

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Camden Amphitheatre and Public Library

Other Name/Site Number: Camden Public Library and Amphitheatre, Garden Theatre, Bok Amphitheatre

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 55 Main Street

N/A Not for publication:

City/Town: Camden

N/A Vicinity:

State: Maine

County: Knox

Code: 013

Zip Code: 04843

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ___

Public-Local: X

Public-State: ___

Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): ___

District: ___

Site: X

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

3

1

4

Noncontributing

___ buildings

___ sites

___ structures

___ objects

0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 2

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

PROPERTY NAME

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

_____ Date

_____ State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

_____ Date

_____ State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ Entered in the National Register
- ___ Determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ Removed from the National Register
- ___ Other (explain): _____

_____ Signature of Keeper

_____ Date of Action

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	Recreation and Culture Landscape	Sub:	Theater (Outdoor) Park
Current:	Recreation and Culture Landscape	Sub:	Theater (Outdoor) Park

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Classical Revival
Modern

MATERIALS: Stone, earth, brick, metal, plant materials

Foundation: N/A
Walls: N/A
Roof: N/A
Other: N/A

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 4**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

INTRODUCTION

The Camden Amphitheatre and Public Library is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 4 and NHL Theme, Expressing Cultural Values (Landscape Architecture). Designed and constructed between 1928 and 1931, this one-of-a-kind property represents the creative genius of Fletcher Steele (1885-1971), one of the nation's premier practitioners of twentieth-century landscape design. The Camden Amphitheatre, with the associated grounds of the Camden Public Library, is an outstanding and enduring example of Steele's work – one that reflects the inspiration of many historical antecedents and the fusion of several distinct early twentieth century trends in landscape design. At the same time, his design for the amphitheater reflects his emerging interest in European Modernism and foreshadows the introduction of modernist principles in American landscape architecture. The Camden Amphitheatre and the grounds of the library form a unique designed landscape, representing the genius of Steele's method of fusing multiple design concepts to form a single, unified landscape composition – one aesthetically compelling and functionally successful. Rendered in native stone and planted with indigenous trees and shrubs, Steele's composition achieves a highly articulated sense of regionalism, providing an essential link between the Colonial Revival design of the library building and the celebrated scenery of the Camden waterfront and coastal Maine.

The property is also nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its association with the nationwide movement for country planning and village improvement and its outstanding representation of the contributions made by the landscape architecture profession, private benefactors, and national associations to develop public landscapes in the United States that celebrated natural regional beauty, scenic character, and rich history. Designed and constructed between 1928 and 1931, and funded by patron of the arts, Mary Louise Curtis Bok, Steele's landscape design successfully marries the ideals of the Italian Renaissance garden theater with the richness of Maine's native landscape and the nation's increasing cultural sophistication. Steele's writings and lectures on civic improvement coupled with a handful of public commissions, particularly the Camden project, demonstrate his concern for improving the physical and cultural character of America's small towns and his ability to freely translate established principles of landscape design into engaging, yet practical, facilities for the enjoyment of the modern public. An outstanding and lasting example of early twentieth-century civic design, the Camden amphitheater and library grounds fulfilled both the social and cultural goals of its sponsors and the aesthetic vision of its designer. The open-air theater is an exceptionally fine example of its type, articulated with the highest integrity of design, workmanship, materials, setting, and association with its period of construction.

The Camden Amphitheatre reflects a high level of artistry, a disciplined design process, and embodies the fullness of Steele's philosophical outlook on twentieth century landscape design. It is highly successful functionally and acoustically as a public outdoor space serving a variety of functions. It is a work of outstanding artistic quality and workmanship that retains a high degree of historic integrity, and it is a remarkable and unparalleled work of landscape architecture – one highly evocative of several important trends in American landscape design and at the same time innovative in its final solution. The brilliance and complexity of this project stem in large part from Steele's outstanding ability to combine multiple influences into a cohesive, compact design that simultaneously draws from the past, demonstrates his superb talent in organizing three-dimensional space, and presages the emergence of modernism in American landscape design.

DESCRIPTION

The Town of Camden lies nestled in the narrow coastal plain between Penobscot Bay and a range of granitic coastal highlands known as the Camden Hills, the majority of which are protected today as state parklands. Inspired by the beautiful views of the rugged coast of Maine, visitors have been drawn to the heights of Mount

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 5**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Battie and Mount Megunticook, northeast of Camden village, since the nineteenth century. Camden Harbor has been a favored, protected ocean harbor since the early nineteenth century, and the six shipyards that lined the shores of the harbor produced some of the finest wooden ships built in Maine. The powerful waters of the Megunticook River, which flows through the village into the harbor, were harnessed in the nineteenth century to power a lucrative mill industry. By the end of the century, however, the shipping and manufacturing that had successfully driven Camden's economy for two centuries waned, and the summer residents drawn to the region's beautiful coastline and cool summer winds saw an opportunity to recapture and recreate a scenic New England village. All that was needed was creative vision, real estate opportunities, and money.

Camden Harbor opens south onto Penobscot Bay, flowing into the Atlantic Ocean. Eaton's Point and Dillingham Point protect the mouth of the harbor. The harbor is widest at the base of Harbor Park, where the waters of the Megunticook River spill out of the remnant factory sluiceways into the harbor. The harbor twists slightly and then widens as it opens into the bay. Curtis Island, a small wooded island, sits at the opening of the harbor, and offers a picturesque nod to the many islands that fill the broad waters of Penobscot Bay. Although the shores close to the village center are crowded with boats and wharves, the rest of the shoreline features wooded, rocky precipices, and the sun-dappled private residences. The old mills and ship warehouses that once drove Camden's economic fortunes eventually were transformed into quaint antique shops, inns, and restaurants. By the early 1930s a number of older frame buildings were cleared to make way for the public park in the land between the library grounds and the harbor, a project was closely coordinated with the development of the amphitheater. Camden's natural scenery, coupled with the vision for a beatified village sponsored by the Bok family, created an enticing backdrop for the amphitheater and in large part drove Steele's choice of plant materials, use of native stone, and introduction of the bent axis.

Constructed between 1928 and 1931, the multi-tiered Camden Amphitheatre is the dominant landscape component comprising the grounds of the Camden Public Library which occupies an irregularly shaped 2.38-acre lot overlooking the busy intersection of Main and High Streets, in Camden, Maine. Atlantic Avenue borders the southern side of the grounds and extends on a downhill slope alongside the library building and the southern entrance to the amphitheater; it is a narrow residential street that separates the library property from Harbor Park, a large downtown open space overlooking Camden Harbor which was completed several years later. The amphitheater shares the lot with the Camden Library, a diminutive brick Colonial (Georgian) Revival building which faces west toward Main Street. The library building lies above street grade in the middle of a broad, shade-dappled lawn terrace supported by a granite rubble wall. A wide set of stone steps flanked by brick corner piers lies at the southeast corner of the lawn and connects the library to Camden's bustling business district to the south. Rising above Atlantic Avenue, the library lawn overlooks Camden Harbor to the southeast, and provides magnificent views framed by a delicate iron picket railing set atop the granite rubble wall. In 1996 an underground addition to the library was built beneath the southeast lawn and a new entry door and seating area was carved out of the original terrace and a new rubble wall constructed off Atlantic Avenue. The north side of the library building serves as staff parking and a utility yard for the library.

The open-air theater is located in the steeply sloping topography east of the library building. The entry sequence to the amphitheater from the west begins at the library's rear door which opens onto a stone horseshoe staircase framed by a delicate iron railing. The symmetrical, double staircase frames a grotto with small fountain that spits water into a shallow garden pool and leads to an intimate terrace known as the Fauns Garden, which is framed by arabesque garden beds edged with low evergreen hedging. On axis with the rear door, a broad set of granite rubble stairs steeply descends the slope from the terrace to the grassy floor of the theater. A series of four stone and turf terraces extend to either side of the stairway, creating a gracefully contoured U-shaped bowl, or naturalistic *cavea*, with spacious aisles and informal seating set against a backdrop of tall dark evergreens. In a masterful *tour de force* the landscape designer abandoned the east-west axis connecting the

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 6**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

rear door of the library and rubble stairway, in favor of pivoting the amphitheater on a north-south axis so that it faced the distant headlands of Camden Harbor. Dense plantings of evergreen shrubs and trees frame the theater to the north and west, while errant boulders and occasional trees—spruces, birch, and elm articulate the seating terraces. A pair of Colonial Revival brick garden pavilions frames the open view to the harbor, backed by a set of shallow stone and turf steps that descend to Atlantic Avenue. To the east and west, a set of cut granite stone steps flanks the outer wall of each garden pavilion, completing the southern entry sequence and providing access to and from the middle tier of the amphitheater. Delicate wrought iron arches with central lamps overhang each stairway and join the brick piers and walls that connect to each pavilion.

The north end of the amphitheater is screened with heavy plantings of spruce, arborvitae, and hemlock, hiding the back of neighboring residential lots and creating a dramatic dark backdrop to the sun-dappled turf seats of the amphitheater. In a broad niche at the north end of the amphitheater, the axis terminates in a low brick wall that once featured a large carving of the State of Maine seal. Shallow steps lead to this uppermost level and provide an alternative smaller stage should any performance director choose to turn his back to the harbor view.

