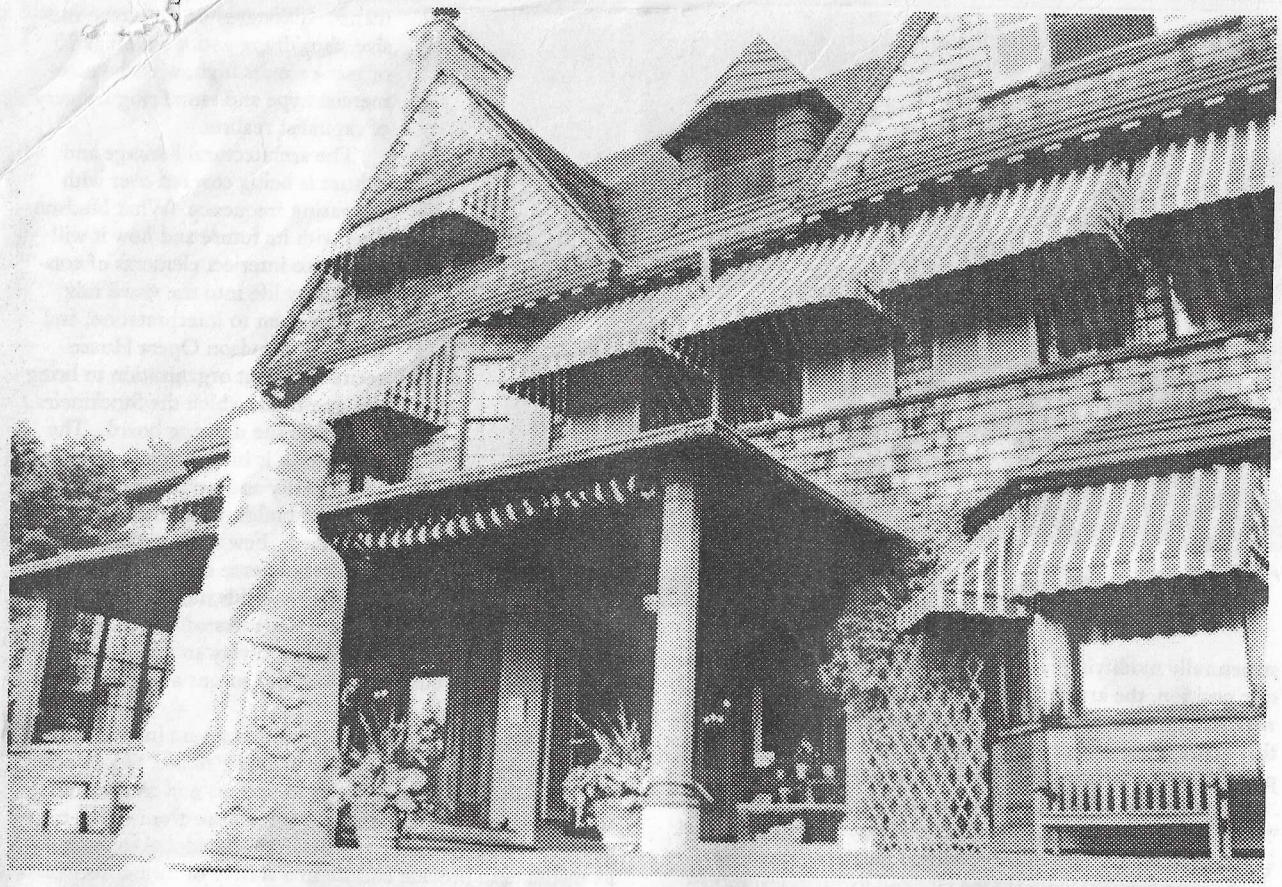




In the gardens at Naumkeag

NAUMKEAG

Hidden Haven in Stockbridge

by Sallianne Spatafore
photos by Julie McCarthy

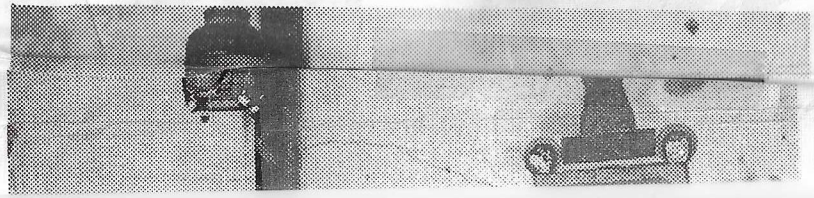
As the crisp fall days blow in, there's no better place to be than the world-renowned Berkshires. Should you find yourself there with a lazy day to fill, why not spend it revisiting the past at a glorious Victorian mansion?

You'd never know it was there, tucked quietly into the hills in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. But, it's a treasure that once discovered, you'll never forget. It is Naumkeag, the old summer home of the Joseph Choate family.

But, what to see first? Grab a complimentary map and you're off on your self-guided landscape tour. You'll want to leave yourself plenty of time to saunter around. There's so much beauty to take in. There's the Rose Garden, which is designed to be viewed from Mrs. Choate's bedroom window above. The Afternoon Garden is the perfect place to sit and relax amidst the Venetian gondola poles. The Moon Gate is said to bring luck to all who pass through it on their way out of the Chinese Garden.

