was aware of how these two spaces needed to correspond visually, and she further understood that disjointed stylistic attributes between the two would result in a less than successful landscape design. Connecting the inside with the outside created a holistic space that visually depended upon architecture and nature to articulate the needs and desires of the property owner.

Her knowledge of historic references used throughout a particular country's lifetime suggests that she was well travelled and researched in her chosen profession. She carefully looked at each aspect of a garden and used references from Europe within the American landscape at Cornish Colony, New Hampshire. As if to elevate the space beyond America, her addition of English and Italian aspects into one garden allowed Nichols to use these European models to create an amalgamative space that was dependent upon cultural references that one would have to have the means to understand. Thus, by including these two cultures in her landscape design at Mastlands, Nichols elevated her status and her garden beyond the station of America and into the social stratosphere of the elite. By using the characteristics that she discussed in her books later and that she had seen prior to this garden's construction, Nichols showed off her abilities, knowledge, and capital, each of which interdependent upon the other to sustain a career within landscape design. Mastlands existed as a seminal garden for the burgeoning landscape architect and was a place where Nichols incorporated attributes that expressed her personal, professional, social, and intellectual aptitude.

Havenwood and Italian Influences

As Nichols grew as a landscape architect, her client base matured and moved out of the Northeast. Many of her garden commissions were in the Midwest, and Nichols brought her love of European gardens to each of these projects. Most decidedly classified by a single European country, Havenwood, encompassed an austere Italian feeling and inspiration. Located in Lake Forest, Illinois, Havenwood was the home of the prominent Edward Larned and Mary Pringle Ryerson. The home was designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw (1869-1926) in a design which resembled the Villa Rezzonico in Bassano, Vicenza, designed by Baldassare Longhena (Figures 7 & 8).¹⁷ The Ryerson's were powerful and opinionated, demanding that their home reference Italian gardens of the past and command visual authority and command over their landscape.¹⁸ The home began with decidedly Italian influences and the grounds designed by Nichols needed to reflect this impression. The home was the second attempt by the Ryersons to construct a home that also encompassed the space and fortitude for Italian Renaissance influences and both formal and informal landscaping. Nichols had approximately twenty commissions in the area, and Havenwood soon became her most famous.¹⁹

The grounds at Havenwood encompassed a full block in Lake Forest, were spacious, and provided ample room for Nichols to design a garden unencumbered by spatial constraints. She installed four classically inspired sculptures from Italy and a fountain on the north section of the garden (Figure 9 & 10). Similarly to the designs sent to Nichols by Saint-Gaudens, a mall flanked by rows of trees connected the gardens closest to the home with those at the end of the mall. The experience was collaborative, with architect David Adler influencing the balanced

¹⁷ Kim Coventry, Daniel Meyer, and Arthur H. Miller, *Classic Country Estates of Lake Forest: Architecture and Landscape Design, 1856-1940* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 175.

¹⁸ Stuart Earl Cohen and Frances Wells Shaw, *Inventing the New American House: Howard Van Doren Shaw, Architect* (NY, NY: Monacelli Press, 2015), 147.

¹⁹ Ibid.

approach to the designs, Nichols constructing the planting and gardens, and Danish-American landscape architect Jens Jensen (1860-1951) creating and framing the views.²⁰ The collaborative process of designing the gardens of Havenwood is important to recognize for multiple reasons in relationship to Nichols' career. Firstly, she was working with the highest level of architects during the time period. These men are renowned today, and were during their lives, for their contributions to design across the Midwest and the greater United States. Nichols's ability to suavely network and insert herself into this world is reflected in the collaboration achieved in this specific place and it is a testament to her knowledge of the male-dominated culture that controlled the design world at the turn of the century. Working on an equal playing field, Nichols was not a small or minor supplement to this team. Rather, she had an integral role in composing and incorporating her designs and ideas of both men into one space. Her garden connected the views of Jensen, which are located at the far end of the garden, with the distinguished and celebrated Italian inspired architecture of Shaw and Adler. Nichols's contribution to this project lived in the middle-ground, physically and intellectually connecting both famed mans' designs through one Italian inspired space.