To the northeast, a companion set of broad granite rubble steps leads out of the amphitheater through a dense evergreen planting to what was originally called the “meadow”—a broad sunny field screened from view of the amphitheater that was originally intended for playground and now houses asphalt parking for library and amphitheater patrons (the current parking area is excluded from the 1.63 parcel proposed for NHL designation). Like the north end of the theater, this area is heavily framed with a broad band of evergreens along its borders.

Today the property is operated under the stewardship of the Camden Public Library Trustees. The library property totals 2.38 acres, of which the 1.63-acre parcel occupied by the library, its immediate grounds, and the amphitheater is being proposed for National Historic Landmark designation. Steele’s site plans divided the library property into three distinct, almost equally sized areas. Developed according to Steele’s original plans, the lawns and rear terrace surrounding the library occupied the westernmost third (.83 acre), and the U-shaped amphitheater with its wooded borders and Atlantic Avenue entrance covered a similarly sized area directly east (.8 acre). Labeled the “meadow” in many of the Steele plans, the easternmost third of the property (.75 acre) was initially conceived as a play area screened from the amphitheater by a dense evergreen border. The plans were never executed, and the lot remained unimproved until the library realized a need for additional off-street parking in the late twentieth century. Screened by the original wooded border on the west side of the amphitheater, the area is currently used by the library as a driveway and parking lot. The .75 acre-parcel has not been included within the boundaries of the proposed NHL because the historic design was never executed and the area today does not contain any historic features that contribute to the significance of the property.

In 1996 the library launched a massive restoration and building campaign. A carefully researched preservation plan restored much of the Camden Amphitheatre’s original planting scheme, some of which had been lost through storm damage, age, and natural succession. A large underground room was added beneath the southeast lawn, lit by windows in an octagonal neocolonial garden pavilion on the library lawn. A new entry for the library addition pierced the south side of the granite rubble wall along Atlantic Avenue, removing a small portion of the banked earth plantings designed by Steele. This addition and its new entry were seen as an important and necessary improvement, driven by the popularity and continued heavy use of the library by the citizens of Camden.

The Camden Amphitheatre was designed as a venue for the performing arts and other cultural activities. It continues to serve this function to the present day. Professional and community organizations are featured in the annual calendar of art exhibitions and performing arts programs. In the summer, free concerts are offered every Wednesday afternoon, sponsored by the Camden Parks and Recreation Department. Every Monday

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 7**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

night, the amphitheater features outdoor movies. When the weather is nice, the Camden Library holds children's story hour in the amphitheater. Twenty to twenty-five weddings are performed each year, sometimes as many as three per day during the height of the season. In February, the amphitheater provides the setting for more than a dozen ice carvings created by local non-profit organizations as part of the community's Winterfest celebration. Additionally, the theater is a popular place to meet, to stroll, to take pictures, and to enjoy an occasional lunch.

The adjacent Harbor Park is a favored spot to stroll, walk dogs, and picnic while enjoying the views of Camden Harbor. For community events which are too large for the amphitheater alone, events spill over into both properties, including the Chamber of Commerce Arts and Crafts Fairs (held in July and October), a Memorial Day band concert organized by the Camden Rotary Club, and a family concert in August produced by the professional music organization, Maine Pro Musica.

An average of more than 500 citizens visits the library every day and it is fair to estimate that 200 to 300 of these patrons enjoy the amphitheater on a daily basis during the busy summer season. Approximately 800 people attend the Winterfest celebration; each arts and crafts weekend attracts approximately 3000 people, and the summer concerts draw almost 700 people for each performance. Taken in the context of Camden's total year-round population of 5000, these numbers illustrate the popularity and significant use of the amphitheater and adjoining park each year.

In his design for the amphitheater, Fletcher Steele captured the natural characteristics of the original site, particularly its hillside topography and view toward Camden Harbor. The amphitheater features intimacy in the details of its design, yet it consistently draws the visitor to the vista of its landscape prospect. Its walls purposefully open onto the view of the harbor, and emphasize its beauty as a living stage curtain for the theatrical experience expected within such a space. Here there is theater even when there is no formal performance. Even when not in use, the Camden Amphitheatre demonstrates drama in the movement of the boats in the harbor, the dramatically changing weather conditions, and the comings and goings of life in the small coastal village. As expressed by landscape historian and Steele's biographer Robin Karson: "Although public, the Camden project very much resembled Steele's typical private garden. The pull between the land, specific use, and a repertory of distinguished architectural forms had again led to a fresh vision. His incorporation of the harbor as theater backdrop was especially inspired. The gentle, ongoing stir of marine activity was a pageant in itself."¹

A Brief History

The Camden Library, the only public library in Camden village, sits upon the highest point on Main Street, where it crosses Atlantic Avenue, at the north end of Camden's bustling business district. The work of Boston architect Charles G. Loring (1881-1966) with the assistance of architect, summer resident, and building committee member Parker Morse Hooper (1877-1966), the library was constructed in 1927 and 1928 after a decades-long effort to build a public library for the citizens of Camden. The building was placed close to the street, in direct relationship to its surrounding built environment rather than in a position to take advantage of its larger landscape scenery. The 2.38-acre property within view of the waterfront once contained the remains of former wharves and warehouses and the ruins of the Ocean View Hotel, which had burned in 1903.²

¹ Robin Karson, *Fletcher Steele, Landscape Architect: An Account of the Gardener's Life, 1885-1971* (New York: Harry N. Abrams/Sagapress, 1989), 131.

² John R. Williams, *History of Camden, Maine, 1907-1930 and 1931-1950* (Rockland ME: Courier Gazette, 1989), 328.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 8**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Mary Louise Curtis Bok (1876-1970), one of Camden's and nearby Rockport's most influential summer residents and philanthropists, provided financial support for the library and amphitheater projects. Born into an upper-class Philadelphia family, Mary was the daughter of publisher Cyrus H. K. Curtis and received an education in music. In 1896 she married Edward W. Bok, a conservationist and the editor of *Ladies Home Journal*. Her particular interests lay in promoting music among the general public and supporting Russo-Hungarian refugee musicians whom she brought to America and hired to develop exceptional music training programs in both Philadelphia and Camden-Rockport. In Philadelphia, she supported the Settlement Music School and in 1924 established the world-renowned Curtis Institute of Music.

In 1916 Mary Bok purchased several lots at the head of Camden Harbor, including the land where the hulk of burned Ocean View Hotel left a gaping hole at one of Camden's busiest intersections, the junction of High and Main Street. Although it took more than ten years and a world war to raise enough funds to build the library, she nevertheless persisted, eventually convincing her father and two of his wealthy friends to assist her in setting up a trust for the new library. The new library opened to the public on June 11, 1928. Shortly after, she offered to pay for the design and construction of the library grounds. Loring, who shared his Boston office with landscape architect Fletcher Steele, recommended Steele to the building committee.³ Subsequently the Olmsted Brothers were hired to design and supervise the construction of a public park, known as Harbor Park, on the other side of Atlantic Avenue between the library and Camden Harbor. Although they would remain separate in function and ownership, the two public landscapes were intended to complement each other and flow freely from one to the other. With the Camden projects well underway, she turned her attention to nearby Rockport, where she purchased most of the property around Rockport Harbor and began a two-year civic improvement program renovating old lime kilns, barns, sheds, ice houses and tumbling dwellings into a bustling music colony along a reconditioned harbor coastline.

As designs for the Camden Amphitheatre were being developed, Mrs. Bok made it clear that "the garden theater [would be] so arranged that an audience could face north rather than south when expedient, so that they would face heavy planting, and their backs would be turned toward those entering and leaving."⁴ The open-air theater was seen as a space where summer residents and local inhabitants could patronize programs jointly, instead of developing their own, separate venues. Camden never developed its own summer music institute like that of Rockport, but the close association between the two communities and their single beneficent patron (Mary Bok) brought the Rockport musicians to perform regularly scheduled summer music programs. The Camden Amphitheatre was christened on June 25, 1931, when the Camden High School graduation exercises were held here. The Camden Herald reported that more than one thousand persons were present, but "thanks to the use of amplifiers not a word was missed by the audience despite the fact that it was an open air affair...Thursday's exercises demonstrated clearly that Camden has in this open-air theater a beauty spot that likely is not equaled anywhere in the country."⁵ The reporter continued to list the types of performances anticipated for the amphitheater, including summer flower shows, musicals, plays, pageants, and "a dozen other events that call for an out of doors setting." Ever since the Camden Amphitheatre has been home to Shakespeare productions, garden club award ceremonies, the crowning pageant for the Queen of Camden's Winter Carnival, and the annual Salzedo Harp Colony recitals, and it has provided the setting for enumerable public and private events--weddings, funerals, concerts, plays and outdoor movies.

³ Fletcher Steele to William Marquis, 25 January 1969. (Fletcher Steele Papers, Library of Congress), as quoted in Williams, *History of Camden*, 414.

⁴ Fletcher Steele, office memorandum, "Camden Library, Conferences on Submitting Model Showing Preliminary Study," (Typewritten manuscript, Camden Library archives, n.d.), p. 1.

