

Inside SPNEA:

Drawings from the Office of Ogden Codman, Jr.

The wide-ranging interests and skills of Ogden Codman, Jr., whose family home is today one of SPNEA's historic houses, are documented in his drawings, on display at SPNEA during the centennial of his most important design treatise.

Nineteen hundred and ninety-seven marks the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of *The Decoration of Houses*, written by Edith Wharton and her young protégé, the architect and decorator Ogden Codman, Jr. In recognition, *Old-Time New England* presents a selection of Codman's work from the more than 1,700 of his architectural drawings preserved in SPNEA's Library and Archives. Chosen for their visual appeal and to give a brief overview of the nature of the collection, these drawings also

provide inescapable evidence of the depth of historical learning that not only informed his work but helped make *The Decoration of Houses* the definitive work on the subject.

When SPNEA acquired The Grange, the Codman family home at Lincoln, Massachusetts, as a bequest from Dorothy S. F. M. Codman and began the daunting task of inventorying the contents of the house and outbuildings, staff discovered in the stable loft more than two dozen labeled tubes containing rolled-up architectural drawings and a golden oak architect's chest whose great shallow drawers held more drawings—everything from pencil sketches

to blueprints to finished watercolor renderings. Three large portfolios sectioned from A to Z held further groups of drawings. A material legacy from the architectural career of Ogden Codman, Jr., these 1,700 drawings represent his personal part of his office archives. They came to Lincoln in 1926 when Codman sold his New York house, 7 East 96th Street, furnished, reserving for himself only personal items, books, and objects with a family provenance. Because he had been living in France since 1920, the drawings went to storage at Lincoln along with the other family memorabilia. By the early twenties, Codman and his siblings had decided to leave The Grange to SPNEA because, of the five, only Ogden, Jr., had married, and he had no children. These drawings, relegated to the stable, remained unseen until 1968 when the last sister, Dorothy Codman, died and SPNEA took possession.¹

The labels on the tubes and on the portfolios were for the most part reliable, but there was much loose material unsorted and unidentified. Not until 1980 were the drawings catalogued by Frieda Cohen, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. They were found to date from 1883 (a sketch of the Doric order, done while Codman was a student at MIT) to 1919 (the final, unexecuted project, for an office building at 32 Beacon Street). While Codman's practice was almost exclusively residential, the collection held such surprises as plans for a theater, designs for a Boston apartment house,² and plans for the conversion of a Providence property belonging to D. B. Updike

into apartments.³ Of great interest to architectural historians was the discovery of many of Codman's measured drawings of colonial and Federal houses, often made on the occasion of their demolition.⁴

Until the discoveries at Lincoln were catalogued, the principal source of Codman drawings (some three thousand of them) was the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University. When Codman closed his office in 1920 and went to live in France, he turned over to the Metropolitan Museum his office archives, consisting of plans, drawings, photographs, and all of his architectural library. In 1947, the Metropolitan petitioned him for permission to transfer to the Avery all the drawings, which he granted. The Metropolitan kept the rest, including plans of historic houses and a remarkable set of watercolor renderings of interior elevations, largely from the 1890s. Some of Codman's architectural projects are represented in both the Avery and the SPNEA Library and Archives,⁵ but much Boston and New York work from the 1890s appears only in the latter collection, while many New York jobs are documented only in the former. There is no logic to the division, nor to the fact that, for example, almost everything that survives of the many projects executed for the Thayer family, whether in Boston, Lancaster, or Newport, is held by the Avery. SPNEA is unique in preserving a number of early sketchbooks in which Codman recorded the plans and measurements of houses whose interiors he was to decorate, as well as sketch plans and details of old houses,⁶ which he would use in 1918 when,

in a burst of activity, he drew the plans of Federal houses he had visited twenty or more years earlier. Fiske Kimball mined the Metropolitan's share of these drawings for his 1922 *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic*, as did Harold Kirker for his 1969 *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*.

Included in SPNEA's inventory, appropriately enough, are all of Codman's drawings of The Grange, both those showing the house as he found it and those resulting from his researches into its appearance after the remodeling of the late 1790s. This research formed the basis for his recreation in 1899 of the paneled fireplace walls in the bedrooms, which had been swept away by his uncle John Sturgis in the 1860s.⁷ With the collection also came drawings by other architectural firms for houses for which Codman was contracted to do decorative finish work⁸ or in which he had a scholarly interest.⁹

