

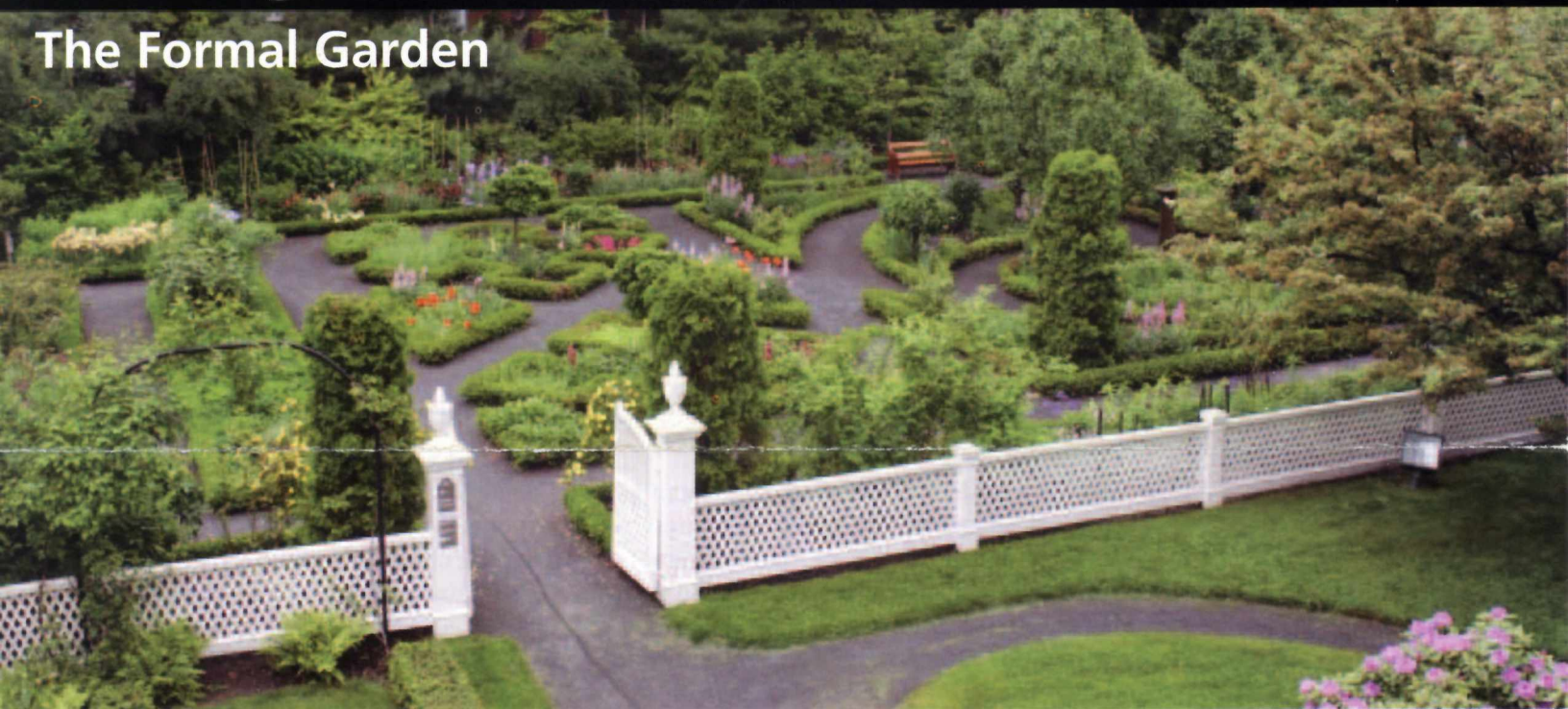
Longfellow House - Washington's Headquarters

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Longfellow House - Washington's
Headquarters National Historic Site



The Formal Garden



Introduction

Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters NHS is home to many stories. These encompass not only the house and its inhabitants, but also the surrounding landscape and formal garden. This story—the story of the garden—provides rich insights into the history of the site and the people who cherished it.

The formal garden you see today is a restoration of a Colonial Revival garden commissioned by Alice Longfellow, daughter of poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The beds are planted with early 20th century heirloom plants and have benches that provide places of quiet retreat. The garden is open for the enjoyment of all, every day, from dawn to dusk.

From Country Estate to Revolutionary Headquarters



In 1759, John Vassall began construction of a country estate on the outskirts of Cambridge. Along with the house and extensive farm land, Vassall built formal gardens around his new home. His original plans have been lost, but a 1775 map shows a sketch of a garden complex.

On the eve of the American Revolution, Vassall and his family fled to Boston, abandoning the estate. In July 1775, General George Washington arrived to take command of the Continental Army. He used the abandoned house as his official Headquarters for nine months. By the end of the war, Vassall's gardens had largely vanished.

A Gentleman's Garden

In 1791, the house was purchased by Andrew Craigie, former Apothecary-General of the Continental Army and a wealthy businessman. Craigie greatly expanded the property, adding greenhouses and orchards and creating a landscape which blended seamlessly from garden to farm to wilderness.

to the west of the house, and planted hundreds of trees to replace those cut for firewood during the war.