⁵ "Camden High's Graduation Exercises Christened the New Bok Amphitheatre," (*Camden Herald*, 26 June 1931).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 9**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Detailed Description

The Library and its Yard

The Camden Public Library (1928) is a rectangular Georgian Revival one-and-one-half story brick building with a broad rear ell on a cut granite stone foundation. The gable end walls of the building project above the pitched roof, more reminiscent of Virginia colonial architecture than that of colonial New England. A cupola extends upward from the center of the gabled roof, marking the hillside location of the library when viewed from the harbor. The five bay façade features a central door protected by a dome-roofed, semi-circular open portico and four twelve-over-twelve windows. The main floor of the library had featured an open reading room framed with bookshelves and reading spaces, and now houses larger research rooms and archival storage. The southern gable end wall, which overlooks Camden Harbor, is dominated by a tall Palladian window with sidelights that fills the center of the one and one half story elevation. The northern gable end wall is simply dressed with two twelve-over-twelve windows overlooking a staff parking area. The rear (east) elevation, which overlooks the amphitheater, features a central, pedimented doorway flanked to each side by three narrow, six-over-six windows which provided natural light to the book stacks.⁶

The central projecting wing that runs across the back of the building contains the principal entrance from the library to the terrace overlooking the amphitheater. This wing originally housed the library stacks and today is used for offices and storage. This wing and its central door formed a cross axis for the building and established the principal axis for Steele's sequence of stairways and terraces descending to the turf floor of the amphitheater. The dramatic difference in elevation between the library's main floor and the floor of the theater created the need for a series of connecting stairways and terraces. Steele's use of the double curving stairway and terraces is clearly drawn from the example of Italian Renaissance and Baroque era villas outside Rome, whereas the geometrical form and finished character of his lawn terraces and central stone stairways lying below are more reminiscent of the lichen-covered and weathered ruins of abandoned Greek theaters he had seen in Sicily (as well as the weathered, sea-battered ledges of the Maine coast). The wide stone stairways also are reminiscent of the weathered stone-edged stairways and terraces seen in André Le Nôtre's gardens at St. Cloud and Sceaux, outside Paris, which were abandoned and in decay when Steele visited them in the early twentieth century.

The library sits at the northeast corner of Main Street and Atlantic Avenue. Its principal entrance faces Main Street, and Steele's 1928 plan created a broad sun-dappled lawn around the library building, supported by a stone retaining wall topped with a simple wrought iron fence. At the front of the building, a symmetrically balanced, U-shaped walk connects the original, main entrance of the library to Main Street; the center of walk coinciding with the entry porch to the building with its curvilinear canopy. The broad flat lawn created the appropriately scaled setting for the library building, and its retaining wall and iron fence, which held up the grade along the southern boundary. Steele's plan followed a natural grade around the east side of the building; the height of the stone retaining wall gradually diminished as the lawn sloped down toward the rear of the library. The wall and staircase featured in the southern corner of the lot were delineated with smooth cut granite stone and carefully laid running-bond brick that matched the brick used for the walls of the library and the garden pavilions. Between this wall and the first tier of the amphitheater, the sloped grade was covered with masses of low evergreens and native shrubs, filling the hillside without interfering with views to the harbor from the upper lawn.

⁶ The broken pediment located above the rear door was added after construction at an unknown date. The original design called for a simple rectilinear entablature.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 10**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

When the 1996 underground library addition and its new entrance on Atlantic Avenue were planned, a portion of Steele's landscaped hillside was removed to accommodate the new entrance. The remainder of the original hillside remained unaffected by the new construction, although missing and unhealthy plants from the original installation were replaced in situ with younger plants of identical species. A small children's reading plaza was created on Atlantic Avenue at the base of a new stone retaining wall. The new wall runs in the same location as the earlier wall, but is taller in height to accommodate a basement level entrance and the reading plaza at the southeast corner of the library. The original iron railing was preserved and reset across the top of the new wall. The new wall was constructed to conform to the materials, workmanship and detailing of the historic wall, and did not alter the lines of the original upper terrace. A skylight is the only interruption in the smooth surface of the lawn above the addition, a necessary intrusion to allow daylight to fill the subterranean reading room. Positioned near the center of the library lawn, this skylight was designed to resemble a colonial-era garden pavilion. Its octagonal form features eight, fifteen-light full height windows separated by Doric columns topped by a low copper dome.

Steele designed the grounds so that the building appeared to sit on a high, sun-dappled plateau, the first in a series of levels that descend the natural slopes toward the harbor. Steele added new trees to the composition and protected the existing maples (*Acer sp.*) and elms (*Ulmus americana*) which provided scale and setting to the new library building. As part of the 1996-99 landscape preservation treatment plans, missing trees were replaced. In addition to disease resistant cultivars of maples and elms, the recommendations called for adding ash (*Fraxinus Americana*) and oak (*Quercus sp.*) in the tree locations indicated on Steele's 1928 plans.

To the north, Steele designed a single access service driveway to the northwest corner of the building. From the start, this area was intended to support the service functions of the building, with billowy masses of native shrubs screening the north end of the building and the service drive from view of the residential neighbors along High Street. A wide grass path wound along the edge of the boundary plantings from the driveway to the upper level of the amphitheater at the rear of the library. Today this screening -- a mixed evergreen and deciduous massing of shrubs -- has been retained and continues to shield the library from its neighbors. The original service driveway was expanded in the late twentieth century to include a small, four-vehicle staff parking lot nestled against the building. The sweeping grass walk to the amphitheater remains and the property boundary continues to be thickly screened from the neighbors. The parking area is concealed from the view from the Fauns Garden and the amphitheater by its original masses of vegetation. At the time the parking lot was added a small walkway was constructed around the northwest corner of the library to connect the parking lot with the front entrance.

Descent to the Amphitheater

The east façade of the library building consists of a central projecting ell with a formal doorway at its center. The ell creates a cross axis for the building and connects to the central east-west axis which extends from the library down the center of the double, horseshoe-shaped staircase, through the Fauns Garden, and down the stone stairway into the amphitheater. When viewed from the floor of the theater, the rear entrance with its double stairway, becomes a striking focal point, marking the western terminus of the east-west axis created by the broad stone stairway that dominates the west side of the theater and connects, to either side, with grassy side aisles and stone edged tiers of seating.

Steele's mastery of three-dimensional landscape design is perhaps best appreciated in the carefully orchestrated transition from the library building to the floor of the amphitheater and his realignment of the principal axis to capture the view toward Camden Harbor. This bent-axial arrangement is one of several design elements that foreshadowed Steele's transition from the Beaux Arts tradition to Modernism.⁷ Most landscape architects,

⁷ Karson, *Steele*, 128. Karson was the first to recognize Steele's influence on American modernism and identify the bent axis at

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 11**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

including the Olmsted Brothers, would have preferred to align the entire amphitheater axis with the rear of the library. As if the axial arrangement was not challenging enough, Steele had to conquer a significant change in elevation from the main floor of the library to the lowest level of the theater. He chose to break this descent into a series of landscaped spaces, with dramatic changes in aesthetic styling to define each space and encourage the visitor to descend into the theater with little apparent effort. Steele's classically inspired treatment of the horseshoe staircase with the Fauns Garden grotto at its center, gives way to the massive, heavily weathered rubble granite staircase of the amphitheater. The juxtaposition of the delicate terrace garden to the heavy, ruin-like appearance of the garden amphitheater is evidence of Steele's mastery of both engineering and artistry.

Fauns Garden

The double staircase provides oblique views of the library lawn and the amphitheater, and leads to a spacious yet intimate terrace below. The terrace is known as the Fauns Garden and is named for the bronze fountain, entitled *Two Little Fauns*, by sculptor Benjamin Turner Kurtz, which forms its centerpiece and is set upon a rock pedestal in the grotto embraced by the symmetrical arms of the horseshoe-shaped staircase.⁸ The sound of the water as it falls into the shallow pool below the fountain enhances the descent down the steps. The symmetrical, classical treatment of the double staircase reinforces the symmetry of the building itself. This sequence, with its grotto-like fountain garden, is derived directly from the Italian hillside villas of the late Renaissance and Baroque periods. To frame the sides of the terrace space, Steele designed paired arabesque garden beds framed with low evergreen hedges to repeat the curvilinear forms of the double staircase. Rather than mirror the curve of the stairs, however, Steele altered the sweep of the arcs of the garden beds, subtly transitioning from a strictly Beaux Arts treatment to one more characteristic of French Moderne design. The low evergreen hedges that outline the garden beds reinforce their graceful sweep and strengthen the dimensional texture of the framing. The wide, sunny south lawn squeezes down into a path between the arabesque beds and then broadens again into a small lawn in front of the fountain, creating a small outdoor room that serves as a foyer or anteroom to the expanse of the theater below.

The stone retaining wall that frames the library lawn sweeps around to the rear of the building to define the eastern edge of the garden. The iron railing atop the stone wall terminates at a square brick pier which lies next to the arabesque hedge and is aligned with the southeast corner of the library building. An identical brick pier is placed opposite the northeast corner of the building, mirroring the south end of the garden and reinforcing the symmetry of the entire space. Between the brick piers, the wall takes the form of a low stone retaining wall and merges with the top step of the stairway leading down into the amphitheater. The brick piers are two feet square and four feet high, topped by a low-pitched pyramidal granite cap and set on cast concrete bases which in turn integrate the pillars into the stone retaining wall. The brick pillars marry the architectural materials of the library building with the grounds, and bind the brick to the granite stones used throughout the rest of the amphitheater. The use of brick is repeated again in the theater's garden pavilions and entry walls, always associated with the most architectural elements of the landscape design.

