

# A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



**Guy Lowell**  
**1870-1927**

One of the most prominent architects in Boston during the early twentieth century, Guy Lowell was well known for a variety of major public buildings and a wide range of domestic work for affluent clients in the social enclaves of Long Island, Massachusetts, and Maine. His training in historicism resulted in his skilled use of the Italian Renaissance and Neo-Classical styles, especially as reflected in his two most important works, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the New York County Courthouse. He treated these styles with a certain level of restraint, creating architecture which took into consideration the surrounding environment and culture of America. In Maine, especially, he faced

the need to balance formalism with simplicity, and his work here provides an excellent overview of his approach toward adapting historicism.

Born in 1870 in Brookline, Massachusetts, Guy Lowell grew up in a leading Boston family, a status which was to benefit his future career as an architect. Among his close relations were A. Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard; Percival Lowell, astronomer; and James Russell Lowell, poet.<sup>1</sup> Lowell graduated from Harvard in 1892 and went on to two years of architectural graduate work at M.I.T. At the time, M.I.T.'s architectural faculty included Constant Desire Despradelle, a Frenchman renowned for his espousal of Ecole des Beaux-Arts academic training, and it may have been due to his influence that Lowell entered that famous school in Paris in 1895.<sup>2</sup> There he spent four years studying architectural design, history, and landscape architecture, exposed to the exuberance and lavishness of French design that so characterized the school. Upon his graduation in 1899, Lowell returned to Boston, whereupon he immediately opened an office in the Tremont Building.<sup>3</sup>

During the initial years of Guy Lowell's career, many of his commissions came from his intricate web of family and school connections, enabling him to lay the foundations for his career. These circumstances may have led to his first commission in Maine, a summer cottage for the Goodrich family in York<sup>4</sup> (Figure 2). The family of B. F. Goodrich, the rubber tire magnate from Akron, Ohio, had summered in York Harbor for several seasons before purchasing property on the York River in 1904. The Goodriches apparently preferred to build there rather than in the heart of the summer colony by the shore in order to avoid the coast's inclement weather.<sup>5</sup> The following year Mary Goodrich, B. F. Goodrich's widow, retained Lowell to design a summer house on what is known today as "Goodrich Point". A large, hipped roof cottage with wings stepping back into a "U" configuration, "River House" looked down from a hillside across a wide swath of lawns and terraces to the wooded banks of the river. Featuring red brick walls, overhanging eaves, and strong symmetry, this