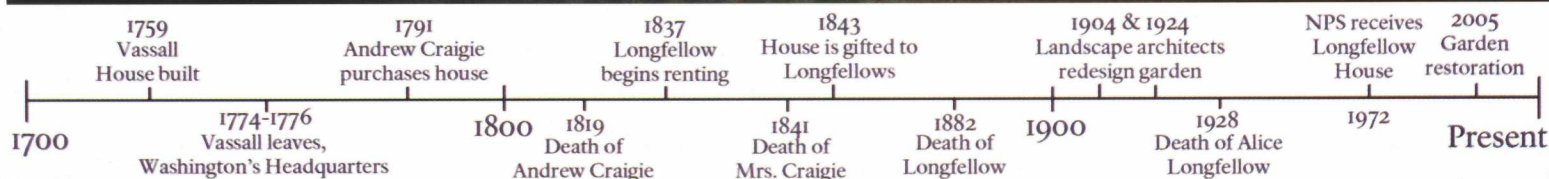
Sadly, no design plans survive from this period.

After Craigie's death in 1819, his widow Elizabeth received the house and 95 acres of land as her dower portion.

Over the years, Mrs. Craigie hosted many tenants, including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow beginning in 1837.



Craigie dug a picturesque pond with an island



The Longfellow Family

During his years as a boarder, Longfellow had already taken an interest in the grounds of the estate. After he and his new wife Frances received the property as a wedding gift in 1843, Henry soon invested himself fully in the landscape, including the creation of a lyre-shaped garden.

In the fields behind the present garden, Longfellow created tree-lined grande allées and serpentine footpaths for wandering and pondering. The new

*In all places, then, and in all seasons,
Flowers expand their light and soul-like wings,
Teaching us, by most persuasive reasons,
How akin they are to human things.*
"Flowers," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1839

landscape also included a stream with a rustic bridge. In winter the Longfellow boys, Charley and Erny, skated on Craigies' old pond to the annoyance of their western neighbor.

In 1847, Longfellow hired English landscaper Richard Dolben to design a formal garden. The result was an Italian Renaissance garden with a Gothic "rose window"

in the center and an overall Persian carpet pattern; remnants of this design can still be seen today.

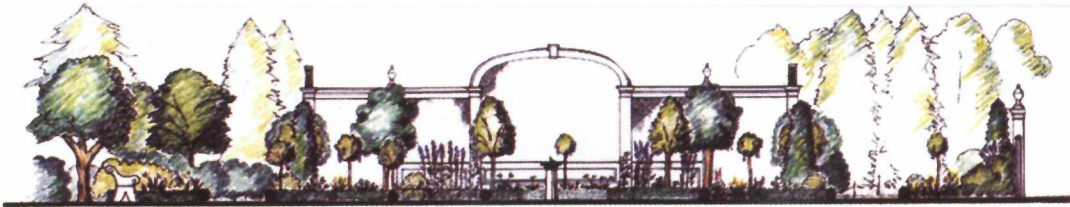
Remembering the Poet

Following Henry Longfellow's death in 1882, the garden fell into disrepair. Happily, the poet's daughter, Alice, took an interest in the garden, hiring one of America's first female landscape architects, Martha Brookes Hutcheson, to restore it in 1904. Hutcheson reestablished Longfellow's original boxwood parterres, then enclosed the garden with fences, gates, and a pergola to make an "outdoor room," typical of the Colonial Revival style.

At the center of the garden, Alice placed a sundial inscribed "Pensa che questa di mai non raggiorna" or "Think that this day will never dawn again." It was a favorite line of her father's from Dante's *Purgatorio*.

Alice's architect cousin Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow created a small personal garden just outside the main garden's southwest gate. There he constructed trellises against the side of the house around a solitary bench. Today this garden is filled in early spring with daffodils and tulips, followed by ferns, roses and autumn clematis through the fall.

In 1924, Alice hired Ellen Biddle Shipman to rejuvenate the space. She was known for her painterly design, enclosed spaces, and for emphasizing the relationship between garden and house. Shipman planted the rectangular borders with heirloom roses and added evergreens and ornamental fruit trees to give the garden height. Just as importantly, Shipman made detailed planting diagrams and cultivar lists for future maintenance.



The Garden Restored

In 1969 the Cambridge Plant and Garden Club renovated the garden, restoring the central rose window design but erasing the outer borders. Their garden was retained after the property came into the National Park Service in 1972.

Aware that the garden was incomplete, the Friends of Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters began a major fundraising effort to restore it to its former glory. Eventually the capital campaign raised more than \$1 million through private donations and grants. By 2003 enough money had been raised to start a multi-year garden restoration

Using Shipman's extensive documentation and heirloom varieties of plants, Alice's Colonial Revival garden has

been recreated for visitors to enjoy today. The pergola and fences are reproductions of the 1904 originals, the flowers are varieties and colors enjoyed by Alice Longfellow, and the central rose window feature honors Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's own design.

Today, National Park Service gardeners care for this restored garden which provides a place of beauty and respite for all who visit.