Besides the early sketchbooks and the drawings of historic houses derived from them, little in the collection can be ascribed with certainty to Codman's hand. Emery Roth, a New York architect who apprenticed in the Codman office from 1895 to 1897, remembered that his boss "did not possess drawing skills,"¹⁰ and Codman later told how, when in Paris in 1894 to design the bedrooms for The Breakers for Cornelius Vanderbilt, he got a talented group of students from the *École des Beaux Arts* to draw them up.¹¹ Roth could do beautiful renderings, but he was untrained in producing working drawings. He left the Codman office to buy an architectural prac-

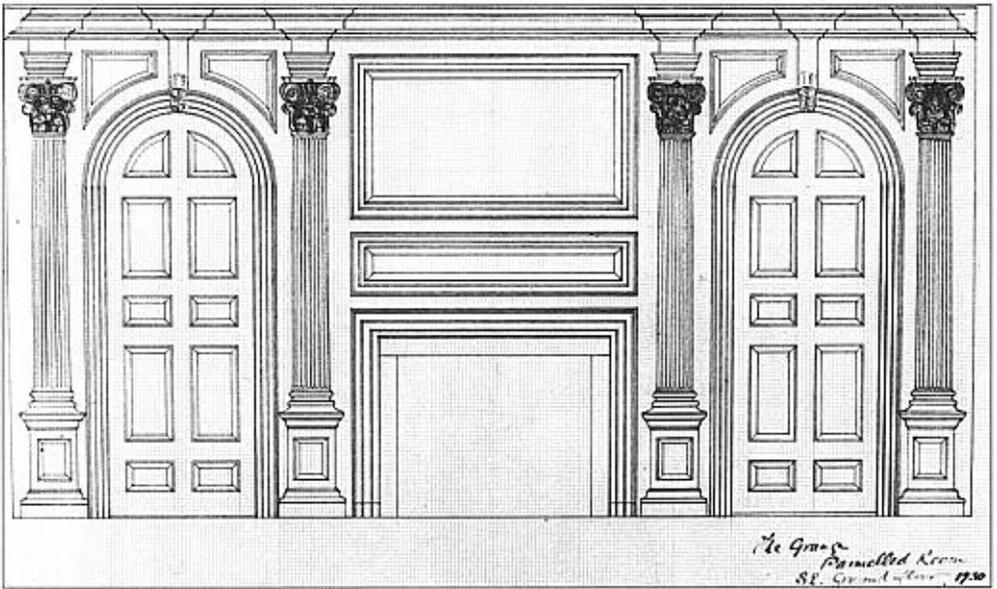
tice for himself and was succeeded in 1897 by Charles Wulff, who remained with Codman as a draftsman, office manager, and chief designer until 1919. While Codman was abroad during the summers before 1914, shopping with clients or traveling, Wulff ran the office and was left to make designs on his own, which he would forward to Codman for approval or correction. Wulff was joined during the teens by Chester Griswold Burden (Harvard '11), a nephew of Codman's wife, who also assumed some design responsibilities, and by Frederic Rhineland Church, a nephew of Edith Wharton.¹² The names of some draftsmen are known from office records,¹³ but as Codman drawings are only haphazardly dated and rarely signed or even initialed, it is difficult to attribute any group to a particular hand.¹⁴ A relative chronology can be established because the name of the client always appears. So does the office address, and because the succession of office locations and their dates is known, a job can at least be identified as "early," "middle," or "late" Codman.¹⁵

Attempting to date drawings from stylistic content is somewhat less certain. Louis XV and Rococo revivals were popular during the 1890s but were less so after 1900 when an interest in neoclassicism took hold and lasted through the war years. But Codman was not bound by such stylistic limitations: he was as capable of producing neoclassic designs in the early 1890s (such as the Louis XVI interiors for the J. Randolph Coolidge house, 147 Beacon Street, Boston) as he was in 1912 (for example, the austere halls and salons at 7

East 96th Street, New York, which he designed for himself). A surer indication is the style of lettering on a drawing—florid, idiosyncratic, and somewhat undisciplined in some early cases and balanced, assured, even grand during the teens.

