

SAINT-GAUDENS



NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE / NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Home, Studios, And Gardens Of An Important American Sculptor

Augustus Saint-Gaudens first saw "Huggins Folly," an ancient mansion crowning a bare New Hampshire hillside, on a gloomy April day in 1885. He was momentarily repelled by the bleak brick structure. But after his wife pointed out that the scene would look different in summer, Saint-Gaudens rented the house from his friend Charles Beaman, a New York lawyer who owned a country house nearby. Saint-Gaudens was about to begin a statue of Abraham Lincoln for a park in Chicago, and tradition holds that Beaman sold the artist on the house by telling him that he would find many "Lincoln-shaped" men among the lean Yankee natives. That consideration and his determination to escape another summer in New York City convinced him that he should move to the country where he could work comfortably and have his family about him. He was just 37, with long years as a student and struggling young artist behind him. Ahead lay his most productive years, and most of these would be spent here at Cornish.

There was much to be done to make the property useful for his work and acceptable to his taste. He quickly turned the barn into a studio, and he and his assistants worked there until the next November. The house itself, built about 1800 and once used as a tavern, was capacious and cool. When he constructed the terraces about the house, he removed the front porch and steps. On the west he added a classical columned porch to take advantage of the prevailing breezes and the dramatic view of Mount Ascutney across the river. Inside, the house was completely remodeled. Dormers were added to serve new rooms carved out of the huge attic, the main stairway was moved to the rear of the house, rooms were combined, doors enlarged, a wing added, the upstairs ballroom cut up into bedrooms, and baths and more bedrooms built on the south side.

Over the years Saint-Gaudens lavished much attention on the grounds. He placed a formal garden between the house and barn-studio. Where once there were only rough farmland and pastures, Saint-Gaudens developed pools, fountains, a birch clump, hedges of pine and hemlock, a bowling green with summer house (near the *Shaw Memorial*), and an expanse of lawn. To the east he built a shop for the plaster-moulder and a studio for his assistants. This studio burned in 1904 with the tragic loss of all the sculptor's correspondence, sketch books, the rec-

ords of commissions, and numerous works in progress. It was rebuilt a year later, only to burn again in 1944. The site now holds the sculpture court and exhibition galleries.

As Saint-Gaudens worked at softening what he felt were the house's harsh qualities, his friend Edward Simmons commented that the house reminded him of an "upright New England farmer with a new set of false teeth" Another acquaintance, noting the classical columns, the Mediterranean pergolas, the marble pools, the archaic Pan, and the rams' heads, thought that the building was "like some austere and recalcitrant New England old maid struggling in the arms of a Greek faun."

In 1897 Saint-Gaudens went abroad to live for three years. He gave up his New York residence on West 45th Street and his studio on West 36th Street, but he kept his home in Cornish. When he returned, he lived there the remainder of his life. His search for health drove him to take up outdoor sports. He built a 60-foot scaffolding near the upper studio to support the starting run of a toboggan slide. A nine-hole golf course was laid out, and in winter Saint-Gaudens and his friends played hockey on the pond below the house and skied on nearby hills.

In June 1905 the Cornish colony, composed of the friends and companions of Saint-Gaudens who came to live and work nearby, celebrated the 20th anniversary of the sculptor's coming to Cornish by holding a masque (a play based on early Greek drama) at the foot of the field below the house. A small Greek temple was erected in the grove of large pines that once stood there. Originally made of plaster, it was later reproduced in marble and became the family burial place.

After Saint-Gaudens' death in 1907, his widow and son, Homer Saint-Gaudens, provided for the preservation of the property. They deeded the estate to a board of trustees, and later the New Hampshire legislature chartered the Saint-Gaudens Memorial as a non-profit corporation to preserve and exhibit the collections, house, and studios. For over 50 years friends and admirers of the sculptor have supported the memorial's work. In 1964 Congressional legislation authorized the National Park Service to accept the property as a gift, and a year later the memorial was designated a National Historic Site. The trustees continue to act as advisory committee.

Augustus Saint-Gaudens was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1848, the year of the Potato Famine. His father, Bernard Paul Ernest, was a French shoemaker from the little village of Aspet, near the town of Saint-Gaudens in the foothills of the Pyrenees. During the 1830's and 40's he had wandered from his native country to London and then on to Dublin, where he met and married Mary McGuinness of County Longford. Several children were born to the couple before Bernard, 6 months after the birth of Augustus, took his family to the United States. They settled in New York, and there the boy grew up. When Augustus finished his schooling at 13, he was apprenticed to a French cameo-cutter. Through his teens the boy labored long days in his master's shop. His father encouraged his urge to draw, and at night Augustus attended the newly opened art school at Cooper Union. Later he studied at the National Academy of Design, which was near his home.