From the terrace that forms the library's rear entrance, a curved double stairway (popularly called the horseshoe stairs) ascends to the library door a half-story above. Each stairway curves outward as it extends upward, turning midway to curve back to the center, and joining the other at the landing set before the library door. The staircase creates an oval-shaped garden or grotto. The smooth-cut granite stairs are set on a brick foundation. Beneath the door landing, a blind arch, created by relief detail in the brick wall, serves as backdrop to the Fauns fountain. Wrought iron railings frame the edges of the stairs and emphasize their delicate curves. The small

Camden as one of his earliest attempts to explore the possibilities of French Modernism.

⁸ Benjamin Turner Kurtz (1899-1966) was a Baltimore-based sculptor trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His work was exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and through the National Sculpture Society.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 12**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

grotto framed by the double stairway was designed to showcase the *Two Little Fauns*, which was donated to the library by Mary (Mrs. Edward) Bok in 1930. The sculpture features a cherub-like child figure whose arms hug a small deer that is bending down as if to drink from the water; it is set on a natural gray, granite boulder atop a series of natural granite stones arranged to appear as granite outcroppings around a small natural pool. A small water jet allows water to spurt from the base of the figure down the granite boulder and into the pool below. The arrangement of porous stones around the pool is softened by a dense planting of swamp azalea (*Rhododendron viscosum*), daphne (*Daphne sp.*), inkberry (*Ilex glabra*), arborvitae (*Thuja sp.*), heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and rhododendron (*Rhododendron sp.*). Climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea a. petiolaris*) and euonymus (*Euonymus fortunei cv.*) soften the brick arch behind the fountain. The small spaces between the rocks at the edge of the pool are softened by ferns (several species) and moss.

Granite fieldstones are embedded in the lawn at the bottom of the staircase and across the front of the Fauns fountain where a granite millstone embedded in the lawn serves as threshold to a granite fieldstone path that bisects the small lawn and connects the horseshoe staircase to the wide granite rubble stairs that descend into the amphitheater. When the mill stones were purchased as bases for the theater's lighting fixtures, two extra mill stones were added to the delivery triggering Steele's imagination. He wrote: "The fact that the old grooves point star-like in all directions, suggested to me a possibly interesting and diverting use to which they could be put."⁹ Steele proposed that one stone be embedded in the ground at the foot of the stairs from the library building, and form the center of a bronze ring pierced with four diamond-shaped points indicating the directions of the compass. Although the compass rose was designed by Steele, it was not executed until 2005 when it was included in the phased restoration program for the amphitheater. Steele's design specifications were carefully followed in casting and installing the feature.

The Fauns Garden serves as an important transitional terrace between the library and the amphitheater. To the south, the sun-dappled lawn serves as an overlook to the village and park. Though the new underground library room is hidden beneath this terrace, and portions of the stone wall were rebuilt to accommodate the new entry, the line of the wall as designed by Steele remains the same, as does the delicate iron railing atop the wall. To the north, the service drive and parking lot are screened by the same thick band of vegetation designed by Steele, although some new plants of the same species and placement replaced missing or dying plant material from the original design.

To the east, the theater opens at your feet and the broad stone steps entice you to descend. To the northeast, the level of the Fauns garden becomes a grassy aisle that continues clockwise around the theater and becomes its upper level. This space simultaneously serves as the rear entrance to the library building and forms the upper level of the descent to the floor of the open-air theater.

Design of the Amphitheater

Steele designed the amphitheater as a concentric series of turf and stone terraces, some forming wide aisles and others narrow rows of seating backed by rough-cut stone walls. The unified composition is richly complex in both individual details and overall design. Here, Steele's genius is marked by the visual ambiguity inherent in the way each tier blends into the next, the integration of plantings and natural boulders throughout the design, and the ways in which some walls form rectangular planters and others become risers in the design of the stairways.

Adding to this rich complexity are the many ways in which Steele intended visitors to enter and move through the amphitheater. From Atlantic Avenue, one can enter through the turf and stone steps between the two garden pavilions, or ascend the more formally cut granite stairs between the two brick piers that flank the outside of the

⁹ Fletcher Steele, Office Memorandum, "Notes to Library Committee, 1 July 1930" (Camden Library archives).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 13**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

pavilions. From the west, one may descend from the library down the wide axial staircase, or circumnavigate the upper tier of the amphitheater along a wide grassy aisle that extends from the Fauns Garden across the north end of the theater and descends a series of broken-tiered steps down the main axis of the theater. Foot traffic can flow through, down, up and around this multi-tiered space in a seemingly endless number of ways, each offering a widely different succession of landscape experiences.

To add to the complexity, not one of these approaches supersedes the others, despite their dramatically different detailing. Some entries feature the rubble granite stairs reminiscent of early Greek ruins; others are detailed with cut granite steps and brick piers more typical of colonial New England. Others, with their grassy paths and meandering informality seem inspired by the nature theaters of Germany. Yet all of these stylistic details are carefully integrated into a unified arrangement, exhibiting Steele's remarkable artistry.

In total, there are five tiers within the theater. Some of these tiers are primarily for seating; others serve as aisles and passage ways. All feature mixed uses of stone, brick, grass and various plantings. The highest tier wraps around the top of the amphitheater from the Fauns Garden to the former meadow (now parking area). This level includes a centrally located brick niche marking the major north-south axis of the theater; originally a carved wooden plaque of the Maine State Seal was located here. Heavy bands of plantings provide intimacy and screening of the amphitheater from the neighboring properties. The next tier serves as the highest U-shaped sitting area. The third tier descends yet again into another row of rock-edged turf seating. Both of these tiers terminate in a set of cut granite stairs that descend to Atlantic Avenue along the outside wall of the garden pavilions. The second tier is terminated at each end by the garden pavilions. Finally, the wide turf lawn forms the fifth, and lowest level, designed to sit high enough above the adjoining street to offer uninterrupted views of the harbor and park. This level fills the center of the U and is terminated by stone and turf steps that create gradual adjustments to grade across the end of the lawn until it meets with Atlantic Avenue.

Outdoor illumination was an innovative feature of the Camden project, and consisted of large tripod lanterns mounted on circular brick posts capped with granite millstones. Arranged to flank and illuminate the three major stairways, there are eight such light fixtures in the theater. Each lantern on its corresponding pier-like lamppost is almost four feet high. Each fixture is formed by three decorative cast iron legs that extend upward and somewhat outward from the base. A decorative cast iron ring ornamented with chain-like swags rises above the tripod and supports a glass dome that illuminates skyward. These fixtures were mass-produced, classically-inspired examples similar in form to ones Steele had meticulously and individually designed for the project.¹⁰ According to landscape historian Robin Karson: "The [tripod] form spoke of Roman culture—specifically, the enlightened and elegant civilization of Pompeii where learning was valued and a gentle climate encouraged outdoor life. Steele's tripods not only evoked the splendor of the past civilization but also helped establish a human scale and presence."¹¹ As each circular post extends from the adjoining stone wall, it creates a spiral effect that is reinforced by the circular form of the millstones and the conical forms of nearby spruces and arborvitae.

Throughout the property, brick, concrete and native stone are carefully integrated into Steele's design. Wrought iron used in the railings, lamp standards, and accent arches, serves as a finely crafted, rhythmic accent to the overall design. These materials are then softened and highlighted by Steele's careful use of plant material and lawns, setting all of the elements carefully within the larger composition of the landscape.

¹⁰ According to Karson, *Steele*, 130, the landscape architect designed unique classically inspired motifs for each set of tripods. These were never completed and appear to have been replaced by identical wrought iron tripods having a similar form and function but were likely mass-produced. The manufacturer has not been identified.

¹¹ Karson, *Steele*, 130.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 14**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Tier 1

This tier represents the highest elevations of the amphitheater, and as such, its topography blends the heavily structured, highly designed aspects of the theater back into the natural topography. The stone retaining wall framing the library lawn steps down to a shorter fieldstone wall when it meets the brick pier at the northeast corner of the Fauns Garden. This wall continues around the north end of the theater, broken in places to accommodate occasional stairs for use by performers and attendees and prominent flights of stairs at the back (north end) and the east side of the theater. The wall eventually blends into a natural rise in the grade separating the former meadow from the open-air theater. This level is more amorphous than the others, serving as the transitional space between the library plateau, the northern boundary, and the wooded area east of the theater. Along its west side, this level is heavily planted with blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), arborvitae (*Thuja sp.*), cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), and hemlock (*Tsuga Canadensis*). Ferns cover the ground plane under the evergreen trees. Along the northern boundary, as the grade rises to the property line, the plantings feature mature specimens of arborvitae, spruce and maple (*Acer sp.*) set in a naturalistic, wooded arrangement. At the northeast corner of the theater, a wooded path leads from the east side stairway up to the former meadow (now a parking area). Here on the knoll forming the eastern edge of the theater stand massed plantings of cedar and maple backed by a line of Englemann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*).