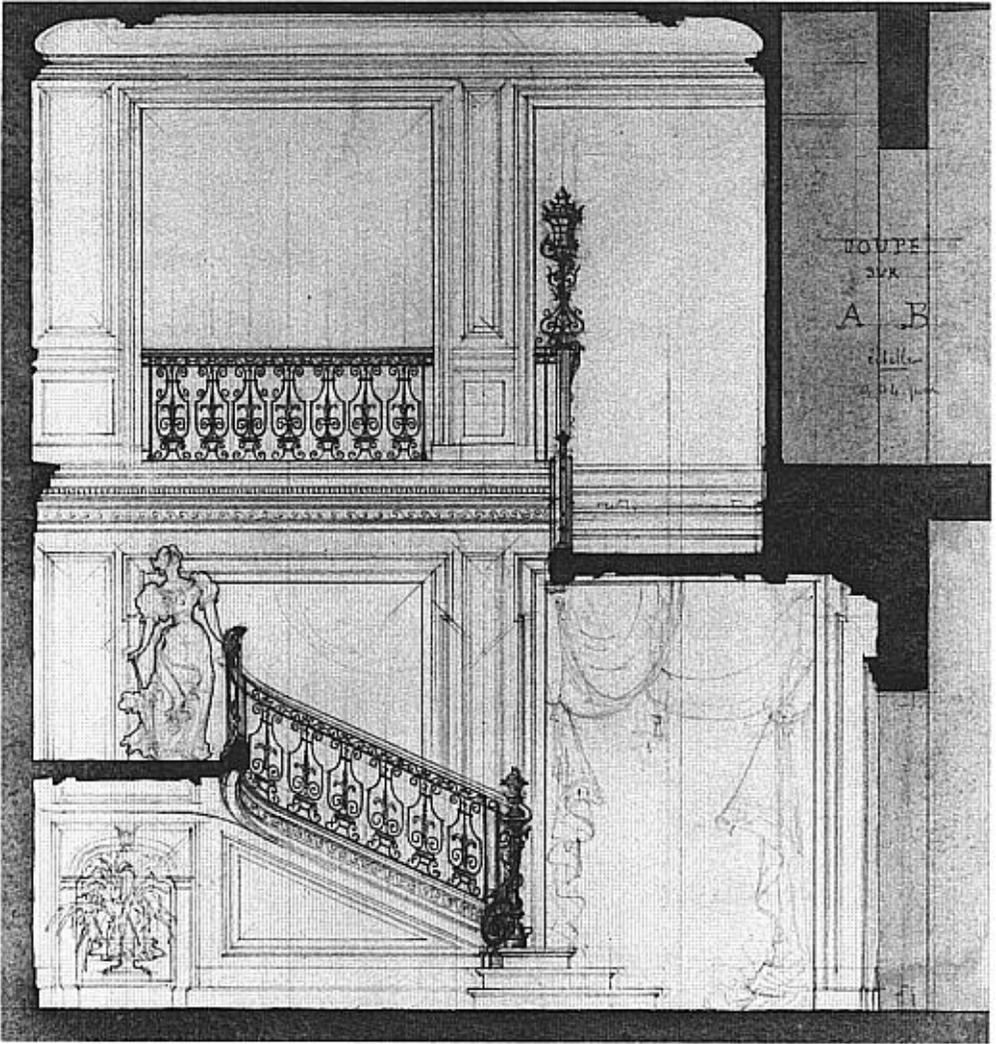
The drawings themselves show a wide variety of skills and finish from a number of hands. Working drawings, blueprints, plans in ink on linen—all display a minimum professional competence. Pencil drawings on tissue of interior elevations and details often show extraordinary free-

hand control in depicting the carvings of moldings or plasterwork and complete assurance of scale and relief. Watercolors of interior elevations date largely from the 1890s (Edith Wharton took Codman to task in 1897 for showering his clients with large numbers of these expensive items)¹⁶ and are often rendered with a degree of perfection that one would expect in the execution of the object itself. They represent in the highest degree the talent of these draftsmen and the rigor of their training in the offices and academies of the day. ❀



Elevation, fireplace wall, southeast or paneled room, The Grange, Lincoln, Massachusetts, 1890s. Pencil and ink on heavy paper, 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 20".

This drawing, probably by Codman himself, reflects his intent both to record the surviving eighteenth-century elements of his family seat and to obliterate the changes made by John Sturgis in the 1860s. By 1900 Codman had restored all the bedroom fireplace walls to as close an approximation of their 1740 appearance as he could produce.

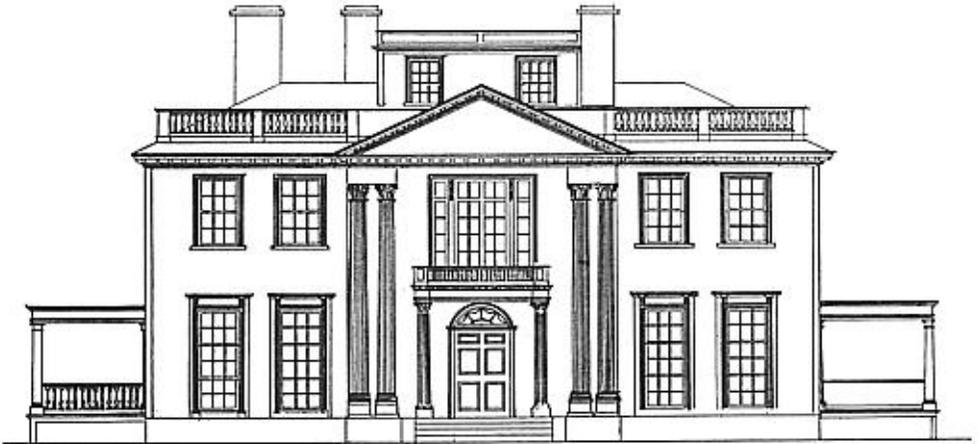


Detail of unidentified drawing, probably a design for the stair hall in the William Starr Miller House, Staatsburg, New York. Pencil on heavy paper with wash, 25 1/2 x 15".