When he was 19 and his apprenticeship over, his father offered him a chance to see the Exposition of 1867 in Paris. He left with \$100 in his pocket, a thorough knowledge of his craft, and deep confidence in himself. While waiting for admission to the famous *École des Beaux-Arts*, he worked in an Italian cutter's atelier. When he was finally accepted a year later, he elected to study under the respected Jouffroy. Because he received little money from home, he supported himself by cameo-cutting. In 1870 the Franco-Prussian War forced him to leave Paris. He lived and worked in Rome for the next 5 years, except for one brief visit home. His outlook and skills matured during these years, and his warm personality attracted a wide circle of friends, both American and foreign. Among his early patrons were William M. Evarts and Elihu Root, whose portraits are displayed in Cornish and at Hamilton College, and through their influence his name became known in circles that counted. Rome was also the place of another fortunate meeting. There he first met Augusta F. Homer of Roxbury, Mass., who recorded in her diary her impression of the artist.

At 27 Saint-Gaudens returned to America and began his career. A brief stint as a mural painter under John LaFarge, whose work decorated Trinity Church in Boston, brought him happily near Miss Homer. He also established close and lasting friendships with two promising young architects, Stanford White and Charles McKim. They would become frequent professional colleagues.

The commission to do the Farragut statue in 1876 was a turning point in Saint-Gaudens' life. It brought him recognition and enough security to persuade Augusta Homer's parents not to delay further the pair's marriage.

“No one ever succeeded in art unless born with an uncontrollable instinct toward it.”

This 1881 *Farragut* statue brought Saint-Gaudens critical acclaim.



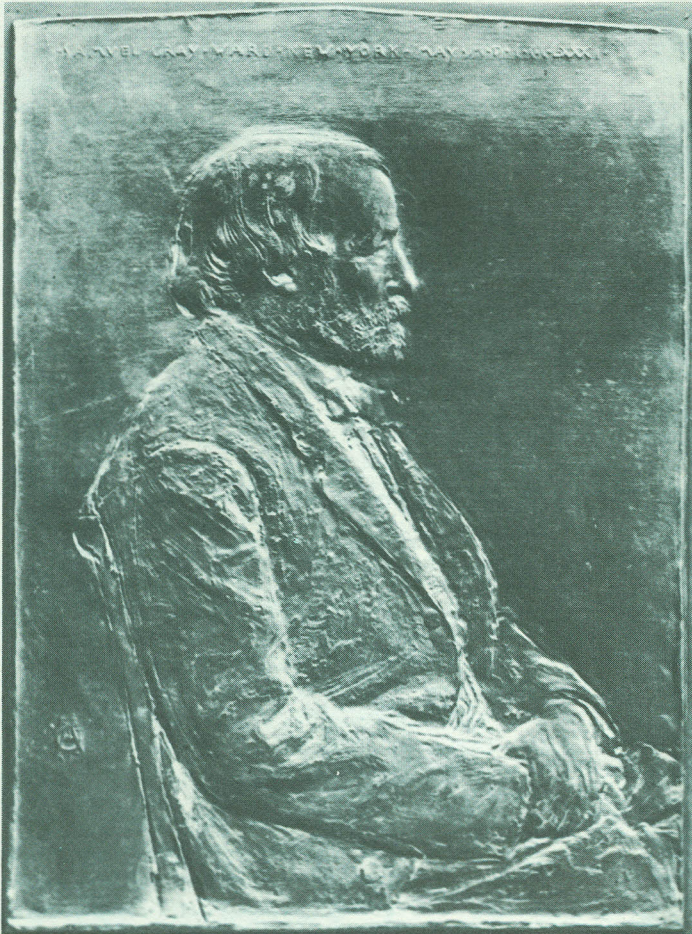
The *Adams Memorial*, 1891.



