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**Guide to**

**Fletcher Steele Papers Regarding Naumkeag, 1926-1959**

**NK.MS.Coll.2**

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## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

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### **RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS**

This collection is open for research.

### **FLETCHER STEELE (1885-1971)**

The landscape architect Fletcher Steele was born on June 7, 1885 in Rochester, NY. He graduated from Williams College in 1907 and then studied for one year in the landscape architecture program at Harvard University, leaving to apprentice with Warren Manning.

The majority of Steele's work was done in private gardens, and much of it is not extant. One of his few remaining commissions is at Naumkeag in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a summer home that was built by Joseph Hodges Choate (1832-1917) and inherited by Choate's daughter, Mabel Choate (1870-1958). Mabel Choate hired Steele in 1926 to design a garden next to the house, the Afternoon Garden. Steele continued working with Choate on various gardens at Naumkeag until 1955, when he finished the Chinese Garden. Choate died in 1958, and in her will she left Naumkeag to The Trustees of Reservations. Steele died on July 16, 1971 in Rochester, NY.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS

The Fletcher Steele Papers Regarding Naumkeag mainly consist of carbons (and some originals) of the orders that Steele made from 1926 to 1958 for plants, trees, flowers, tools, paint, and other materials that he used in his work on the gardens at Naumkeag. Many of the order forms are annotated by Steele. The forms, which are arranged chronologically, contain a fairly complete record of the materials that were used in the gardens, especially when matched with the photographs and plans regarding each garden that are housed in the Mabel Choate Papers Regarding Naumkeag (NK.MS.Coll.1). The order forms were originally housed in binders that have labels in Steele's handwriting. The forms have been removed from the binders and foldered, and the binders have been foldered and listed separately. There are also some invoices that were sent to Steele, some of which can be matched to orders that he made.

The collection contains some correspondence between Steele and Mabel Choate from 1937 to 1940 regarding work on the gardens at Naumkeag; this correspondence consists of Choate's original letters to Steele and carbons of Steele's responses to her. The other side of the correspondence (Steele's originals and Choate's carbons) can be found in the Mabel Choate Papers Regarding Naumkeag (NK.MS.Coll.1). There is correspondence from 1937 to 1945 between Steele and George Norbert Kates, who was hired by Steele and Choate to do research in China and to purchase materials in China for the Chinese Garden. Kates published a book about his years in China called *The Years that Were Fat: Peking, 1933-1940*. The remaining correspondence in the collection is between Steele and various individuals and companies who worked on the Naumkeag gardens, including Choate's gardener, Robert R. Crighton.

The last portion of the collection consists of writings by Steele. There are memoranda and notes from 1936 to 1959 regarding Steele's work on the gardens at Naumkeag; some plans for flower beds; and a 1940 essay about Steele's "Horticultural Undertakings" at Naumkeag. There is also a notebook called "Plant Material Notebook for Peonies, Clematis and Experimental Garden" dated 1935 to 1939. Choate's version of the notebook, dated 1929 to 1956, can be found in the Mabel Choate Papers Regarding Naumkeag (NK.MS.Coll.1, Box 3, Folders 4-13).

| <b>Box</b>            | <b>Folder</b> | <b>Contents</b>   | <b>Date</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------|---|-------------|
| <b>Correspondence</b> |               |   |             |
| 1                     | 1             | Choate, Mabel   | 1937-1940   |
| 1                     | 2-3           | Kates, George Norbert (1895-)   | 1937-1945   |
| 1                     | 4-5           | Other correspondents  | 1933-1956   |
| <b>Orders</b>         |               |   |             |
| 1                     | 6-17          | Forms for orders made by Fletcher Steele, carbon and original, some annotated | 1926-1936   |
| 2                     | 1-14          | Forms for orders made by Fletcher Steele, carbon and original, some annotated | 1937-1940   |
| 3                     | 1-16          | Forms for orders made by Fletcher Steele, carbon and original, some annotated | 1941-1952   |
| 4                     | 1-7           | Forms for orders made by Fletcher Steele, carbon and original, some annotated | 1953-1958   |
| 4                     | 8             | Binder for orders made by Fletcher Steele                                     | 1927-1934   |
| 4                     | 9             | Binder for orders made by Fletcher Steele                                     | 1935-1937   |
| 5                     | 1             | Binder for orders made by Fletcher Steele                                     | 1938-1939   |
| 5                     | 2             | Binder for orders made by Fletcher Steele                                     | 1940-1941   |
| 5                     | 3             | Binder for orders made by Fletcher Steele                                     | 1942-1946   |
| 6                     | 1             | Binder for orders made by Fletcher Steele                                     | 1947-1953   |
| 6                     | 2             | Binder for orders made by Fletcher Steele                                     | 1954-1958   |
| 7                     | 1-2           | Invoices sent to Fletcher Steele  | 1940-1957   |

| <b>Box</b> | <b>Folder</b> | <b>Contents</b>  | <b>Date</b>   |
|------------|---------------|--|---------------|
|            |               | <b>Writings</b>  |               |
| 7          | 3             | Flower bed plans   | [193-?]       |
| 7          | 4-9           | Memoranda and notes by Fletcher Steele   | 1936 Aug-1959 |
| 7          | 10            | “Naumkeag – Notes on Horticultural Undertakings as I Have Been Engaged as Landscape Architect for Some Years at Naumkeag,” typescript carbon, corrected      | 1940 Nov 3    |
|            |               | With note by Steele: “Notes for the Horticultural Society Prize Committee which were asked for by Will Ellery.”  |               |
| 7          | 11            | “Plant Material Notebook for Peonies, Clematis and Experimental Garden. Dec. 1936 – Later Supplemented Fuschias – Added June 1938,” typescript and holograph | 1935-1939     |
|            |               | Annotated: “Office Copy. FS.”  |               |