

NAUMKEAG

Restoration of the Pyramid Stairs
The Trustees of Reservations
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Project Data

Date: 2006-2007

One flight of bluestone stairs

Context: Berkshire Mountains in
western Mass.

Construction Date: 2007



Existing conditions, Aug. 30, 2006



During restoration, May 2007



During restoration, June 14, 2007

Project Description:

Naumkeag, designed by McKim, Mead & White, was the summer home and Country Place Era estate of Joseph Choate and his family. The estate, built on a hillside in the Berkshire Mountains, consists of 45-acres and several distinct garden rooms. In 1926, Fletcher Steele began his 32-year working relationship with daughter Mabel Choate and the entire property was improved physically and aesthetically.

In 1959, The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR) acquired Naumkeag, which is a National Historic Landmark (listed in 2007) and an outstanding example of a historic designed landscape. Since 1959, major portions of the house and pieces of the designed landscape have been restored. In 2006, TTOR decided to restore a set of bluestone stairs that Fletcher Steele designed to connect the Afternoon Garden with the South Lawn and the brick walkway with water rill that leads to the famous Blue Stairs. The Pyramid Stairs have bluestone risers and turf treads. Originally built in the early 1930s, the stairs slowly moved downhill and several stones were broken and leaning and the turf was in poor condition, resulting in a potentially dangerous and aesthetically displeasing situation.

Elmore Design Collaborative (EDC) was hired to assess the existing conditions and prepare construction drawings and technical specifications for the restoration work. Steele's original drawings and period photographs were used to guide the restoration. Work began with a detailed topographic survey. EDC carefully hand-excavated behind the stairs to see how Steele built them. The restored stairs include new stainless steel attachments, some replacement bluestone risers, Geobloc2 turf reinforcement, and new sod. EDC worked closely with TTOR to meet their needs and time schedule, while restoring this significant piece of this historic designed landscape.



Restoration complete, July 20, 2007