In *Italian Pleasure Gardens* Nichols writes, "there are no gardens here of any importance that are accessible to strangers. The walls, statuary, well-heads and doorways visible from the canals are the most interesting features from an architect's standpoint."²¹ Perhaps best reflected in her garden design at Havenwood would be her commitment to privacy and singular accessibility. As she makes note of "gardens of importance" the social ramifications of a garden's design are recognized. The hierarchy of both the profession and the physical garden

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Nichols, *Italian Pleasure Gardens*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1931), 286.

was defined by access. Nichols was keenly aware of this social structure and constructed a design for the Ryerson's which spoke to these European demands and inspirations. The outline of Nichols's design is constructed by thick hedges which enclose the space in a private and intimate setting. Thinking about this garden's location in a Midwestern city block speaks to these concerns that Nichols was attenuating for with marked importance. Wealth and privacy were clearly integral to both the landowners and the hired architects, and using the space in a way that allows the user to look out at a beautiful view while being within an enclosed garden insinuates a careful tension that each architect, both of landscapes and buildings, would carefully have to balance throughout their designs. Looking at Nichols's construction of both the beds and mall of trees speaks to concerns of concealment from the outside world that this garden needed to provide (Figure 11). What is more, is that this necessity for privacy was an attribute which Nichols responded to in Italy and made note of in her writings. Consciousness of the value of the garden being dependent upon its ability to provide a disguise from the outside world, especially from the masses who could ultimately peer in and gain a small voyeuristic glance at how the other half lives, suggests that this was a dominant theme concurrent throughout not only the United States, but also Italy. Nichols's garden design for Havenwood echoes these concerns regarding access, and furthermore, her use of large walls of hedges, both thick and tall, and statues to encapsulate the space into an intimate setting proves that she was always incorporating the lessons and information she learned abroad into her American designs.

Nichols also writes, "in modern Italian gardens reverence for precedent dominates the design, while originality plays a very small part. Naturally, when the pleasure grounds forming part of an ancient villa are expanded beyond their early confines their style is made to conform

closely to precedent.”²² This statement informs Nichols’s construction of the Havenwood garden. Referencing the past, and historic Italian gardens, Nichols followed the example laid out before her by then modern Italian landscape architects, both of whom felt it imperative to reference the past and not stray far from those designs. Imagination and abstraction were not important for Nichols as she designed the space. Rather, conformity and uniformity to her contemporaries and the great architects and artists of the past were paramount for her career and her commissions. As Shaw constructed the home to evoke the feel of a grand Italian villa, steeped in references from the Renaissance and the country’s history, Nichols understood that she needed to continue this style into a garden that suited these high-minded and expensive needs of her influential and affluent clients.

Famous novelist and designer Edith Wharton (1862-1937) worked concurrently to Nichols during this time period. Of Italian gardens she stated, “the Italian garden does not exist for its flowers; its flowers exist for it: they are a late and infrequent adjunct to its beauties, a parenthetical grace counting only as one more touch in the general effect of enchantment.”²³ Firstly, Nichols was not the only woman during this time period who was inserting herself into the realm of landscape design. Secondly, florals, an attribute so often connected with femininity and womanhood, are deemed as not the most important aspect of an Italian garden. Looking at Nichols’s design, this statement by Wharton feels apropos. The drama of this garden is created through the placement of trees and the long mall which Nichols constructed for the Ryersons. The flowers are supplementary, and they endure to highlight the sculptures and tall hedges. Rather than taking center stage, as they do in most gardens and in our initial responses when

²² Rose Standish Nichols, “The New Renaissance Gardens of Italy.” *The House Beautiful*, 1926. The Nichols House Museum Collection, 276.

²³ Edith Wharton, *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (London: Lane, 1904), 5.

thinking about gardens, Nichols's design at Havenwood suggests that beauty can be derived from her professional design and the work. Each of these components worked together to bring the Ryerson's desires and Nichols's skills into one space, and it is important to make note of the historical accuracy which she used to construct this space rather than falling into the common tropes of what we would initially think a woman's garden would look like and encompass.