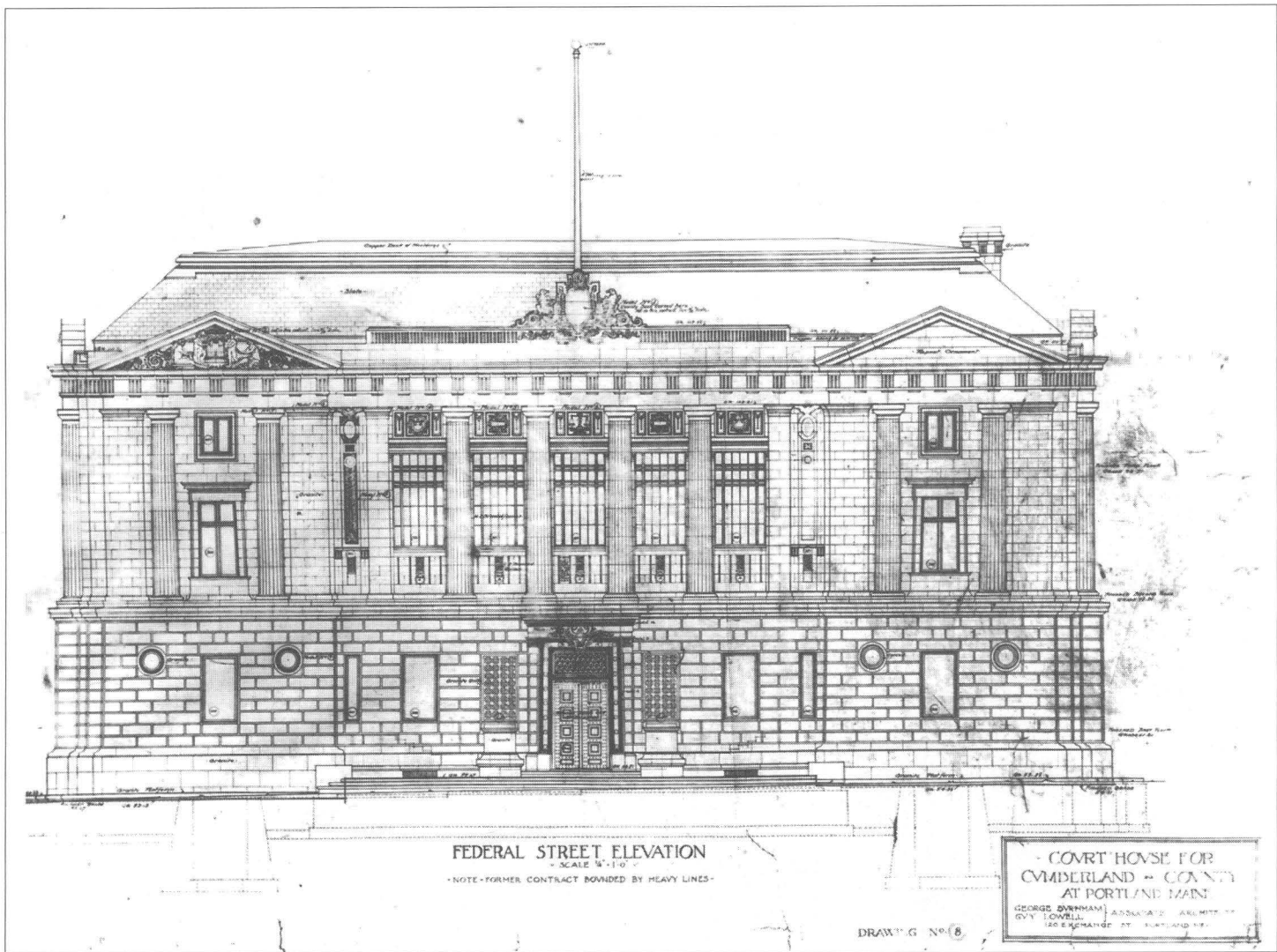


Figure 1. Elevation drawing of the Cumberland County Courthouse, Portland by George Burnham and Guy Lowell, 1904 (MHPC).

Colonial Revival home exuded a sense of regionalism, of being "American". Lowell accomplished this not only through the use of brick construction and key stoned, flat-arched window openings, but also through a limited use of detail, centered around the columned front entrance and rear terrace doorways. This was in contrast to several of Lowell's recent cottages on Long Island and in Massachusetts, where he employed more flamboyant, ornamental European revival styles. Additional wings were added to the cottage about 1915, but a 1925 fire devastated the house; and a Neo-Georgian cottage replaced it a year later, using the foundation and walls of the original. The new architect was Herbert Rhodes of Portland.

In late 1904 the Cumberland County Commissioners announced a competition to design a new county courthouse to be built on Federal Street in Portland. Eight architects were given three weeks to submit drawings for the project, and the competitors included locally prominent names such as John Calvin Stevens and Francis H. and Edward F. Fassett.<sup>6</sup>

George Burnham, a relatively new Portland architect, was included in the list of invitees, and he allied with Guy Lowell to create a competition entry (Figure 1). The circumstances surrounding the collaboration are unclear, but both were graduates of M.I.T. within four years of each other; and Burnham may have desired the input of a more seasoned architect to meet the demands of the complicated program. In any case, their combined effort won the competition, selected for its balance of providing a grand architectural expression while meeting the practical requirements of the building.<sup>7</sup>

The Cumberland County Courthouse was Lowell's first major public work of his five year old career and reflects his training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in his characteristically reserved and refined manner. The three-story granite structure is strengthened visually by a rusticated basement story, which supports the Doric colonnaded bays of the upper two floors. The principal facade is emphasized by two pedimented bays flanking a five-bay colonnade