Tier 2

The eastern, western, and central stairs descend through the first tier down to second – a tightly compact, highly structured walking area that forms an unbroken turf aisle connecting at each end to two short flights of stairs that separated by a fieldstone terrace descend to Atlantic Avenue. A key character-defining feature for this level that is repeated elsewhere in the amphitheater design is the pair of large tripod lanterns mounted on circular brick posts capped with granite millstones. The upper flight of stairs is constructed of the same weathered granite blocks used elsewhere in the amphitheater. The second, lower set of stairs consists of cut granite steps that, flanked by square brick piers, descend to the street creating a formal entrance on the south side of the theater. A graceful, wrought iron arch sits over the stairs, featuring a central iron light fixture. This archway reflects a conventional garden entry feature drawn from ornate Renaissance Italian entrances that were later adopted and simplified for the English manor by eighteenth century British designers. The form was later popularized by Gertrude Jekyll at the turn of the twentieth century, and absorbed into the vocabulary of the Colonial Revival garden in America.¹²

Tier 3

This level serves as the intermediate seating area in the amphitheater. It is broken into three parts, separated by the stone stairs on the eastern and western shoulders of the U. To each side of the stairs, square weathered granite stone planters were constructed and planted with clipped arborvitae (*Thuja sp.*). This stone-edged turf level is broken occasionally by individual plantings of mature birch (*Betula papyrifera*) or oak trees (*Quercus sp.*), often grouped with large cyclopean boulders which break the line of angular cut stones. At the northern center of this level a large euonymus (*Euonymus fortunei*) has molded itself around one of the erratic round boulders, creating a dramatic craggy accent to the seating in this area. The grass aisle continues along this tier to both ends of the U, where it turns back like a hyphen and connects to the fieldstone path separating the upper and lower stairs between the street and the second level. On each side of the amphitheater, as the grass turns to meet the fieldstone path, a rectilinear planting area is created between the walls of the garden pavilion and the cheek walls of the cut granite stone stairs that ascend to this level. A Camperdown elm (*Ulmus glabra* “*camperdownii*”) is featured in each of these planting pockets, their twisted, aged trunks and graceful weeping crowns dramatically flanking the garden pavilions and overhanging the cut granite steps leading down to

¹² Ibid., 79-80 & 131. Steele used similar materials in his Hopkins Memorial Gateway at Williams College. Karson has traced the Camden and Williamstown designs to the wrought iron gateway on a London street that Steele sketched and included in one of his travel albums.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 15**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Atlantic Avenue. A second, smaller (newly planted) elm graces the opposite side of the stairs. A row of evergreens frames each pavilion, the crisp formality of the upright evergreens stand in marked contrast to the graceful weeping sweep of the Camperdown elms.

Tier 4

This tier represents the lowest seating area in the amphitheater. At its southern end, on each side of the U, this level terminates in a square brick garden pavilion used for utility storage or as a ticket booth for some performances. These buildings are square brick buildings set on cut polished granite foundations and capped with slate hipped roofs. A six-panel door opens onto the theater's center lawn. The southern elevation of each building features an arched window overlooking turf and stone steps that gradually descend the grade to the street. The rest of this level consists of an uninterrupted stone-edged turf sitting level that runs the entire length of the U-shaped bowl. Like the upper level, scattered birches and boulders break the line of the stone edge. The stone edge breaks open at the end of the U into three low fieldstone stairs that connect the central lawn to this level. Each end of these stairs is marked by a lantern. A large mature cluster of white birch softens the eastern end of this tier and a seemingly errant oak is carefully sited near its western end.

Tier 5

The lowest level of the amphitheater consists of a broad, open grass central floor, which in classical terms serves as a sunken garden. It was designed to be used as a stage or performance area, but was often used for seating for performances staged on the upper tiers at the northern end of the theater. Two new birches have been planted along the eastern and western sides of this level, replacing missing elm trees that predated Steele's design. The southern end of this level forms the opening toward the harbor. Four broad, low grass steps edged with short cut granite block descend the slope to Atlantic Avenue. Weathered granite fieldstone walls wrap themselves across the front of the garden pavilions, creating narrow grass platforms between the street and the pavilions. These small ramps are sometimes used as entry and exit points for actors during performances. The brick walls of the garden pavilions continue across to ends of the third tier, terminating in the high brick piers that flank the southern entry stairs.

Atlantic Avenue was an existing street at the time the amphitheater was designed. To take advantage of the view to Camden Harbor, the theater's major axis was aligned with the harbor view instead of being set perpendicular to the street. This orientation created an irregularly shaped piece of land between the amphitheater and the street. Steele made a simple, understated transition in this area, effortlessly blending the two boundaries into a simple grass lawn with a stone curb along the edge of the street. The lawn is broken on the eastern edge by lines of grass steps with fieldstone curbs that gradually descend the sloping grade to the road. Recently, a sidewalk was added along the edge of Atlantic Avenue to protect pedestrians from the street traffic. This portion of Atlantic Avenue has experienced increased pedestrian traffic as visitors come to and from the library via the new entrance near the Children's Reading Plaza.

The Atlantic Avenue entrance into the amphitheater, with its paired garden pavilions and flanking cut granite stairs add materially to the ambiance and sense of enclosure within the outdoor theater. Imitating the same balanced placement of the square garden casinos at the Villa Lante – a well-known and much replicated convention from the Italian Renaissance, the Camden pair is highly effective as a compositional element. Steele used a similar convention when he designed paired pavilions (cabanas) on the perimeter of the swimming pool at the Sweppes estate. At Camden, giving a sense of rational order to the lower entrance on Atlantic Avenue, the pair of small buildings frames the view to the harbor from inside the theater and marks the bounds of a possible stage using the distant view as the backdrop. Echoing the architectural style and details of the library building, they also are fine examples of the garden structures gaining popularity in the 1920s and 1930s as a complement to Georgian Revival architecture. In garden art they derive in part from the summerhouses of the

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 16**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

English Arts and Crafts garden, popularized by Gertrude Jekyll, Edward Lutyens, and Lawrence Weaver. In part they reflected emerging ideas about the design of Colonial era gardens as the historic preservation movement gained momentum in the preservation and restoration of Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Colonial Williamsburg.

Fletcher Steele's Design Process

Steele was commissioned to design an outdoor theater that would enhance the cultural and social opportunities for Camden, providing a setting with exceptional acoustics and inspired aesthetics constrained by the practical limitations of budget and maintenance. Steele's design for the Camden Amphitheatre resulted from the fusion of several distinct historic precedents, ones he had particular familiarity with due to his training, study, and extensive travel. In his design, the rusticity and geometry of the early Greek Theater melded with the Beaux Arts traditions drawn from the Italian and French Renaissance. Plant materials and furnishings blended the lingering nineteenth century American naturalistic landscape style (which had been renamed the Natural or Modern American style), influences from English Arts and Crafts and American Colonial Revival garden styles, and abstract and sculptural qualities that presaged Modern landscape design. The most distinctive characteristic composition was Steele's masterful *tour de force* in which he boldly bent the east-west axis linking the rear of the library to the floor of the amphitheater to create an axial alignment for the amphitheater that extended outward to take in distant views of Camden Harbor. While the idea for a boundless distant vista derived from French Renaissance and Baroque estate design, the bold realignment of the axis was without historical precedent and exhibited the influence of contemporary French Modernists. Steele's selection and arrangement of plantings and the workmanship and artistry of stonework in its various forms (walls, stairs, piers, and clusters of boulders), elevated the craftsmanship of the executed design to exceptional levels.

Steele successfully adapted and interpreted diverse design vocabularies into his own, unique interpretation, carefully fusing multiple aesthetic concepts into a single, successfully unified, landscape composition. Steele developed a complex spatial organization for his design, integrating formal and informal conventions into a highly successful arrangement. More than a setting for a public building, Steele's design created a versatile and engaging space suitable for multiple uses. The amphitheater was designed for use both facing toward and away from the harbor. In addition, the amphitheater has no clear staging priority; productions can be staged looking toward or away from the Harbor, with the audience looking down on a performance, or up to a multi-tiered stage from seats arranged on the central turf floor. It became a highly popular space for musical or theatrical performances, school graduation and other public ceremonies, a contemplative public park with spectacular views of Camden Harbor and an exceptional work of early twentieth century landscape architecture. Boulders, birches, light standards and evergreens in large square stone planters punctuate the tiers and carefully reinforce staging options. Steele's landscape design pulses with its complexity, its carefully articulated, widely divergent design details, and its carefully crafted, masterfully engineered, transitions in elevation.