This comprehension of the home, garden, and view as existing as a whole space was an attribute that Nichols brought forward from her time at Cornish Colony and a characteristic that would continue throughout her career. A 1922 article in *The Garden Magazine* stated of Havenwood that, "The estate—not the house and garden alone—is a unit. If you see the whole house and garden at a glance so that there is no mystery – then that may be your undoing. The garden can be made a part of the house without being next to it."²⁴ Again, the whole of the property becomes imperative for understanding the design of Nichols. The collaborative intellectual effort expended by each person working within the space was central to the construction and reception of Havenwood and its grounds. The attenuation for mystery aligns with the privacy and seclusion that Nichols provided in her design of this garden. The unknown was a central idea and it remained the impetus for the wonderment and privacy that this space provided for the sitter and the Ryerson family. The statues and grounds contributed to the glamour and expensiveness articulated through Nichols's design of the garden, and while grand, these components all evoked wealth and a knowledge of what the elites in not only American history, but world history wanted from their gardens (Figure 12).

²⁴ Arthur W. Colton, "The House That Was Built for a Garden," *The Garden Magazine*, 1922, 187.

The article further stated, “in this garden, Mrs. Ryerson entertains... infinite charm is added by this walk down the long avenue from the house: it is another room connected by a hall. A little of the dramatic—not theatrical—helps every garden.”²⁵ Thinking about this garden as an extension of the home, another room even, appropriates Nichols’s concepts into the realm of building architecture. Each section of garden becomes its own possibility, serving a significant purpose that lends itself to the needs of its owner. It is this thought process that separated Nichols from others who considered gardening a hobby rather than a career. The intellectual attempts made to serve a client who was wealthy and of a certain social standing elevated this garden in terms of the hierarchical societal structures prevalent within early twentieth-century society. Making reference to another space for entertainment suggests that the Ryerson family not only had the money to spend on these frivolities, but that they also meant to impress their guests and use the garden as a space to astound people and assert their social standing. As the author makes note of the drama that Nichols’s tree-lined mall added to this garden, the experience of the space is subsequently taken into consideration. The feeling of walking through an enclosed space into an immaculately landscaped garden is nothing short of dramatic. Surely, the impression given by this walk would have been one of capital, history, and transportation away from the mundane and common American into the far away and glamorous Italian. There would also be a feeling of confinement and seclusion expressed by this long walk, and as the visitor moved into the more open area at the end, a sigh of relief and breath into beauty was articulate. This compression and expansion are important feelings to make note of because they suggest that Nichols was concerned with the body’s experience through a garden and not solely the construction of the

²⁵ Colton, “The House That Was Built for a Garden,” *The Garden Magazine*, 1922, 188.

space. Thus, Nichols understood that her role in the garden spanned beyond placement of plants and that it took on a more artistic and professional role.

The gardens at Havenwood were also described as, “perfection without precision, an abundance without confusion, a dignity without effort, a something beyond all these, a something indescribable which quiets the restless dissatisfactions one has had in the contemplation of houses and gardens, and gives one a sense of happiness enclosed in a cloudless peace.”²⁶ This balance between wildness and cultivation was tenuous yet achieved perfectly by Nichols in this space. The most difficult task is to make something appear effortless that was laborious. The reviews indicate that Nichols achieved this in her garden design at Havenwood and that the garden was favorably reviewed by her powerful clients, cementing Nichols as an established and successful landscape architect who actively worked with the upper echelons of society.

Spain and Mason House, Rhode Island

England and Italy were not the only countries where Nichols found European muses. Spain heavily influences her garden designs, and she often studied and wrote about many landscapes in that country. Perhaps most indicative of Spain’s impact upon her career would be her design in Rhode Island at Mason House. Nichols worked at the Mason garden in 1923 and 1925. She considered the architecture of Spain to be, “distinguished by their dignity and frequently by their beauty, notwithstanding the rudeness of their construction.”²⁷ When describing Miss Mason’s home she stated, “the exterior of the house is distinguished by breadth, simplicity and unity of design. Certain details... are rather elaborate, but they are always rightly

²⁶ Colton, 189.

²⁷ Rose Standish Nichols, “A Newport House and Garden.” *The House Beautiful*, 1904. The Nichols House Museum Collection, 189.

place in relation to the whole scheme and not unduly prominent... the roof is improved in appearance by handsome chimneys, characteristically Spanish in design” (Figure 13).²⁸ Here, Nichols is concerned with both the past references and the style of the house. Understanding the features of Spanish architecture and the elements of the home which reflect these features was imperative for Nichols to then move into her garden design. Again, the whole of the property is attenuated for in the mind of Nichols, both are coexistent within the place of Newport and her work brings history into the applied and [then] modern era.

