

THROUGH THE HEDGE

THE HERITAGE GARDEN AT VAUGHAN HOMESTEAD

Where Romanticism, Industry, and Colonial Nostalgia Intersect:
A Reflection on How We Preserve and Reimagine History in America's 250th Year

INTRODUCTION

As the nation approaches its 250th anniversary, the Homestead's Heritage Garden invites reflection on how landscapes shape our understanding of the past. The garden is a cultural artifact—one that reveals how people use history to make sense of change.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, William Warren Vaughan and his wife, Ellen Twisleton Vaughan, transformed the grounds of their ancestral home. As mills, dams, and industry reshaped both the adjacent Vaughan Brook and American life, they looked to the pre-industrial past for inspiration. Together, they restored the Homestead, reclaimed the surrounding woods, and created this formal garden. Influenced by the Colonial Revival movement, they used idealized visions of history to craft a landscape that expressed beauty, continuity, and connection during a period of rapid change.



COLONIAL NOSTALGIA

The word *colonial* carries different meanings. For some, as with William and Ellen Vaughan, it evokes heritage, tradition, and continuity—a simpler time. For others, it recalls Indigenous displacement, slavery, empire, and inequality.

In the late nineteenth century, many Americans looked to the colonial era for inspiration as industrialization transformed daily life and society. Architects, designers, and homeowners restored historic buildings and created landscapes that celebrated an imagined simpler past. William and Ellen's garden reflects Colonial Revival ideals through its formal design, classical architecture, skilled craftsmanship, and emphasis on history.

At this moment of national reflection, the garden invites us to consider how we remember the past. The Colonial Revival movement celebrated an idealized vision of America's past, emphasizing beauty and heritage while often overlooking the more difficult realities of colonial history. As we experience this landscape, we might ask: What stories become visible in the landscapes we preserve? And what might we see differently if we looked more closely at the past we think we know?



MEET THE REVIVALISTS

William and Ellen Vaughan believed that historic places could provide an oasis in a rapidly changing age. At Vaughan Homestead, they restored the family house with period-inspired furnishings and decorative arts, created a formal garden, and worked to reclaim the surrounding woods from a landscape transformed by industry.

Yet their vision extended beyond nostalgia. Ellen Vaughan, an artist, moved within Boston's artistic and intellectual circles, where ideas about nature, history, and emotion were shaped by Romanticism and Transcendentalist thought, movements that celebrated personal experience, emotional connection to landscape, and the belief that wild places could restore what industrial life had diminished.

Though William maintained a thriving law practice, he and Ellen spent decades exploring Maine's rivers, lakes, and forests by canoe. Their vision blended historical preservation with their love of wild landscapes. The result was a formal garden paired with a restored woodland preserve—two complementary responses to the industrial world beyond its borders.

REFLECT. . .

CROSS THE THRESHOLD — THE HEDGE

For Colonial Revival designers, gardens offered refuge from the pace of modern life. Visitors pass from everyday life into a carefully designed landscape. Beyond the hedge lies a world of formal paths, sculpture, and architecture inspired by earlier centuries. The transition was intentional.

CONTEMPLATE TIME — THE SUNDIAL

The sundial stands atop a marble column imported from Italy around 1890. Together they reflect the Colonial Revival movement's admiration for classical art and architecture.

Unlike clocks and factory whistles that regulated industrial life, the sundial follows the rhythms of the sun and seasons. It reminds visitors of a different experience of time—one rooted in observation, reflection, and the natural world.



OBSERVE ORDER — THE PATHWAYS

Straight pathways organize the garden and guide visitors from one feature to the next. They frame views, create symmetry, and encourage a deliberate journey through the landscape.

Unlike the winding paths popular in Victorian gardens, Colonial Revival landscapes emphasized balance, geometry, and permanence.

Their designers believed that orderly spaces reflected the values of harmony, reason, and tradition they associated with early America.



REST AND PONDER — THE LION BENCH

The marble winged lion bench reflects the Colonial Revival movement's fascination with history, tradition, and classical design. Although lions were not common features of early American gardens, Colonial Revival designers often borrowed decorative elements from European art and architecture to create landscapes that felt timeless and refined. Symbolizing strength, vigilance, and permanence, the winged lions have brought a sense of dignity and romance to the garden.

More than an ornament, the bench creates an atmosphere of beauty and reflection. For generations, it has stood watch over the garden, connecting family memories to the larger story of the landscape.



PAUSE IN A PLACE APART — THE GAZEBOS

The Summer House offers a destination within the garden—a place to sit, read, converse, and enjoy the surrounding landscape. Situated to take advantage of the cool air rising from the ravine, it offers a refreshing reprieve from the summer heat. In contrast, the Sun House captures warmth, providing a cozy retreat on cool mornings and during the fall.

Inspired by eighteenth-century pleasure gardens and country estates, these structures invite visitors to slow down and enjoy their surroundings.



APPROACH WILDERNESS — THE GARDEN'S EDGE

The formal garden ends at the edge of a wooded ravine flanked by towering pines, creating a striking contrast between cultivated landscape and untamed nature. This relationship has deep roots at Vaughan Homestead.