This drawing, captioned in French and probably executed in Paris by a French draftsman, is a tour de force of combined mechanical drawing and freehand rendering of details. The balustrade is inspired by Parisian models of the 1770s. The house was designed for William Starr Miller by Warren and Wetmore and Francis L. V. Hoppin, 1904–06, and it is thought (but not documented) that Codman did some of its interior finish work.



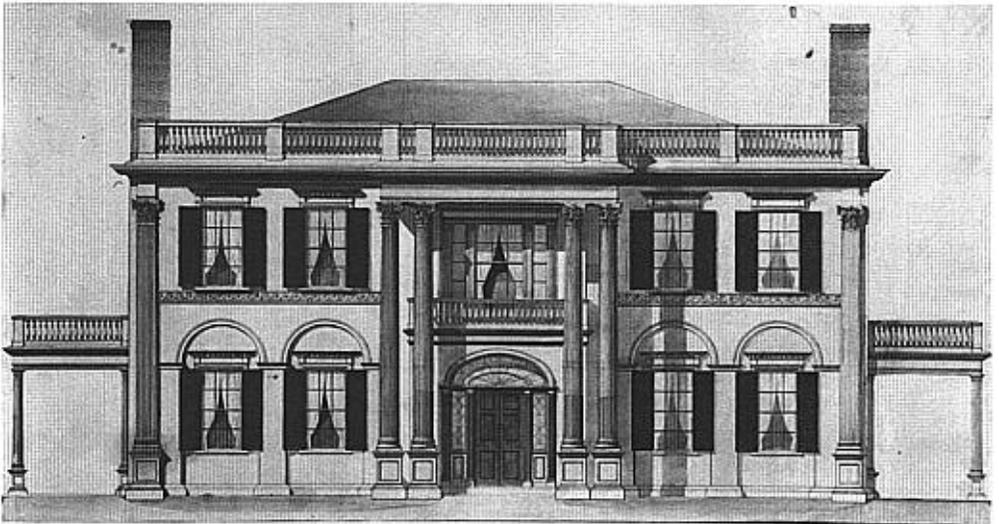
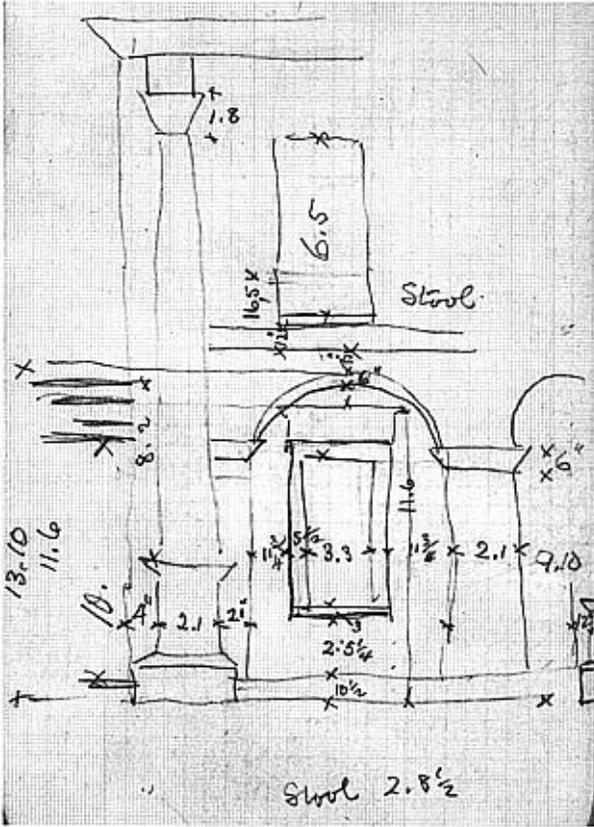
Photograph of the Morton-Taylor House, Roxbury, Massachusetts, ca. 1890.



Detail of elevation, Morton-Taylor House, Roxbury, Massachusetts, 1890. Ink and pencil on heavy paper, 14 x 19⁷/₈".