Conceptually, Mason House’s gardens were similar to the gardens at Mastlands.²⁹ Nonetheless, the differences between the two were marked by two contradictory European countries providing the inspiration for the designs. Nichols claimed to have brought the Spanish features of the physical home into the garden and stated, “they are intended to supplement the indoor living-rooms with a series of enclosures where visitors can sit and walk out of doors in seclusion, surrounded by an abundance of flowers.”³⁰ Again, the idea of privacy and personal enjoyment of the outdoors is a central theme throughout Nichols work. While referencing and attempting to create a holistic space, respectful and reflective of the Spanish themes of the structure, her garden design provides a living space where these features are amplified and appreciated. Making note of the garden being an extension of the living-room suggests that, much like her work at Havenwood, gardens were spaces of seclusion and entertainment, socialization not with all, but rather, with a select few of the elite and invited. The cultural

²⁸ Nichols, “A Newport House and Garden.” *The House Beautiful*, 1904. The Nichols House Museum Collection, 191.

²⁹ Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Long Island Landscapes and the Women Who Designed Them* (New York: Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, 2009), 201.

³⁰ Nichols, “A Newport House and Garden.” *The House Beautiful*, 1904. The Nichols House Museum Collection, 194.

differences reflected by the Spanish impact upon the home and garden existed as a means to elevate the visitors beyond simple society and into the realm of those “in the know.” As artists and architects enjoyed grand tours of Europe in their studies throughout American art history, Nichols chose to bring these lessons into her designs and as such, the elements of knowledge and access becomes central to this examination. Without her travels and support from Saint-Gaudens, Nichols would not have the ability to attain this information nor the ability create this Spanish themed place for Miss Mason.

The garden enjoyed a sundial at the center of its rose garden. It encompassed an English park with groups of trees, a view of the sea, and more formal gardens around the home.³¹ Here, Nichols uses both English and Spanish elements to create this space and achieve her goals as well as the needs of her client. This fact supports that these spaces enjoyed many influences, and while one country’s dynamic attributes may take center stage in a design, it is not the only place represented. Amalgamative, much like the growing American country, Nichols’s garden at Mason House cannot be narrowly broken down as having one country’s influence. Spain is clearly the country that is best exemplified in this design, but English garden components also were a part of its construction and elevate the project as not a mere replica of something Nichols saw abroad and recreated in Newport. Rather, there are conscious choices made which reflect the landscape and consider the place in which garden lived. Furthermore, the ability to use the garden is accounted for in Nichols’s designs and we see that she was conscious of how a holistic approach to landscape design elevated her work in relationship to these large and prominent homes which were also on the property.

³¹ Judith K. Major, *Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer: A Landscape Critic in the Gilded Age* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 24.

Nichols stated in her book, *Spanish and Portuguese Gardens*, “Spain is essentially a land of contrasts. Flower-beds are outlined with box, accented with oleanders, laurels, or tall cypresses. Enclosures are formed by well-clipped evergreen hedges or by massive walls. Water... always appears in abundance.”³² These characteristics all appear at the Mason House. The water of the Atlantic, such a central theme throughout Rhode Island, is appropriately accented as the balance between maintaining a great view and privacy is considered in Nichols’ garden design. The garden also possesses large hedges to create seclusion and intimacy within the space (Figure 14). Using water beds and lotus flowers, Nichols also incorporated the love of water that was also prevalent in many historic Spanish gardens.

Nichols also writes, “nearest the house and visible from the dining-room and the nearest loggia is the ornamental flower garden. In style it shows a reminiscence of Spain, though too faint to be at once perceived.”³³ The need for the outside to be visible from the inside is noted and further highlights the intersection between indoors and outdoors of which Nichols, as a landscape architect, was always cognizant. Nichols also insinuates that there is more knowledge required to understand the references she used in her landscape design at Mason House. Her Spanish allusions were subtle and required thoughtful contemplation to be fully appreciated and understood. The process of experiencing a garden is also mentioned in her statement and was central to the construction of all of her designs. For Nichols, it is clear that using a garden and forming its plan was an academic process, requiring many steps to understand why she placed things certain ways and where she gained the inspiration for these plans.