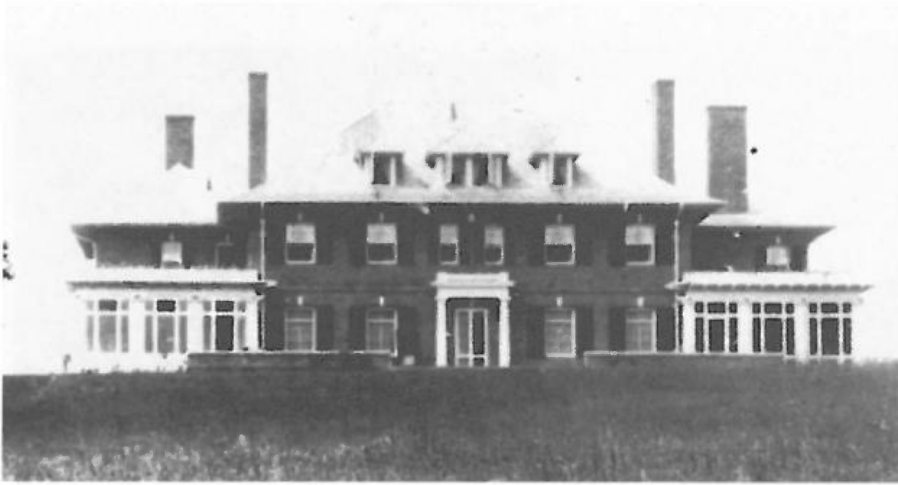


Figure 2. "River House," Goodrich Cottage, York, circa 1910 view (Courtesy of Mrs. Jefferson Patterson).

above the entrance, topped by a decorative car-touche. The high basement story and colonnades lend a proper monumentality to the exterior, which reflects the French architecture of Pascal, to which Lowell was exposed at the Ecole. The use of the Doric order and limited embellishments recalls the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and links the courthouse to the simpler Federal and Greek Revival styles of Portland.<sup>8</sup>

Inside Lowell's Beaux-Arts training is strikingly visible. A vaulted vestibule leads to a vaulted hallway, where a grand double staircase rises on the central entrance axis of the building. The staircase is set in a magnificent space, open two stories to a half-dome and skylight above and lit by a massive iron hanging lamp. Beginning as a central stair, the staircase divides at a landing, and the two flights turn to lead in a reverse direction up past coupled Corinthian columns and pilasters to the Supreme Court chamber on the second floor. This room features the most delicate ornamentation of the courthouse, with a coffered ceiling, paneled walls, and finely carved benches.

The rich interiors and restrained classicism of the exterior combine to make the Cumberland County Courthouse one of Maine's best examples of Neo-Classical architecture. For Lowell, the courthouse project resulted in wide public exposure and aided him in receiving other major public commissions in the future, especially the New York County Courthouse.

This exposure may have led Lowell to his next commission in Maine, the Building of the Arts in Bar Harbor (Figure 3). Conceived by a group of wealthy summer residents, the project was a response to

the interest in music and drama shared by many of the well-to-do families in the summer colony.<sup>9</sup> The project directors recruited Guy Lowell in 1906 to design a Greek temple near the Kebo Golf Links, where concerts and plays could be performed either inside to a capacity of 400 or outside in an open-air amphitheater. It was to provide an idyllic setting for the "worship" of the arts, from opera to Shakespeare, which were very much a part of the urban life of the summer residents during the rest of the year.

Lowell created a building in the High Classic mode, fronted by a pedimented portico supported by two large Ionic pillars. A colonnade of four pillars was centered on each of the two sides, and all facades featured plaster casts of Parthenonian friezes. Though constructed entirely of wood, the temple was sheathed in stucco to give the appearance of marble from afar.<sup>10</sup> The interior was lit by electric lights set into the coffered ceiling, and large windows on the sides opened the interior to the surrounding forests and fields.<sup>11</sup> To create this classic design, Lowell seems to have adapted details from various Greek models and also may have drawn from his contemporary Neo-Classical designs for the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord. The Building of the Arts hosted performances for thirty years, but as interest waned, it fell into disrepair; and eventually it was destroyed in the Bar Harbor fire of 1947.

More than likely, Lowell's success with the Building



Figure 3. The Building of the Arts, Bar Harbor, circa 1910 view (MHPC).