Choate, heiress to the home, left it at her death in 1958. From the massive fireplace in the foyer to the dining table that seats 50, you'll feel you have stepped back into a different age. Portraits by John Singer Sargent line the library. Original newspapers from the day lie about. The children's schoolroom sits ready for the day's lesson.

Particularly of interest are the servant's quarters. Sparse but not at all unwelcoming, even the help's rooms enjoyed fantastic views. The male servants lived on the bottom floor while the female servants lived on the top floor with the



What is Naumkeag? It's a breathtaking gabled mansion with 26 rooms filled with lush furniture, exceptional china, and well-preserved artwork collected from Europe, the Far East, and America. But more than that, it's a snapshot of life as it was one hundred years ago.

The name "Naumkeag" is a Native American word meaning "Haven of Peace." You'll discover just how accurate this name is once you step onto the well-manicured grounds. A self-escorted garden tour and a fully escorted 35-minute house tour await you.

This gorgeous estate features 16 different landscaped areas in which to linger and forget the real world. Stroll amidst the giant clay pots and carefully clipped borders. Relax on a hand-painted bench or carved stone seat. Each garden is an artwork in itself and reflects an Asian or European influence.

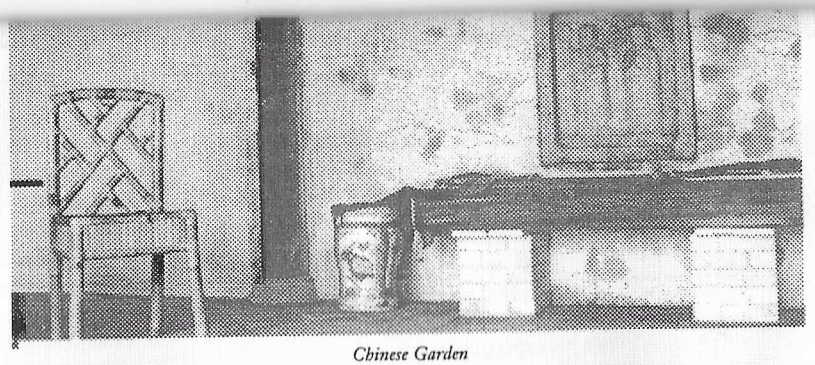
Perhaps the most stunning outdoor structure is the Blue Steps. These Art Deco concrete steps provide a shady slope down to the cutting gardens. Richly painted in sky blue splendor and tinkling with the trickle of cascading water, they are an architectural delight.

At one time, a farm and greenhouse on-site provided all the food and produce for the household. When the Choates returned to New York in the winter, fresh produce was shipped to them from the hot house. It is truly a self-sufficient estate, running in its prime with 10 house staff and 6 gardeners.

How did Naumkeag come to be? Joseph Choate, a wealthy lawyer, purchased the land in Stockbridge in 1884. He had his stunning summer home built for his family in just 18 months-a marvel even by today's standards. The total cost of the land, the furnishings, and the entire building project was $40,000. This was a remarkable sum. But, in the Golden Age, with no income taxes, the Choates could well afford it.

Looking out over the lush hills of the property, you can see other mansions in the distance. It is said the Joseph Choate chose this site for his home so he could watch over his fellow law partners' houses. If the houses grew bigger, he'd know they were stealing from the firm.

Once you've had a chance to soak in the richness of the gardens, get ready for your house tour. In groups of no more than 12, you'll enjoy a stroll through yesteryear. Each room along the tour remains as the daughter, Miss Mabel



Chinese Garden

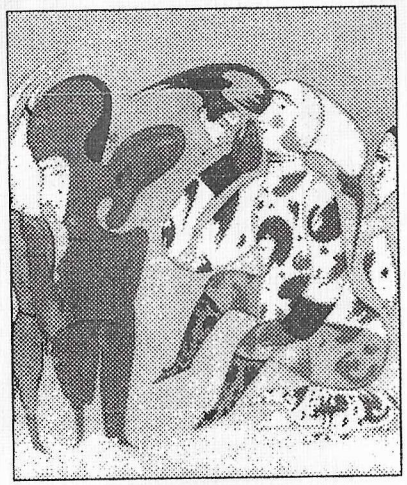
Choate's children. Fun stops on the tour include the Dumb waiters that lifted food from the downstairs kitchen and butler's call boxes, which helped ensure that life ran smoothly for the summering family.

Naumkeag is not to be missed. It is a rare jewel, a treasure from yesterday. The Trustees of Reservations now own the house and property and have taken great care in ensuring the furnishings and grounds remain as the Choates had left them when they donated the house to the public in 1958.

Bring a picnic lunch and enjoy bird and wildlife watching, scenic overlooks and 38 acres of woodlands and open fields. (But leave your pooch at home as no dogs are allowed.) And for those who want to take a token of the day home, visit the fine gift shop for unusual trinkets. Currently showing at Naumkeag through September is the Garden Ornament Exhibit.

The house and gardens at Naumkeag, located at 5 Prospect Hill Road, Stockbridge, MA, are open to the public Memorial Day weekend to Columbus Day from 10 am to 5 pm. Admission for the house and garden is $8 adult, $7.50 senior and $2.50 child. Trustees Members free. For group reservations or more information call 413-298-3239. Or visit Naumkeag on the web at www.thetrustees.org.

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