³² Rose Standish Nichols, *Spanish & Portuguese Gardens*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924, xxvi.

³³ Nichols, “A Newport House and Garden.” *The House Beautiful*, 1904. The Nichols House Museum Collection, 194.

This concept makes note of the access element required for her profession in garden designs and landscape architecture. Without establishing herself amongst the appropriate social circles in Boston and using her uncle's fame and encouragement, Nichols would not have been able to have access to travel or the knowledge to understand where she needed to go to gain these insights. Being able to reference a culture in her Newport commission cements her as a true professional amongst others in the field, capable of seeing things from Spain and using these attributes as an impetus for her American design.

Interestingly, the garden at Mason House was originally designed by the renowned Frederick Law Olmstead architectural firm.³⁴ Nichols's role in this garden was mostly updating and construction of the flower beds and flower placement. Yet, the way in which she marketed her work for Miss Mason gives particular insight into the social climbing and career networking which was imperative for her professional advancement. Writing and publishing upon the space, Nichols marketed herself as the sole landscape architect for the garden, selling her contribution as having utmost importance to the property. This fact is important to make note of as too often we look back upon singular careers and forget that they were multifaceted and involved multiple layers and help from multiple people to exist. This theme is particularly prevalent throughout Nichols work at Mason House and is reflected in the preliminary landscaping for the garden as well as the way Nichols approached this space.

Conclusion

Publishing on English, Italian, and Spanish and Portuguese gardens, Nichols embodied the ideal American landscape architect. Drawing on European references and studying historic

³⁴ Jeffrey Karl Ochsner and H. H. Richardson, *H.H. Richardson, Complete Architectural Works* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 98.

gardens of Europe gave her the intellectual and social abilities needed to excel in this artistic profession. Her career becomes a series of choices which aimed to advance her to the next professional and social level. High-styled and wealthy clients contributed to this growth, and Nichols was keen to make the most of each commission. Through her publishing in prominent magazines to her writing three books upon the gardens of specific countries in Europe, each decision existed for an unambiguous reason and held a specific weight for Nichols. Inspired by her famous uncle, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Nichols developed a solid professional foundation to make gardening more than simply a woman's hobby. She studied, practiced, and travelled to achieve her ambitious goals and looking at specific properties she worked at helps to highlight this fact.

Mastlands, Havenwood, and the Mason House reflect specific moments and influences within Nichols's career. Understanding the amalgamative construction of an American garden is imperative in comprehending her process. While there are overarching influences from singular European countries, no garden is a sole reflection of England, Italy, or Spain. The American landscape was central to the way she thought about garden architecture and layouts, and each space required unique needs. However, it is clear that these three countries were the dominant inspirations for these three projects. Reading and studying her books makes it clear that she was completely enamored by the culture and spaces of these old guards of European history.

Working and understanding privacy, access, climate, flora, fauna, sculpture, and architecture, to name a few, were all apart of Nichols's process, and she worked to understand how and why each culture made their landscape decisions. By diving into her correspondence with Augustus Saint-Gaudens and comparing her work at Cornish Colony with her *English Pleasure Gardens*,

her work at Havenwood with *Italian Pleasure Gardens*, and her work at the Mason House with *Spanish and Portuguese Gardens*, it becomes clear how Nichols created a career for herself, and the tools that she used to make it successful are exposed.

The trajectory of her career begins with her family member, continues to her travels and exposure to the field, and is reliant upon her ability to maintain and please wealthy individuals, rife with money from the booming American economy in the early twentieth-century.

Thoughtful, articulate, social, and with the heir of elitism, Rose Standish Nichols moved beyond simply a lover of nature and a girl enjoying her father's homes and gardens. Rather, she cemented her mark upon garden landscape in the United States and worked with many prominent individuals who we continue to highly regard to this day. Through her designs, travels, connections, and ability to create a successful career in the field, Rose Standish Nichols cemented herself as a true authority on gardens and landscape design in not solely the United States, but also across Europe.

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Illustrations



Figure 1. Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907), *Sketch of Chateau de Fortoiseau*, pen on paper, undated, Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Photograph by Astrid Tvetenstrand.