In 1890, Codman was on the spot making measured drawings of this house, designed by Charles Bulfinch and completed in 1796, while it was being demolished. Codman's friend and fellow architect, Arthur Little, had bought the right to remove from the site anything he wanted. Codman later developed his sketches into formal elevations and helped Little incorporate salvaged woodwork in his new Boston house, 2 Raleigh Street, built in the same year.

Page from Codman's sketchbook,
Elmwood, $6\frac{3}{8} \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ ".

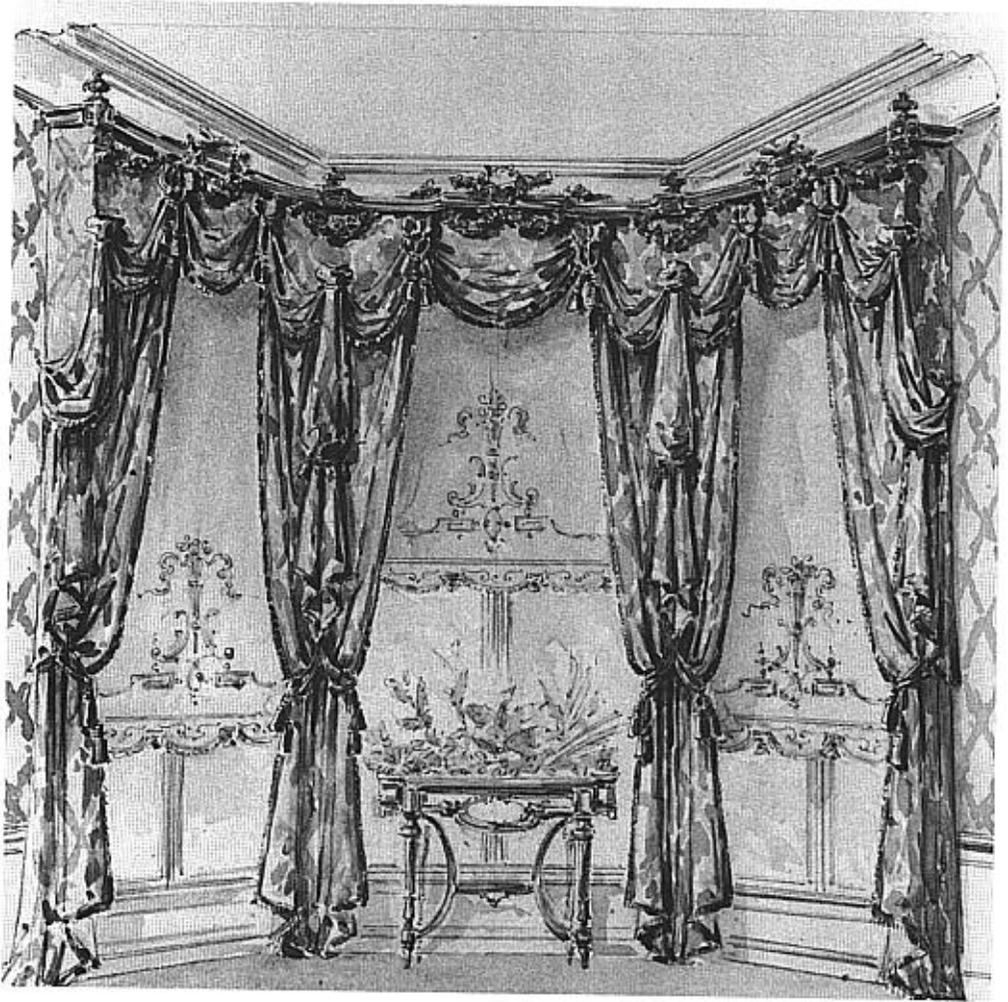


Elevation, Elmwood, the Crafts-Howe-Browne House, 1618 Tremont Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts, n.d. Pencil, ink, and watercolor on heavy paper, $25\frac{3}{4} \times 39\frac{1}{8}$ ".