Initial Site Conditions

With the exception of a few American elms and sugar maples, the library property at first inspection was nondescript and uninspiring. Steele wrote: "The library stood a little back from the main street among tall old elms and maples. Alongside was a nondescript lawn leading to an unkempt bank which fell off to a side street - Atlantic Avenue. Behind it was a sunken piece of land, without shape or meaning, from which one stared into the backyards and rear doors and windows of adjoining houses. The back of the library building itself was uninspiring, with only the high thin windows of a stack room to look upon." Nearby could be seen "a typical land-locked Maine harbor, lined with old wharves and boat builders' weather-beaten sheds. The blue water was

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 17**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

busy with moving pleasure craft, making for the stretch of sea that covered the distance. But the foreground was shabby. The neat lawn around the building fell off without definition.”¹³

Undaunted by the existing conditions, Steele approached the design problem as if he were composing the grounds of an Italian villa, directing the visitor through a controlled sequence of outdoor spaces that revealed distant views of Camden Harbor, the sounds of a splashing water fountain, a steep descent and splay of light through a canopy of arching trees, and a sun-dappled green set at the bottom of the stairway. Steele outlined his solution for the amphitheater, writing, “At the bottom of the steps [behind the library building] the ground fell away sharply across what was left of an old New England meadow. This was where the theater must go. There was a cross view down to the harbor. The rest of the land was hemmed in by nondescript wooden houses. To make a theater of it one must fill in the far side on which to build the tiers of seats; and as far as possible to screen out the houses with evergreens.”¹⁴ Steele further reasoned: “Then the slopes all round could be caught up in tiny terraces with walls conveniently high to sit on, built of native stones. Surrounding the area and planted here and there on the terraces, local plants and trees could be brought in to enclose the resulting theater and shut out the environment. By moving in large evergreens and occasional boulders behind and between the tier walls, all stiffness was removed.”¹⁵

Steele took advantage of the site’s topographic changes by creating a series of carefully articulated stone-edged turf steps which created the seating for the amphitheater. These turf seats gradually descended the grade in a series of concentric arcs to a U-shaped green lawn that opened to a dramatically framed view of the harbor. Three broad, shallow stairs with turf treads and brick risers descended the last of the grade to Atlantic Avenue. Two brick Colonial Revival pavilions flanked the view to the harbor and tied the entire composition back to the architecture of the library building. Wide granite stairs connected the library to the grounds of the amphitheater. Birches, boulders and granite-edged planters disrupted the smooth curve of the seating tiers, energizing and enhancing the landscape composition.

With the library built atop the highest point on Camden’s Main Street, the site offered the best prospect for viewing the harbor, yet the axis of the library building was oriented to Main Street, not the harbor. The genius of Steele’s design was to create a broad lawn that created an artful, simple setting for the architecture, incorporate a formal terrace at the rear of the building and an axial descending sequence to the floor of the proposed theater, and then artfully bend the axis of the U-shaped amphitheater so that it revealed an uninterrupted view of the harbor and distant rocky shores. This resulted in a meticulously evolved expression of garden art and function that took advantage of the inherent beauty of this site and effortlessly blended art, architecture, scenery and natural features into a unified whole.

Rockwork

Steele had to reshape the existing hillside behind the library substantially to create his amphitheater. The work involved extensive grading and terracing with stone masonry retaining walls. Upon this sturdy infrastructure, Steele imposed a highly ambitious program of rough-cut stone stairways, retaining walls, and stone-edged terraces. Historic photographs documenting the construction of the theater indicate the extent to which hand-labor, assisted by horse-drawn sleds, formed much of the workmanship in hauling, cutting, and arranging stone, much of it locally quarried granite. When completed, the overall effect of the stone work became one of simplicity and solidity -- a sylvan theater nestled into a naturally occurring concave basin reminiscent of the ruins of an ancient civilization, the native rocky coastline, and to some degree an old and abandoned Maine quarry.

¹³ Fletcher Steele, untitled manuscript, ca. 1931 (Fletcher Steele Papers, Rochester Historical Society).

¹⁴ Fletcher Steele to William Marquis, 25 January 1969 (Fletcher Steele Papers, Library of Congress).

¹⁵ Fletcher Steele, untitled manuscript, ca. 1931 (Fletcher Steele Papers, Rochester Historical Society).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 18**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The workmanship apparent in the stonework throughout the project is remarkable in both construction and design. Not only was there strict control over the cutting of the stone, but also the size and arrangement of stone and the placement of uncut boulders. The size and shape of stones for the stairways received special attention. They were carefully selected and sometimes cut to attain the proper evenness of size, shape, and outward appearance. Teams of horses hauled in enormous rocks at great expense, and the rockwork was finely crafted under the supervision of Henry Rice, the designer from Steele's office who had an unusual ability for constructing convincingly realistic geological forms.¹⁶ The involvement of local landscape architect Hans Heistad, who had first-hand experience working with native stone materials and a knowledge of local laborers, further indicates Steele's commitment to attaining the best aesthetic appeal.

Landscape designers in America, as well as in England, attained a high standard of design and workmanship in the design and construction of naturalistic rock walls. Such rockwork was an important feature of nineteenth century parks, particularly those designed by the Olmsted firm and others, and American landscape treatises from the 1890s to the 1920s, provided comprehensive instructions on embedding rocks and laying up courses of rocks to affect convincing naturalistic arrangements. Steele shared an interest in the design of less-formal walls using random rubble and stone with his contemporaries, including Albert D. Taylor, who provided numerous technical notes on the stone construction in walls, ha-has, and paths in *Landscape Architecture*, and other noted master designers such as Charles Leavitt, Harold Hill Blossom and Ferruccio Vitale.¹⁷

For artistic accent, Steele's design called for the irregular cement of cyclopean boulders among the tiers of seating and the wide grassy aisles. These boulders added to the informality of the space and broke the monotony of the concentric arcs of stone and turf seating, enhancing the naturalistic qualities of the site. According to landscape historian Robin Karson, "[The] boulders served both formal and poetic ends. Large rocks were incorporated into the terraces to relieve the rigidity of the regular curves and to evoke the nearby presence of dramatic, coastal ledges."¹⁸

Steps and Stairways

Steele gave serious consideration to the design of stairways and steps, differentiating between the functional stairway that became an essential part of a garden's structure and what he called "occasional" or incidental steps that enriched a composition and encouraged one's personal pleasure in a garden, even if they didn't lead anywhere. To Steele the steps and stairways not only gave essential structure to a garden of any scale, but they gave the spatial organization a three-dimensional, sculptural quality. Writing somewhat whimsically he wrote: "The good designer uses steps as a poet uses rhyme...steps mark stanzas in the writing of the builder and show up his wits and his character...When stairs cannot go straight, they must follow some other line, and it is this other line which causes brainstorm in the average designer and poetic flights in genius."¹⁹ Interesting at Camden the garden theater form invited Steele's own exploration of the creative possibilities presented by stairs when rendered in native stone and designed to echo a native landscape dominated by ledges aged and worn by weather and surf.

Steele's artistry in using stone to shape space is evident in the complex composition of the broad stone stairway that descends steeply from the Fauns Garden to the floor of the theater. Consisting of evenly spaced risers and

¹⁶ Karson, *Steele*, 130.

¹⁷ Works offering instructions on creating naturalistic rockwork included Henry Vincent Hubbard and Theodora Kimball, *Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design* (New York: Macmillan, 1917); Frank A. Waugh, *The Natural Style in Landscape Gardening* (Boston: Richard Badger Co., 1917); Samuel Parsons Jr., *Landscape Gardening* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1891). For a list of Taylor's technical notes on stone construction, see Section 9, Major Bibliographical References.

¹⁸ Karson, *Steele*, 130.

¹⁹ Fletcher Steele, *Gardens and People* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1964), 84-85.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 19**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

treads and tied into the sturdy stone walls forming the structure of the U-shaped theater, the limestone stairs were constructed of evenly sized blocks with rough surfaces. With their rough weathered surfaces left exposed and their mortar joints cast in deep shadow, the steps became a rhythmic display of vertical and horizontal accents and assumed an aged and weathered appearance reminiscent of Greek ruins or the resilient broad stairways designed by Le Nôtre for the royal chateaus outside Paris. The stairway blended harmoniously and ambiguously with the surrounding walls, tree planters (set in specially designed stone boxes), and seating levels. When viewed from across the theater, the stairway was transformed into a waterless cascade with the steps seeming to tumble down the grade.

Of particular note in Steele's composition is his varied use of steps – whether made of turf, smooth-cut quarried stone, weathered cobble-like stone, or even brick. Especially notable is his use of informal stone steps that abound in the Camden theater; on this technique he later wrote: “They should not be stiff like important stairs...Stone steps will begin anywhere and end where you will, against a bank or vaulting a bridge. They will go straight or curve around a bend; stay level at a platform, slope up or down; much or little. They are the medium par excellence of the designer who is free in spirit -- who treats incidental steps as so much sculpture.”²⁰

Plant List and Planting Plan

Steele's planting plans exhibited a careful selection of plant materials and a highly controlled sense of composition to create an evocative and engaging setting appropriate for a sylvan theater. Steele combined billowy masses of dark evergreens with native shrubs to frame the amphitheater's design and to screen neighboring houses from view. Like a dark theater curtain, the plantings enriched the texture and color palette of the composition, and framed the central field of his three-dimensional landscape painting. The vertical forms of the white birch and the columnar arborvitae enhanced the verticality of the design. These stood in stark contrast to the weathered granite stone terraces that formed the horizontal dimension of the project and masked the dramatic changes in elevation. When completed, Steele's composition was a careful blending of native and introduced, old and new, form and function, captured in a complete mastery of artistic form.