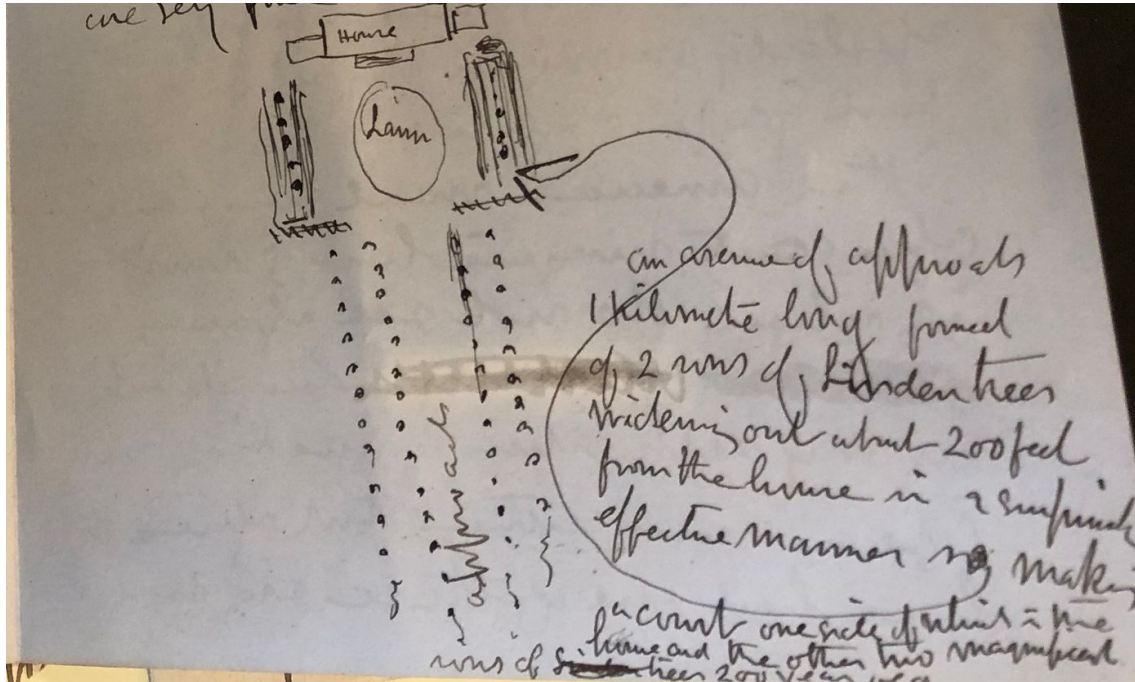


Figure 2. Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907), *Overhead Sketch of Chateau de Fortoiseau*, pen on paper, undated, Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Photograph by Astrid Tvetenstrand.



Figure 3. *Photograph of Rose Nichols at Mastlands*, photograph, ca. 1906, Courtesy of the Archives of Public History at University of Massachusetts, Boston.

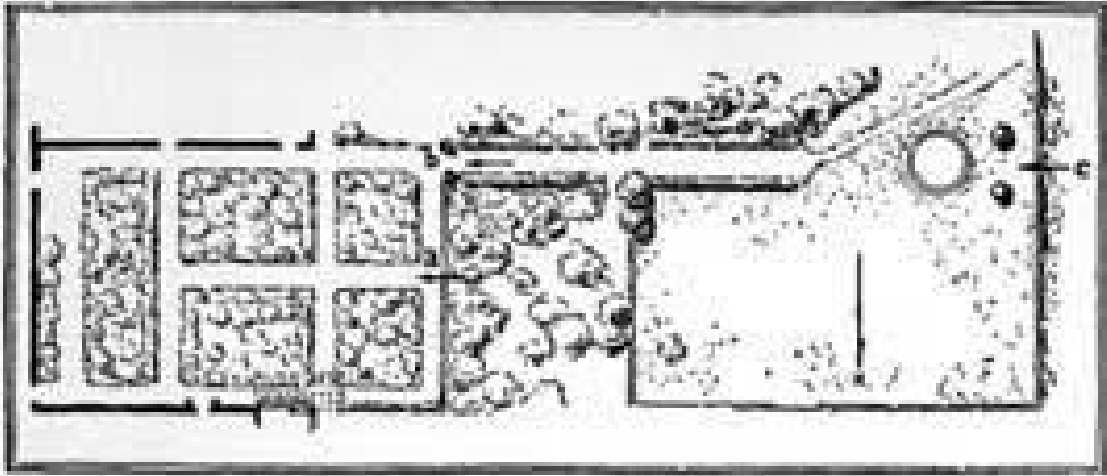


Figure 4. *Photograph of Circular Pool and Fountain with Apple Branches*, photograph, ca. 1906, Courtesy of the Archives of Public History at University of Massachusetts, Boston.