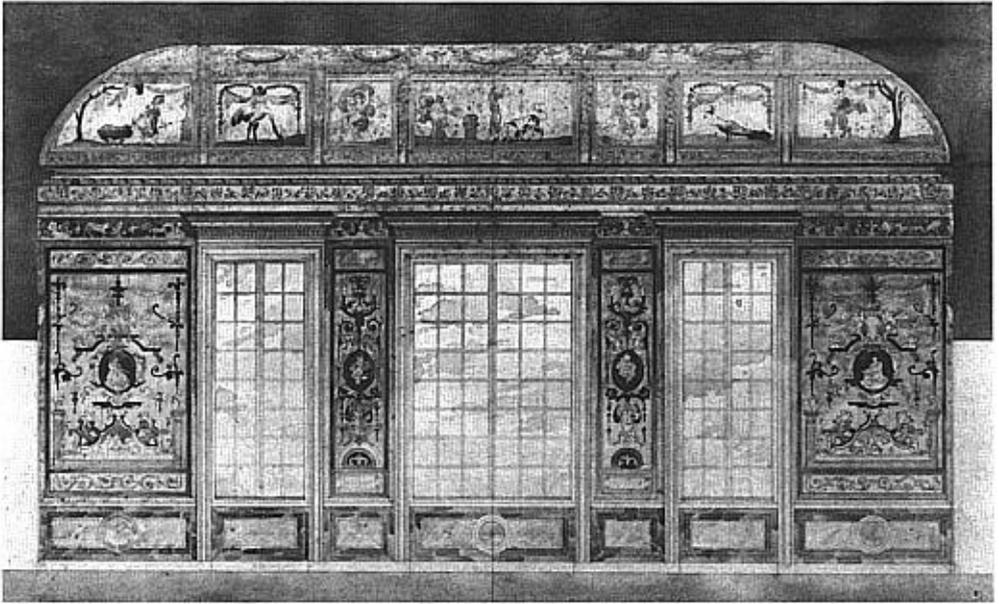
Photograph of Elmwood, ca. 1865.

This Federal mansion was the childhood home of Codman's friend and fellow architect, Herbert W. C. Browne. The beautifully detailed facade elevation probably was rendered by Codman himself from rough sketches and measurements he made in March and April 1892. The Howes had altered the house in the 1850s, adding a mansard roof. Codman, ever the archaeologist, eliminated it in his rendering, replacing it with a Federal hip.



Elevation of a bay window, boudoir for Mrs. F. Brockholst Cutting, Newport, Rhode Island, 1891–92. Pencil and watercolor on heavy paper, 19¹¹/₁₆ x 25¹/₂".

While rich, these window curtains are a great simplification of the drapery styles of ten or fifteen years earlier. The gilded planter filled with foliage, however, still evokes the spirit of a Victorian parlor. Codman made the drawing as part of a project to enlarge and redecorate Mrs. Cutting's house at Bellevue Avenue and Gordon Street. This elevation, in green in the Louis XVI taste, was made for a boudoir scheme. Codman's first Newport job, the project was never executed.



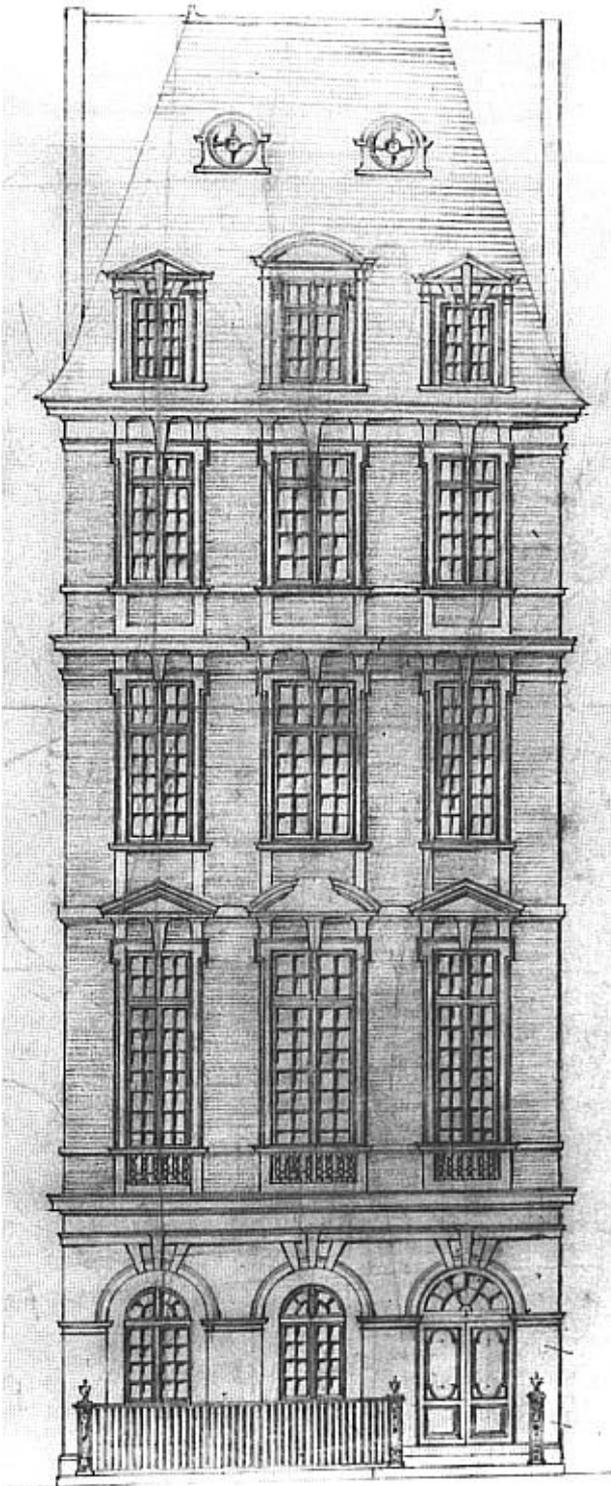
Unidentified elevation, perhaps for a second-floor room of Cornelius Vanderbilt's The Breakers, Newport, Rhode Island, 1894. Pencil and watercolor on heavy paper, 16⁷/₈ x 25¹/₂".