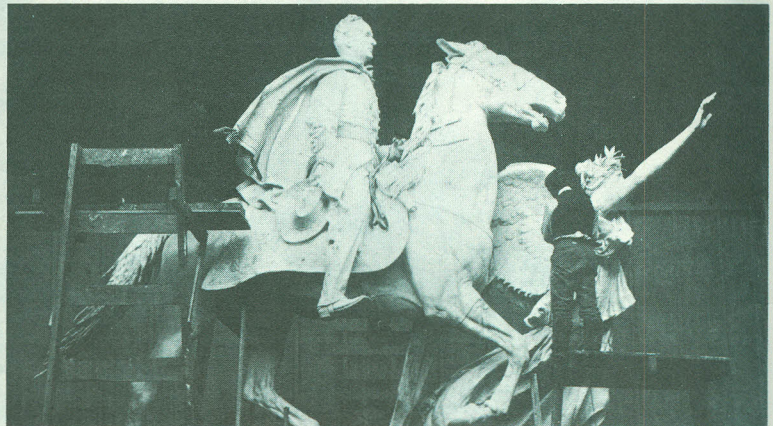
The *Standing Lincoln*, 1887.



Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Saint-Gaudens considered this relief of *Samuel Ward* one of his best.



At work on the *Sherman*.

When the statue was exhibited in Paris in 1880 and then cast in bronze and placed in Madison Square in New York, it was quickly recognized as a landmark in American sculpture. "Here was racy characterization joined to original composition," one critic has written, "a public memorial with the stamp of creativity upon it." While Saint-Gaudens was overturning old conventions in sculpture with the figure, his collaborator, White, was contributing a new approach in pedestal design.

Shortly after their wedding in 1877, Saint-Gaudens and his bride sailed for Paris, where he knew he could find the surroundings that would call forth his best. In Paris, Saint-Gaudens made the first of a long series of bas-relief portraits that revealed his mastery of delicate line and sensitive modeling. He also undertook a new role as leader among his fellow artists. Just before he left New York he took part in a revolt by his generation against the stifling academicism of an older group. One outcome was the organization of the Society of American Artists, of which he was a founder. He became a leader of the American group and helped choose American paintings for the 1878 International Exposition.

After the Farragut statue Saint-Gaudens no longer had to struggle to obtain commissions. They flowed into his studio in an almost overwhelming stream. "The Randall," "The Puritan," "The Standing Lincoln"—about which he was thinking when he first came to Cornish—the ever-lengthening series of relief portraits, all these he welcomed. Sometimes it appeared to his friends that he undertook too much, that he found it difficult to say no when he should have for the sake of his welfare and his work. Saint-Gaudens also felt keenly his duties to those who would come after him. As he had benefited from his teachers, so he thought himself obliged to instruct. In numerous private ways he helped aspiring young sculptors, and through the classrooms of the Art Students League he reached many more. He taught steadily from 1888 to 1897.

Besides his teaching, Saint-Gaudens gave generously of his time to other causes. He was an advisor to the Columbian Exposition of 1893, and suggested his former pupil, MacMonnies, and his friend and contemporary, Daniel Chester French, for important commissions. He made many speeches on behalf of the American Academy in Rome, an institution he cherished, and persuaded Henry Clay Frick to give \$100,000 as an endowment. He later spent much time in Washington working with his friend McKim and Daniel Burnham of Chicago on the MacMillan Commission, making recommendations for the preservation and development of the Nation's Capital.

His achievements during the 1880's and 90's included the *Amor Caritas* purchased later by the French Government for the Luxembourg Museum in Paris, the *Diana* for the tower of Stanford White's Madison Square Garden, the portrait of Robert Louis Stevenson, which he later modified into the memorial to the author in St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, and the bust of General William T. Sherman, which finally evolved into the masterful equestrian statue now standing in New York on Fifth Avenue near Central Park. He began the Shaw Memorial for Boston Common during this time and continued work on it for 14 years. And for Henry Adams he created the haunting memorial to Adams' wife, which stands in Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

At the turn of the century the Sherman statue won the Grand Prix in the Paris Salon of 1900. It was there also that Saint-Gaudens learned of the malignancy which sent him back to Boston for surgery and which led to his decision to return permanently to Cornish. These last 7 years were productive too, in spite of his diminishing energy and the pain caused by cancer. He finally completed the Sherman to his satisfaction, and it was unveiled in New York in 1903. His summer neighbor, John Hay, sat for a bust. He finished the Stevenson Memorial and sculptured two other important works—the monument to Ireland's Charles Parnell for Dublin and the heroic seated Lincoln, which many mistakenly assume to be the figure in the Lincoln Memorial, for another park in Chicago. When President Theodore Roosevelt, a friend and admirer, asked him to apply his talents to United States coinage, he magnificently redesigned the \$10 and \$20 gold pieces, today treasured by collectors. Altogether, in three decades of work he produced nearly 150 sculptures. Honors came to him in these last years of his life. Harvard, Princeton, and Yale granted him honorary degrees. He was elected a member of the Royal Academy in London and the French Legion of Honor.