Figure 5. *The Nichols family garden in Cornish, New Hampshire*, photograph, ca. 1906, Courtesy of the Nichols House Museum, Boston, Massachusetts.

A Garden at Cornish, N. H.



The Garden at Mastlands, Courtesy of the Nichols House Museum Collection, Boston, Massachusetts.



Figure 6. *Tapestry Room at Mastlands*, Courtesy of the Nichols House Museum Collection, Boston, Massachusetts.



Figure 7. *Photograph of Havenwood II*, Courtesy of Lake Forest College Library Special Collections.



Figure 8. *Postcard of Havenwood II*, ca 1920, Courtesy of the Lake Forest College Library Special Collections.



Figure 9. *Sculptures at Havenwood*, Courtesy of the Lake Forest College Library Special Collections.

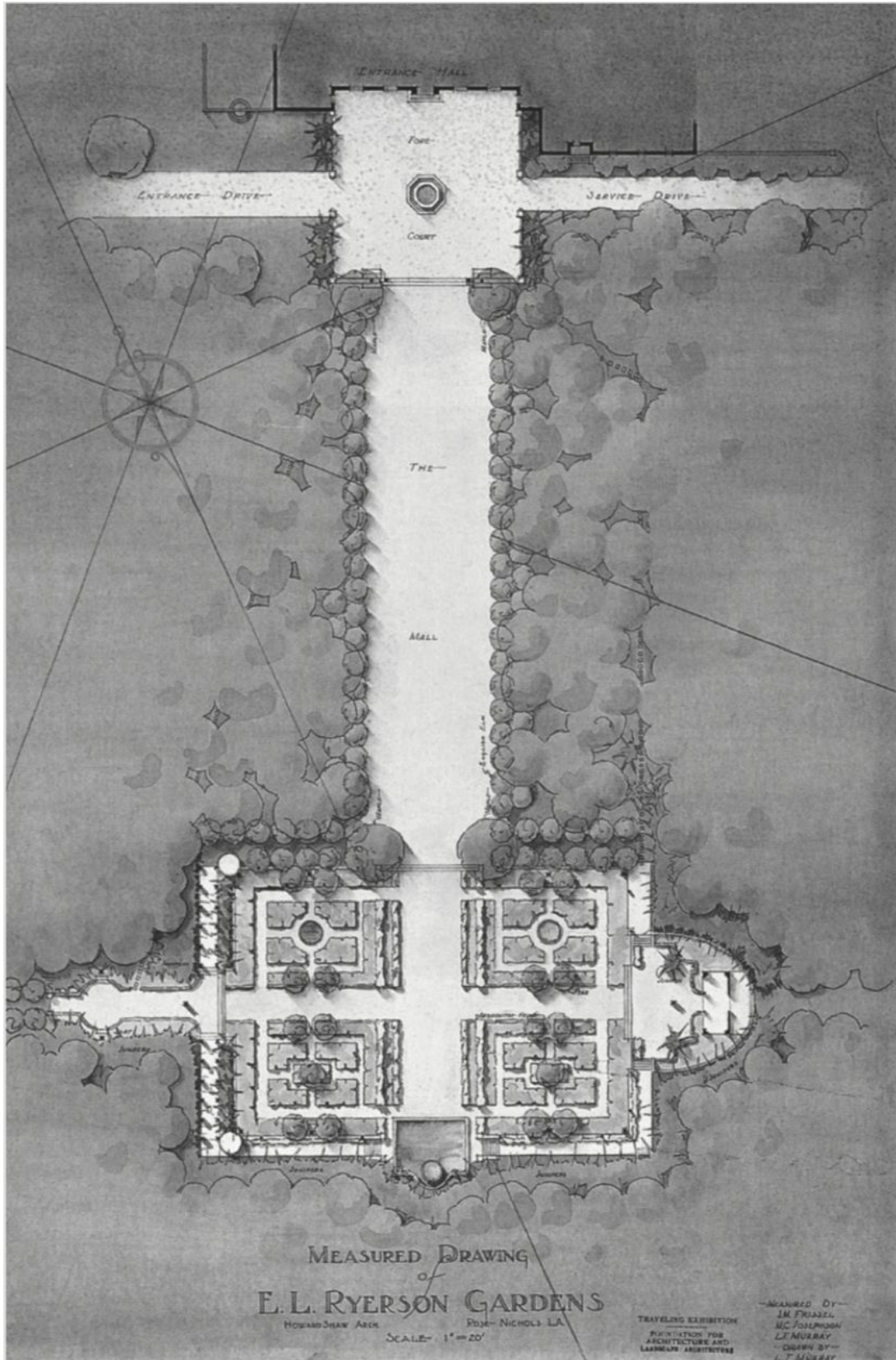


Figure 10. *The Grounds at Havenwood*, Courtesy of the Cultural Landscape Foundation.



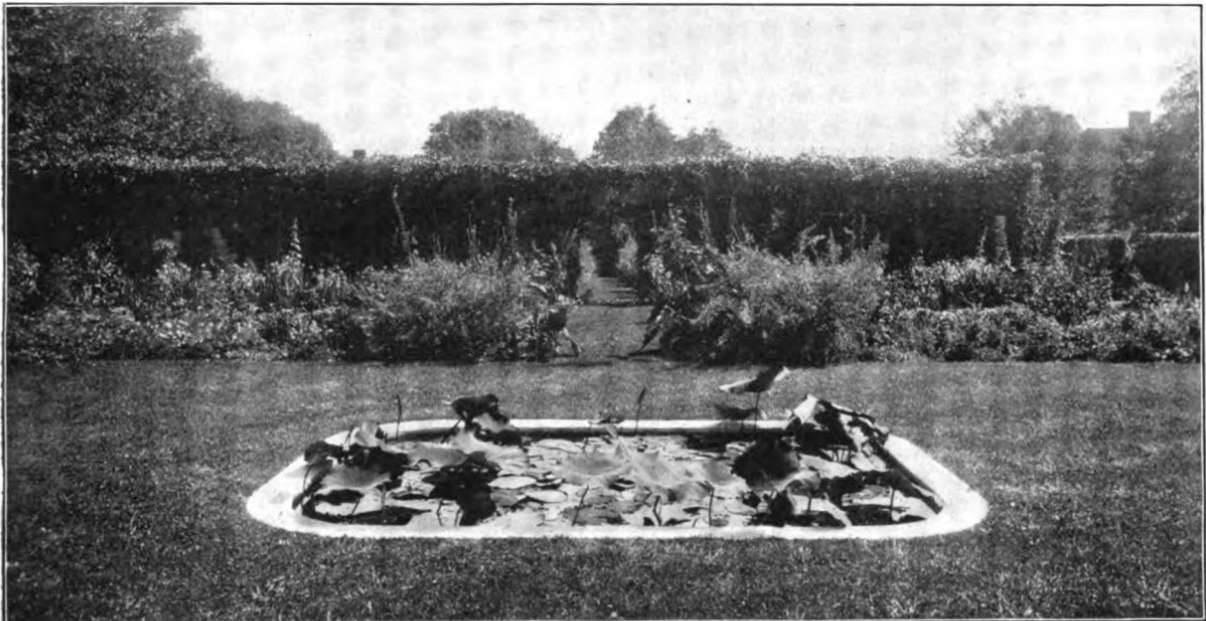
Figure 11. *View of Havenwood II from approach*, Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, Chicago, Illinois.



Figure 12. *Two Gentlemen of Verona—and Two Ladies at Havenwood*, Courtesy of The Garden Magazine.



Figure 13. *Miss Mason's House at Newport, Rhode Island*, Courtesy of the Nichols House Museum.



THE LOTUS BASIN

Figure 14. *Gardens at Mason House in Newport, Rhode Island*, Courtesy of the Nichols House Museum.