This beautifully detailed rendering belongs stylistically to a group done from Codman's designs by students at the École des Beaux Arts for the decoration of the bedrooms in The Breakers. The deep cove, however, is unlike any room in The Breakers. The subtlety of the watercolor execution places it in the first rank of interior depictions in Codman's papers.



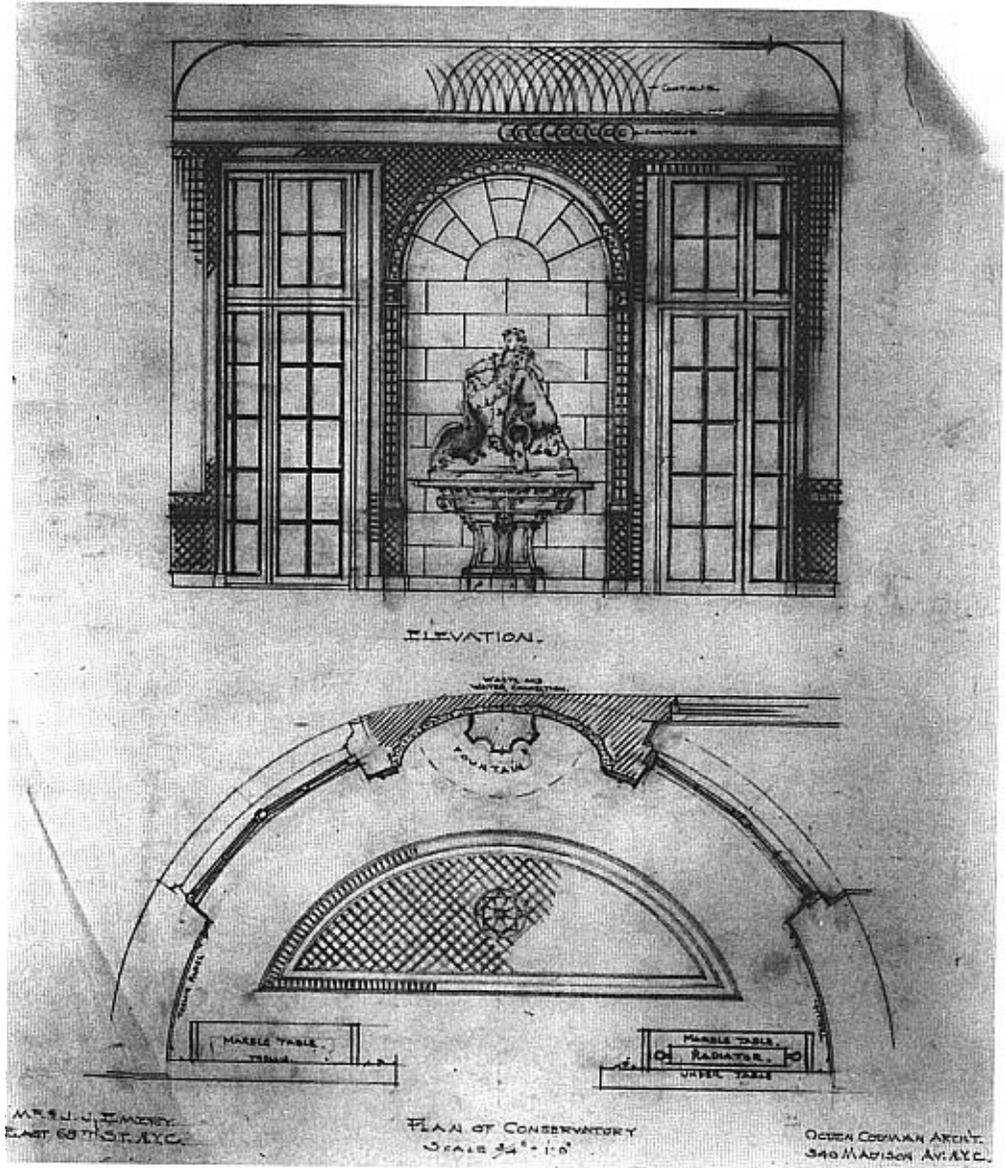
Photograph of the north side of East 51st Street, between Fifth and Madison avenues, New York City, ca. 1906.