Figure 4. Land side of "Eegonos," Ladd Cottage, Bar Harbor, circa 1910 view (Courtesy of Richard Cheek).

of the Arts made his services as an architect very desirable among the elite summer "cottagers" of Bar Harbor. He received several commissions from within the colony, the most significant of these being his cottage for Walter G. Ladd on the northern shoreline of town (Figures 4, 5). Named "Eegonos", the Ladd Cottage exhibits a mix of Italian Renaissance and Second Renaissance Revival styles, featuring simple stucco exterior walls and a red tile roof. Ladd originally wished to call the house "Sonogee", the name of the first cottage on the property. However, when a neighbor used the name for his cottage, Ladd had to settle for the reverse spelling.<sup>12</sup>

Lowell's Beaux-Arts training is clearly evident in his design of the elegant entrance elevation, which features plaster ornamentation in the form of swags, pilasters, urns, and medallions. Flanking wings are decorated with wrought-iron balconies, supported by cast plaster brackets. This type of exuberance was typical of the Bar Harbor summer colony, where the residents seemed to be continually contending with each other in the form of competing architectural statements. The rich detail and elaborate decoration

of the entrance elevation, however, contrasts strikingly with the simplicity and sedate formalism that characterizes the rest of the exterior. The ocean elevation is punctuated by French doors opening on to a brick patio on the first floor, and second floor windows are fronted by wrought-iron balconies, the only decorative elements on this side. A large side porch extends from the southern end of the cottage, supported by immense Ionic columns. Inside, there is a formal symmetry to the plan, with rooms leading off a vaulted, marble-floored central hall running from front to back, with a view straight out to Frenchman's Bay.<sup>13</sup> Other interior details include fluted columns lining the hall, wall friezes and ceiling medallions, and a grand stairway leading to the second floor bedrooms.

The Ladd Cottage is an excellent example of Lowell's tendencies toward a simplification of the European revival styles, seeking as he did to adapt them to the lifestyles and environments of America. As he wrote in *American Gardens*:

We may borrow the details and ideas from Italy, France, and England, but we must adapt them skillfully to our own needs, and give them the setting which they require.



Figure 5. Ocean side of "Eegonos," Ladd Cottage, Bar Harbor, circa 1910 view (Courtesy of Richard Cheek).

The overall Mediterranean feeling of "Eegonos" was common to many of Guy Lowell's summer houses, another example being the Richard D. Sears Cottage on Islesboro, designed concurrently with "Eegonos" in 1907. Sears, a talented tennis player, was also from a prominent Boston family and may have known Lowell through social connections. He hired the architect to design a new house on the site of a shoreline cottage which had burned earlier that year. Sears signed a contract with W. H. Glover and Company of Rockland in November of 1907, and work was completed by June of 1908.<sup>14</sup> The Italian Renaissance cottage consists of a long, rectangular main block with a small wing on one end and a porch on the other. The stucco walls and bracketed roof overhang liken it to the Ladd Cottage, but there is much more restraint in its decoration. Again, this is part of Lowell's refinement of revival architecture, but it may also reflect the more subdued character of the Islesboro summer community.

Though principally an architect, Lowell also had a strong interest in landscape design. He studied it while at the Ecole and lectured on the subject at M.I.T. from 1900 to 1913.<sup>15</sup> He designed several private urban and estate gardens and published books on

American and Italian gardens as a result of his extensive travels. Only one landscape design by him in Maine has been identified, that being a layout of paths, monuments, and plantings for Webster Park in Orono. This small park on the banks of the Stillwater River was donated to the town in 1910 by the Websters, a prominent local family who were involved in the lumber business. That year Orono's park commissioners voted to "procure the services of a competent landscape architect" and hired Lowell to survey the property and "make suitable charts thereof."<sup>16</sup> Lowell's design consists of a simple plan of paths and benches along the terraces above the river and includes suitable trees and shrubs, a fountain, and a statue of Chief Orono. The park today remains much as it was originally planned, except for the omission of the fountain and statue.

Guy Lowell returned to Maine in 1926, near the end of his career, to design alterations and additions to two large summer cottages in Bar Harbor. The first project was a remodeling of "Guy's Cliff", which had recently been purchased by James Byrne, a New York corporation lawyer. Lowell had established a second office in New York City in 1906 and was currently

deeply involved in the New York County Courthouse project, resulting in wide recognition for him within the city.<sup>17</sup> This may be the reason behind Lowell's selection by Byrne. The original Victorian cottage was designed by William A. Jordan for Charles T. How in 1881 and was named after a subsequent owner's son. Lowell transformed it into an Italian Renaissance, Mediterranean-influenced cottage, with hipped overhanging roofs, arched windows, and open balconies. Away from Bar Harbor for nearly twenty years, Lowell still recognized the need for reserved formalism in the architecture of the community. Eventually absorbed into the campus of the College of the Atlantic, the cottage burned in 1983.