But treatments could not arrest Saint-Gaudens' illness, and his health continued to decline. He courageously kept at his work and weathered such setbacks as the loss of the upper studio by fire in 1904. He rebuilt the studio the next year and filled it with assistants whom he personally supervised. His productivity never faltered during those last years, even though he required a kind of sedan chair to move from place to place and the constant attention of a trained nurse. By early 1907 Saint-Gaudens was bedridden, but still cheerful. A few days before his death on August 3, 1907, he lay watching the sun set behind Mount Ascutney. "It's very beautiful," he said, "but I want to go farther away."

The Cornish Colony. The arrival of Saint-Gaudens in the summer of 1885 was the beginning of the Cornish Colony. He also brought two assistants, Frederick MacMonnies and Philip Martiny, to work with him in the barn-studio. They were the first in a long series of helpers, many of whom went on to important careers of their own. Herbert Adams, Frances Grimes, James Earle Fraser, Elsie Ward, and—most important of all—his brother, Louis Saint-Gaudens, were only some who worked here and went away enriched by the experience.

That first summer, a friend and painter, George de Forest Brush, came to Cornish and camped with his wife near the ravine just below the house. Brush had lived out west among the Indians for many years, and the teepee he built for a summer dwelling greatly amused Saint-Gaudens and his neighbors. The next spring Thomas W. Dewing, also a painter, rented a house nearby, soon followed by Henry O. Walker, Charles A. Platt, and Stephen Parrish. In 1898 Maxfield Parrish came to Cornish and began to draw those immensely popular scenes with glowing blue skies so unbelievably romantic to the viewer, yet so accurate to one who has seen a Cornish hillside on a July evening when the sky is clear and the sunset has faded.

As the attractions of Cornish became more widely known, other artists found Cornish a delightful spot in which to spend a rural summer working among congenial spirits. When the 1905 masque was performed, 70 members of the colony pooled their skills to provide the music, settings, costumes, scripts, and acting before an appreciative audience of more than twice that number.

There were poets as well at Cornish—Percy MacKaye, Witter Bynner, and William Vaughn Moody. In 1898 the American novelist Winston Churchill built a home here which he named Harlakenden House. President Woodrow Wilson used it as a vacation White House during the fateful summer of 1914 and again a year later. Ten years earlier the young Ethel Barrymore spent a summer in the colony, renting the house of Henry and Lucia Fuller. Both were painters, he of landscapes and she of miniatures. Kenyon Cox, a painter and art critic, built a home and studio here, and over the years the prominent residents of Cornish included in their numbers Charles Dana Gibson; Everette Shinn; John Elliott and his wife, Maud Howe Elliott, who was a writer; Peter Finley Dunne, the creator of "Mr. Dooley"; Herbert Croly, the author of *The Promise of American Life* and the editor of *The New Republic*; Norman Hapgood, the editor of *Collier's* magazine; Willard Metcalfe, the landscape painter; Louis Shipman, a playwright, and his wife, Ellen, who designed many of the famous Cornish gardens; and Arthur Whiting, a composer and musician.

This circle of talented spirits drew members of certain moneyed and social circles. Italianate villas rose on hill-sides and in abandoned pastures. Embellished with sunken gardens, marble fountains, artfully developed villas, and rows of Lombardy poplars, a farm community turned into what local people sometimes called "little New York." The swirl of entertainment in this upper-class Bohemia was gay and elegant, but Thomas Dewing thought there were "too many picture hats" and left to seek a more secluded spot.

Today the artists who made up the Cornish Colony are gone, and with them a colorful era has passed. But at the home of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, with its well-kept house, its carefully designed gardens, and studios that retain a touch of their master's hand, one can relive for a moment an age gone by—the age of an American *belle epoque* that nurtured and enchanted a singular company of artists at Cornish.

For your safety. Be alert for two-way traffic when you cross the highway to and from the parking lot. Please stay on designated paths while touring the grounds. Watch your step: marble steps are slippery in wet weather, and brick paths are sometimes uneven.

Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site

The park, open from May through October, is located on N.H. 12A in Cornish, N.H., 9 miles north of Claremont, N.H., and 2 miles from Windsor, Vt. Taxi service is available from both towns. Visitors traveling via Int. 91 should use the Ascutney or Hartland, Vt., exits; via Int. 89, the West Lebanon, N.H., exit.

The National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, administers the park in cooperation with the trustees of Saint-Gaudens Memorial. The superintendent's address is R.R.2, Box 73, Cornish, NH, 03745.

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