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Guide to
Fletcher Steele Papers Regarding
Mission House, 1927-1949

MH.MS.Coll.2

by Staff

January 2015
Last updated: January 2018

Archives & Research Center
27 Everett Street, Sharon, MA 02067
www.thetrustees.org
arc@thetrustees.org
781-784-8200

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FLETCHER STEELE (1885-1971)

John Fletcher Steele was born to Attorney John Mason Steele (1851-1936) and Mary S. Steele (1853-1943) on 7 June 1885 in Rochester, New York. The couple also had a daughter named Esther (1887-1964). According to biographer Robin Karson, John Fletcher Steele was never referred to as “John” but always as “Fletcher” throughout his childhood.

Steele graduated from the Bradstreet School for Boys in 1903 and attended Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts where although he completed most of his coursework in three years, he did not finish his degree until 1907. Upon graduation from college he enrolled in the Graduate School of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The program, founded in 1900, taught a Belle Arts approach to design and early instructors included Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and Arthur Shurtleff (later Shurcliff).

Steele began a six-year apprenticeship with landscape architect Warren H. Manning (1860–1938)

in 1908. During this apprenticeship Steele embarked on a four-month overseas tour that included Portugal, Spain, North Africa, Italy, France, Germany, and England. Manning partially funded the tour and Steele produced a hundred and twentyfive page report at the end of the trip. During the apprenticeship, Steele also served as secretary of the Boston Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. In 1913, Steele began his own landscape architecture business in Boston, Massachusetts.

Throughout his career he lectured at the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture and the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture, Gardening, and Horticulture for Women. In 1967, the Garden Club of America awarded Steele the Mrs. Oakleigh Thorn Medal in recognition of outstanding achievement in garden design, Steele had worked on over five hundred projects during his career. He died on 16 July 1971 in Rochester, New York.

In 1926, Steele met Mabel Choate (1870-1958), the daughter of former Ambassador Joseph Hodges Choate (1832-1917) and Caroline Dutcher Sterling Choate (1837-1929). Mabel Choate hired Steele to create a sitting area at the Choate's estate Naumkeag in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, thus beginning a thirty-year collaboration between Steele and Mabel Choate.

SOURCES:

Karson, Robin S. *Fletcher Steele, Landscape Architect: An Account of the Gardener's Life, 1885-1971*. Amherst: Library of American Landscape History. Distributed by the University of Massachusetts Press, 2003

Waag, Carol, "The Lovely and the Wild: Considering Naumkeag". Masters Theses 1896 – February 2014. Paper 1100.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS

The Fletcher Steele Papers Regarding Mission House contain materials related to Fletcher Steele's collaboration with Mabel Choate (1870-1958) on the restoration and furnishing of the Mission House, including his design of the colonial gardens and buildings around the house.

Included is a small amount of correspondence from 1930 to 1953; orders that Steele made from 1927 to 1953 for plants, trees, flowers, tools, paint, and other materials that he used in his work at the Mission House; a 1928 list of plant labels; 1939 notes regarding the chimneys; and notes regarding a 1933 visit to the Mission House.

Box	Folder	Contents	Date
Correspondence			
I	1	Bartlett, Arthur N. (1874-1958)	1944 Sep 11
I	2	Choate, Mabel (1870-1958). Envelope addressed to Fletcher Steele labeled "Mission Hs. Clippings"	1948 Oct 9
I	3	Howard, Channing	1943
I	4	Lombard, Virginia B.	1949
I	5	Mero, E[verett] Bird (1876-)	1930 Jan 11
I	6	Peck, Irving H. 1951, 1953	
Other Materials			
I	7	Envelope labeled "Notes on 'The Mission House' at Stockbridge, Massachusetts for Measured drawings of same. Belonging to E.T. Sturgis, Jr. c/o Fletcher Steele, #7 Water St. Boston. Please do not disturb. Return immediately"	[194-]
		With measurements of Mission House buildings.	
I	8-25	Forms for orders made by Fletcher Steele (photocopies and originals)	1927-1953
I	26	"List for Plant Labels" (photocopy)	1928 Apr 25
I	27	Notes from telephone conversation regarding chimneys (photocopy)	1939 Mar 7
I	28	"Visit," notes, carbon, from trip to Mission House	1933 Oct 7