Codman built three houses (numbers 9, 15, and 17) in this block facing the north flank of St. Patrick's Cathedral. On the right is the red brick and limestone Louis XIII facade of 15 East 51st Street, built in 1904 for Mrs. H. Walter Webb. Second from left, under construction, is number 9, designed for E. Rollins Morse and derived from the early nineteenth-century designs of Boston architect Charles Bulfinch. On the far right, number 17, under construction for Frank K. Sturgis, is a literal copy of Robert Adams's number 20 St. James Square, London, of 1772.



Facade elevation, 15 East 51st Street, New York City, 1904. Pencil and colored pencil on tracing paper, 25³/₈ x 11³/₄".

Codman built this house for the widowed Leila Howard (Griswold) Webb in 1904 and married her in the same year. Loosely derived from the Pavillon du Roi, Place des Vosges, Paris (built after 1605), its scale was always at odds with the rest of the block. Codman sold the house in 1911 to build 7 East 96th Street, and by 1930 it had become a bookshop. The house has since been demolished.



*Elevation of a conservatory for Mrs. J. J. Emory, 5 East 68th Street, New York City, 1912.
Pencil on tracing paper, 26 x 23".*

Codman had pioneered the interior use of trellis work as early as 1900 in Newport, predating the celebrated trellis room designed by Elsie de Wolfe at New York City's Colony Club by five years. The Emory house had been built by Peabody and Stearns a scant sixteen years before Codman was called in to classicize its interior. The fountain was designed and executed in Paris by Jules Visseaux, Codman's favorite decorative sculptor.

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Browne, ca. 1890, and this firm's house in Wayland, Massachusetts, for Frank Shaw, 1892-93.

NOTES

1. For information on the last Codman generation at The Grange, see the special issue on the house of *Old-Time New England* 71, 258 (1981).
2. This apartment house was to be built at the corner of Commonwealth Avenue and Parkway in Boston; the plans are undated.
3. This building stood at the corner of Magee and George streets in Providence and had been built for Updike's grandfather by Richard Upjohn.
4. For example, the Morton-Taylor House in Roxbury, Massachusetts, built by Boston architect Charles Bulfinch in 1796 and razed in 1890.
5. For example, the house for Oliver Ames at Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts (1904), or the building of 3 East 89th Street and the alteration of 1083 Fifth Avenue, New York City, for Archer Huntington (1913-16).
6. Codman Family Manuscripts Collection (hereafter cited as CFMC), box 216, SPNEA Library and Archives.
7. Pauline C. Metcalf, "Ogden Codman, Jr., and 'The Grange,'" *Old-Time New England* 71, 258 (1981): 68-83.
8. Richard Morris Hunt, Peabody and Stearns, Warren and Wetmore, and McKim, Mead and White.
9. For example, the house built for General Strong in Washington, D.C., by Little and Browne, ca. 1890, and this firm's house in Wayland, Massachusetts, for Frank Shaw, 1892-93.
10. Steven Rutenbaum, *Mansions in the Clouds: The Skyscraper Palazzi of Emery Roth* (New York: Balsam Press, 1986), 34.
11. William H. Jordy and Christopher P. Monkhouse. *Buildings on Paper: Rhode Island Architectural Drawings, 1825-1945* (Providence: Brown University, The Rhode Island Historical Society, Rhode Island School of Design, 1982), 52.
12. Information from Henry Hope Reed to David M. K. McKibben, Codman Papers, vol. 49, Boston Athenaeum.
13. Office account books from 1915-16 at the Metropolitan Museum list the names James D. Geddes and J. L. Stanford.
14. A watercolor rendering of Codman's projected east facade of The Grange in the SPNEA collection is signed by W.F. Protz and dated 1903. In the same year Protz produced a superb watercolor perspective, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of Faxon Lodge, built by Codman at Newport in 1902-03 for Frank K. Sturgis.
15. Codman's offices were at 100 Chestnut Street, Boston (1891-92); 53 State Street, Boston (1893); 5 West 16th Street, New York (also his residence; 1893-97); 281 Fourth Avenue (Church Missions Building, 1894-September 1901); 571 Fifth Avenue (Windsor Arcade, October 1901-May 1911); and 340 Madison Avenue (May 1911-August 1918). He occupied an office in Newport, at 18 Bellevue Avenue, as early as October 1891.
16. Edith Wharton to Ogden Codman, Jr., May 28, 1897, folder 1671, CFMC.