A simple palette of native species found in the Camden vicinity was used to define the library grounds and amphitheater. A mix of maples (*Acer saccharum* and *A. rubrum*) and elms (*Ulmus americana*) were scattered across the open lawns surrounding the library and framed by the stone retaining walls on Main Street and Atlantic Avenue. The library's foundation plantings consisted of a simple palette of white lilacs (*Syringa vulgaris alba*), euonymus (*Euonymus sp.*) and climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea a. petiolaris*). White spruce (*Picea glauca*) and arborvitae (*Thuja sp.*) screened the north parking area from the library reading room windows. Low shrubs, including bayberry (*Myrica pennsylvanica*), blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) groundcover and euonymus extended into planting beds on each side of the parking lot. To the east, the arabesque beds carved into the lawn at the base of the horseshoe stairs featured low hedges of globe arborvitae (*Thuja sp.*) filled with masses of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*). Larger evergreens such as hemlocks (*Tsuga Canadensis*), arborvitae (*Thuja sp.*), and dense masses of spruce were used to screen the north property line under-planted with mixed shrubs including euonymus, heaths, and heathers.

Plantings in the amphitheater were limited to elms, oaks (*Quercus sp.*), birch, arborvitae, and spruce. Large existing American elms provided the pivots around which the terraces revolved. With keen sensitivity, Steele arranged spruce, and white birch to accent the curved rock-tiered seating area. Although other Beaux Arts designers had used native birch in allées and other formal arrangements, Steele was intent on capturing the abstract visual qualities of the native birch with its multiple spreading trunks. He arranged the white trees to stand in sharp contrast to the dark evergreen groupings that flanked the amphitheater, so that they “provided a

²⁰ Ibid., 92-93.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 20**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

much-needed vertical rhythm to offset the strong horizontal curves of the tiered stone ledges.” The combination of shimmering trunks of the birch among the rock-edged tiers of seating with the occasional over-sized boulder, set against the dark evergreen foliage created a convincing yet abstract evocation of the regional landscape, successfully connecting the designed landscape with the distant, tree-studded and rocky shoreline.²¹

Steele’s desire for native plants was not just an idealistic goal; he was equally interested in their functional, expressive and symbolic purposes. Steele’s years under Manning’s mentorship taught him the value of indigenous plantings, though he rejected creating only naturalistic scenery without an appreciation for the aesthetic values plants could add to an artistic composition. One exception to native tree plantings that graced the amphitheater grounds were four Camperdown elms (*Ulmus glabra* “*Camperdownii*”) planted to frame the entry stairs at the garden pavilions. Climbing hydrangea, another non-native, was used to soften the stone retaining walls below the library yard.

Steele’s Camden scheme represents one of the first instances where he used a limited palette of bold plantings intended for specific architectural and decorative impact.²² Unlike his mentor Warren Manning, who celebrated the horticultural value, profusion, and rich interplay of mixed plant materials, Steele preferred to use plants for their abstract, decorative and evocative qualities. His interest in the aesthetic quality and symbolic character of plant species evolved after 1925, largely as a result of new ideas he had encountered at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Moderne in Paris and following developments in French garden design of the 1920s. “In certain ways”, Steele told readers of *House Beautiful*, “the French are in a good position to see materials impersonally and clearly. For French landscape architects appear to have had but little real affection for horticulture at any time.”²³

Hans Heistad (1871-1945) assisted Steele in the selection and acquisition of native spruce and other trees, shrubs, and plants for the amphitheater project. Born in Brevik, Norway, Heistad studied landscape design in both Norway and Denmark before working as a landscape foreman for several design and horticulture firms in Germany. He immigrated to the United States in 1905 and worked as a carpenter and estate gardener. He came to Maine in 1910 where he was employed by the Olmsted Brothers to supervise the installation of the gardens at Chatword, the Joseph Pulitzer estate in Bar Harbor. He settled in the Camden/Rockport area and provided design and supervision for the construction of several private estates in the region, only one of which, the John Gribbel estate (Weatherend), remains intact. Heistad was most interested in the integration of new design into the native landscape, including the use of native plants and local stone. Heistad brought to Steele’s project an intense understanding of local materials, including their source and availability, and the local contractors best suited for properly installing the materials.²⁴

Selection of some species was driven by their local availability and by the offers of the members of the Camden Library Committee to provide free plant material to the project. He relied on Hans Heisted, who had considerable knowledge about native plants and previous success in naturalistic plantings in the region. Clearly, the selection of hardy plant species was a collaborative effort, though it was Steele’s placement within the landscape composition that drove their aesthetic considerations. Telling of the efforts to acquire plants of the right species, size, and age is a memo dated December 6, 1929, in which Steele wrote: “Mr. Sargent is to go over the spruces at Mr. Hayden’s camp to see if some of the handsome spruces are suitable for moving, in

²¹ Quotation and analysis come from Karson, *Steele*, 128.

²² Karson, *Steele*, 129.

²³ Fletcher Steele, “New Styles in Gardening,” *House Beautiful* (March 1929), 317, as quoted in Karson, *Steele*, 130. Steele was particularly interested in the evolution of French gardens and the writings of Paul and André Véra, as discussed in Dorothée Imbert, *The Modernist Garden in France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

²⁴ Elizabeth A. Igleheart, “Hans Heistad, 1871-1945,” in *Landscape Architects and Designers: Biographical Dictionary* (August 1986), online version <http://maineolmsted.com/ad/heistad.html> accessed 28 January 2011.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 21**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

which case Mr. Hayden will be glad to have them used. Sargent will continue to scout around for material and especially he will take up with Mr. Hayden those trees which are on the grounds of a burned and abandoned summer cottage....It is the universal opinion in the neighborhood that spruce is the only permanent tree, [and] that firs are never found more than six inches in diameter, and they always die young. Consequently the bulk of the planting should be spruces with some hemlocks and no pines.”²⁵

Historic Integrity

In 1997 the grounds of the Camden Amphitheatre and Public Library and nearby Harbor Park were the subject of a massive historic preservation treatment program designed to rejuvenate the two historic landscapes. Recognizing the variations in levels of integrity for each area, plans called for the restoration of the amphitheatre and rehabilitation of Harbor Park. The library grounds were altered to accommodate a 1996 subterranean building addition, and the design of Harbor Park was rehabilitated to better accommodate universal accessibility and respond to the demands of the park as a highly popular tourist attraction.²⁶ At the same time, the amphitheater was restored, including its original plant palette. When originally conceived, the library grounds and portions of the amphitheater contained a high overarching canopy of existing elms, which were retained in the final Steele design. This canopy of elms has been lost and disease-resistant cultivars of elms and other replacement trees have been planted to restore this canopy as part of the restoration program. The Camden Amphitheatre remains one of Fletcher Steele’s best extant public landscapes, and continues to reflect the integrity of his original design. Any specific changes which have occurred within the landscape are outlined in the paragraphs which follow.

Library Yard

Fletcher Steele designed a brick and stone wall, wide granite stairs and a broad flat lawn between the library building and Atlantic Avenue. This area was re-graded slightly to accommodate the 1996 subterranean library addition. A portion of the hillside plantings were removed in front of the original wall to accommodate a new entry and children’s reading plaza. To accommodate these changes, a portion of the retaining wall along Atlantic Avenue was reconstructed using original stones and new stone selected to match in color, texture and size, the stones from the original wall. The placement and alignment of the original retaining wall was not changed, and Steele’s original iron railing was reinstalled on top of the retaining wall when the construction work was completed. The skylight for the subterranean room, which sits like a garden temple on the upper lawn, is a new addition. A four-car parking area was constructed on the north side of the library building, an expansion of Steele’s original plan for a service drive wide enough for parking one vehicle with a turn-out. Most of Steele’s original plantings were retained when this parking area was constructed.

Amphitheater

There have been no significant changes to the natural or cultural features of the amphitheater with the exception of the natural growth, maturation and decay of the plant palette, a condition which has been corrected as part of the preservation treatment program. The changes required to accommodate the underground library addition were carefully designed to limit their impact on the library grounds and the open-air theater. All other structures are in excellent condition and receive regular routine maintenance. A pedestrian sidewalk was installed by the Town of Camden along the northern side of Atlantic Avenue in front of the amphitheater, replacing a portion of the grass terrace and simple curb that had been part of the original Steele design.

²⁵ Fletcher Steele, office memorandum, 6 December 1929 (Camden Public Library archives).

²⁶ Harbor Park is not being considered for National Landmark status at this time, although its rehabilitation has been accomplished with great sensitivity to its historic design intent and it continues to complement and support the significance of the amphitheater and the library grounds.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 22**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Throughout the twentieth century, new varieties of vegetation were installed by well-meaning but uninformed site managers, changing the plant palette of Steele's original design. Restoration maintenance was conducted during the 1997-2001 preservation project, including the replacement of missing or dying plant material. Inappropriate plantings have been removed, and replaced by species identified in the Steele planting plans. In some areas, groves of evergreens were replaced by volunteer or planted deciduous trees. Some of this transition was the result of natural tree succession; some was the result of intentional species selection. Under the preservation treatment program, these inappropriate species were removed and the groves of original evergreens species have been re-established in a systematic, phased restoration program.

The maturation of the evergreen trees and the loss of the low and medium height evergreens beneath resulted in the opening of some views from the amphitheater to buildings on High Street under the tree canopy. Much of this condition has been corrected under the phased replanting program. Some vegetation growing in or around stonework had disappeared, there were changes to the plant palette in the Fauns Garden, and annuals and perennials had been introduced into the western quadrant of the theater. These plantings were removed and replaced with Steele's intended plantings as part of the restoration program. In some areas, shade cast by maturing tree canopies and heavy pedestrian traffic resulted in the loss of grass and some soil compaction. These areas were limited in size and scope and were treated to improve light and soil conditions to encourage grass viability during the restoration program.