Concurrent with this work were alterations and additions to "Chatwold", the estate of Joseph Pulitzer, the well-known journalist. Little is known about this project, but work was being completed at the time of Lowell's sudden death in February of 1927, according to an obituary.<sup>19</sup>

In Maine, Guy Lowell created some of the best examples of his public and private work. His eclectic collection of architectural designs provides a wide overview of both his architectural sources and talents and reflects his tendency to work for clients in affluent communities. The influences of Italy and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts are evident in his work. Yet through a subtle reordering and restraint in decoration, massing, and detail, his architecture is differentiated from European models and is provided with a simpler, less formal spirit that suits it to the Maine environment.

Jeffrey A. Harris

## NOTES

1. Guy Lowell Obituary, *Architectural Record*, April, 1927, p. 373.
2. Dumas Malone, *Dictionary of American Biography*, New York, 1933, p. 457.
3. Douglas H. Bonnell, *Boston Beaux Arts: The Architecture of Guy Lowell*, unpublished Master's Thesis, Tufts University, 1980, p. 33.
4. Lowell's mother was Mary Goodrich Lowell, a distant relation of B. F. Goodrich. After B. F. Goodrich's death in 1889, his family may have lived in Cambridge during the winters.
5. *Bowdoin Alumni Magazine*, Brunswick, December, 1986, p. 11. *Banker and Tradesman* magazine in October, 1904, makes reference to alterations to Charles C. Goodrich's cottage in York Harbor by Guy Lowell. This refers to "Orchard", the estate next door to "River House", which was purchased at the same time by the Goodrich family.

6. *Portland Daily Press*, November 30, 1904.
7. *Eastern Argus*, January 2, 1905.
8. Roger Reed, "George Burnham", *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine*, 1984.
9. Owen Johnson, "The Building of the Arts at Bar Harbor", *Century Magazine*, September, 1908, p. 676. The directors included George Dorr, Henry Lane Eno, George W. Vanderbilt, Mrs. Henry Dimock, and Mrs. Robert Abbe.
10. Gladys O'Neil, "Bar Harbor's Vanished Temple to the Arts", *Down East Magazine*, May, 1978, p. 54.
11. Johnson, p. 676.
12. Barbara Sassaman Report, Maine Historic Preservation Commission files.
13. Bonnell, p. 262.
14. Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., *The Summer Cottages of Islesboro*, Islesboro, 1989, p. 98.
15. Guy Lowell Obituary, *The American Architect*, February 20, 1927, p. 230.
16. Orono Annual Report, March 1, 1911, p. 36.
17. Bonnell, p. 35.
18. G. W. Helfrich and Gladys O'Neil, *Lost Bar Harbor*, Camden, 1982, p. 29.
19. Bonnell, p. 263.

## LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY GUY LOWELL

- Charles C. Goodrich House, York, Additions, 1904, Extant
- Cumberland County Courthouse (with George Burnham), Federal Street, Portland, 1904-09, Extant
- "River House," Mary Goodrich House, York, 1905, Destroyed
- "La Selva," J. Andrews Davis Cottage, Eden Street, Bar Harbor, Additions, 1906, Extant
- The Building of the Arts, Bar Harbor, 1906-07, Destroyed
- "Egonos," Walter G. Ladd Cottage, Eden Street, Bar Harbor, 1907, Extant
- Richard D. Sears Cottage, Islesboro, 1907-08, Extant
- Webster Park, Orono, 1910-11, Extant
- "Oaklands," Robert H. Gardiner House, Gardiner, Alterations, 1917, Extant
- "Guy's Cliff," James Byrne Cottage, Eden Street, Bar Harbor, Additions and Alterations, 1926, Destroyed
- "Chatwold," Joseph Pulitzer House, Bar Harbor, Additions and Alterations, 1926-27, Destroyed

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