In the late eighteenth century, Benjamin Vaughan maintained a fruit and flower garden here while preserving views into the surrounding woods. Like many early American landowners, he embraced the idea that cultivation and wilderness could exist side by side to create a distinctly American landscape.

The ravine later became an industrial corridor lined with mills and dams. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, William and Ellen Vaughan purchased land, gradually restored the brook valley, removed traces of industrial activity, and protected the surrounding forest. Together, the garden and surrounding woods reflected a single vision: restoring a landscape they believed industrialization had diminished.



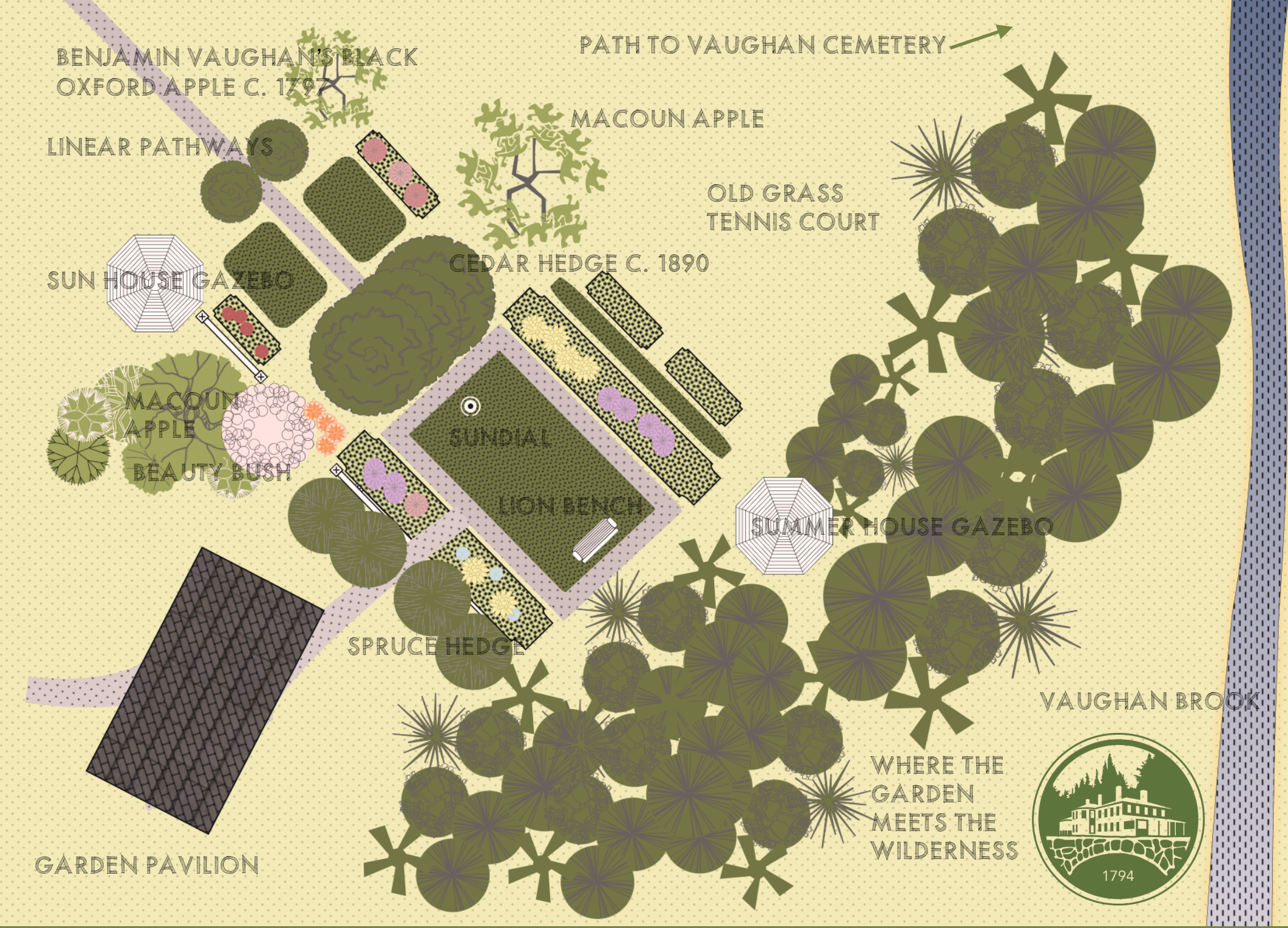
CONSIDER WHAT WE REVIVE

William and Ellen Vaughan revived a house, a garden tradition, and a wooded landscape, shaping a vision of the past that still influences how this place is understood today.

Yet preservation is never neutral. The Colonial Revival celebrated certain histories while often overlooking others, including the experiences of Indigenous peoples, enslaved individuals, immigrants, and working communities.

The movement emerged around the nation's Centennial in 1876, another era of upheaval, change, and reflection. Today, as new technologies and environmental challenges reshape our world, we face similar questions about what should be preserved, restored, and remembered.

Like the Vaughans, we are creating the historical landscapes of the future. What stories will we choose to carry forward—and which will we leave behind?



~ VAUGHAN HOMESTEAD HERITAGE GARDEN 1890-PRESENT ~