The wooden State of Maine seal which sat at the northern end of the amphitheater in the niche was removed to the Camden Historical Society's Conway House. The stone compass embedded in the path from the Fauns Garden to the amphitheater was installed in 2007. Although designed by Fletcher Steele, it was not installed in the Fauns Garden or in the central lawn (the two locations contemplated when Steele was released from the project in 1931) until 2007, when the decision was made to set the compass in a visual location within the Fauns Garden where its placement would not detract from the overall integrity of the original theater.

The Camden Amphitheatre continues its historic relationship with the Camden Library, Harbor Park, and Camden Harbor. The amphitheater continues to exist within its historic boundaries, and the axial relationship between the harbor and the library building remain unchanged, as do the views from the library to the theater and beyond to the harbor, thanks to the careful protection of the park and the preservation of its historic landscape integrity. The addition to the library and the new Atlantic Avenue entrance were designed with a sensitive appreciation of the historic significance of the library and the amphitheater, and their relationship to each other. There has been an increase in foot traffic through the amphitheater from the new parking area (in the former meadow) to the library's new Atlantic Avenue entrance. To date this increased circulation has not negatively impacted the lawn, terraces or other features of the amphitheater.

The high quality of the amphitheater's initial construction and the skillful mastery of its 2001-2004 restoration have resulted in a continuity of quality craftsmanship and preservation of original materials. In its spatial relationships, its topography, its circulation, its infrastructure and its structural materials, the amphitheater has remained little changed from its 1928-1931 appearance. The type, arrangement, and density of plant materials have experienced the natural cyclical evolution of growth, maturation, decay and rebirth evident in any historic landscape. Although the increased girth and height of the original white birches have changed their scale and relationship to other trees, this change is seen as a natural part of the cyclical evolution of the site and does not negatively impact the integrity of the amphitheater. Again, the careful attention to detail and the skillful quality of the preservation treatment program have ensured that the remaining historic plant materials will survive as long as possible and ensure that new plantings, as they are added, will support and reinforce the original Steele planting design.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B C X D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 1 and 4

NHL Theme(s): III. Expressing Cultural Values
 5. Architecture, landscape architecture and urban design

Areas of Significance: Landscape Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1928-1931

Significant Dates: 1928-1931

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Steele, Fletcher (1885-1971)

Historic Contexts: XVII. Landscape Architecture

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 24**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Camden Amphitheatre is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 4 in NHL theme III, Expressing Cultural Values (landscape architecture). This property represents the creative genius of Fletcher Steele, one of the nation's premier practitioners of twentieth-century landscape design. The amphitheater is an outstanding and enduring example of Steele's work because 1) it represents the designer's mastery of the principles of design and ingenuity in adapting a variety of conventions and practices to the design of the public grounds and outdoor theater, and 2) it was a forerunner of American modernism by one of the movement's early and most influential proponents. The genius of Steele's design is rooted in his fusion of multiple design concepts in a single, unified landscape composition -- one that is aesthetically compelling and functionally successful. Stylistically the work is a remarkable illustration of Steele's design process and most importantly a tangible representation of his early experimentation with the modernist principles being explored by his European peers -- principles which, when expounded upon in his professional writings, influenced an emerging generation of forward-looking practitioners, who by the end of the 1930s successfully challenged and broke the mold of traditional landscape education in America.

One of Steele's few public projects, this property is a highly successful and outstanding early twentieth-century example of the classical amphitheater form adapted for popular use at a time when national interest in civic improvement, cultural arts, and outdoor recreation were beginning to coalesce, initially due to the foresight and generosity of private patrons and philanthropists. Designed and constructed between 1928 and 1931, and funded by a local patron of the arts, Mary Curtis Bok, Steele's landscape design successfully marries the ideals of the legacy of the early Greek theater form with the scale of the Renaissance Italian garden theater and the richness of Maine's native landscape. The Camden Amphitheatre is an exceptional example of this form because of the artistry and quality of Steele's design, its unparalleled representation of important trends in landscape design, and its significance in presaging modernism in American landscape architecture. Although rooted in the Beaux Arts traditions of the Italian and French Renaissance, Steele's design is one of the first examples of Steele's experimentation with European Modernist principles and serves as a significant transitional composition that celebrates the use of the bent axis and abstracted forms of vegetation within the framework of the largely traditional architectural form of the outdoor theater.

The property is also significant under Criterion 1, for its identification with and outstanding representation of broad national patterns of United States history and through which "an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained." The Camden Amphitheater is an outstanding representation of the contributions made by the landscape architecture profession, private benefactors, and national associations to develop public landscapes in the United States that celebrated natural regional beauty, scenic character and rich history. Public and private amphitheaters of many scales were incorporated into private estates, the grounds of colleges and universities, and public parks in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Rooted in the classical traditions of ancient Greece and Rome, the landscape type began to attract the attention of village improvement and country planning advocates in the early decades of the century. The Camden Amphitheatre was the product of the early period when American culture and recreation were enriched through the contributions of socially-minded private philanthropists, and America's public landscape was being shaped through the talents of landscape architects, most of whom had been trained in Beaux-Arts design and had a first-hand familiarity with the finest monuments of Western civilization. The outdoor or open-air theater grew in popularity, and by the end of the 1930s the development of such public facilities had achieved nationwide attention from landscape architects and park designers and overwhelming support from public officials and legislators. Steele's writings and lectures on civic improvement coupled with his few public commissions, including the Camden Amphitheatre, document his connections to the Garden Club of America and other groups advocating village

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 25**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

improvement and country planning. The Camden Amphitheatre and Public Library fulfilled both the social and cultural goals of its sponsors, as well as the aesthetic vision of its designer. The amphitheater design today reflects the highest integrity of workmanship, materials, setting and association of the period 1928 to 1931. As a result of the excellence of the original design and recent restoration efforts, the amphitheater endures today as an outstanding representation of Fletcher Steele's genius and early twentieth-century American public landscape design.

Fletcher Steele, Twentieth-Century Landscape Architect

Steele's work on the Camden Amphitheater began in 1928, when the landscape architect was at the height of his design career and the Country Place era, which had engaged the American profession in the design of private estates since the turn of the century, was coming to an end. Steele's career, which had been strongly influenced by European travel and a particular admiration for French design, was dominated by Beaux Arts principles and commissions for private estates. Unlike many of his colleagues, however, Steele was open to emerging ideas and encouraged the expansion of his profession's purview to include the gardens of small homes and village improvements. By the time the Camden project was completed in 1931, it had become a socially-conscious philanthropic enterprise and an early example of private funds employing local citizens hit hard by the Depression to create a new direction in landscape architecture. Originally known simply as the "Camden Library" (the name used by Steele in all of his drawings), the renown of the outdoor garden theater immediately resulted in its more popular name, the "Camden Amphitheatre."

Fletcher Steele (1885-1971) grew up in Rochester, New York, the son of a lawyer. He graduated from Williams College and attended the graduate program in landscape architecture at Harvard. In 1908, he left Harvard to take up an apprenticeship with Warren Manning in his Boston office of landscape architecture and regional planning.²⁷ Steele worked with Manning for six years, beginning as an unpaid apprentice and then serving as Manning's private travelling secretary. By late 1909, Steele was planning and supervising design installations for clients from Massachusetts to Michigan. Warren Manning (1860-1938) was the son of a Boston area nurseryman and worked for Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., for eight years, from 1888 to 1896, specializing in horticulture and planting design. He worked closely with Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. on the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 and the Vanderbilt's estate, Biltmore, in Asheville, North Carolina (1888-1895). Manning started his own firm in 1896, and helped establish the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1899.

Manning was a pioneer in two areas of landscape architecture: resource-based design and community-based participatory design. He developed a planning model based on gathering and assessing discrete types of information about a site as part of the planning process, including soils and vegetative cover mapped in grid form onto property base plans. Manning's design work was driven by these natural site assets. His professional work was best noted for his extraordinary knowledge and use of native plants, and his ability to manipulate site topography and soils to drive his designs, especially in his work for municipal parks and town planning. Under Manning's tutelage, Steele acquired hands-on experience in design, planning, site analysis, the use of native plants, knowledge of indigenous soils, and, through careful site analysis, the subtle manipulation of topography to enhance and reform genius of place. Manning's designs were rooted in what Steele called "convenience and economy and natural conditions, whence he believes beauty will follow."²⁸ Steele felt that Manning's work was best appreciated by a horticulturist or park superintendent and engineer, but it was not the kind of work that appealed to an architect or an artist. Although his association with Manning did not advance Steele's artistic

²⁷ Robin Karson, "Steele, Fletcher," in *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*, ed. Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 375-376.

²⁸ Letter, Fletcher Steele to John Steele, 27 January 1912 (Rochester Historical Society).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 26**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

skills, Steele gained exceptional technical skills during his six year apprenticeship. While Steele worked for Manning, the firm's clients included the Charles Adams property (1909), L.A. Ault property (1910) in Camden, the National Soldiers' Home in Togus (1909), Bangor Public Library and Bangor City Plans (1910-1911), the Ira M. Cobe property in Northport (1911), and plans for Dr. T.U. Coe in Bangor (1912). As Steele was leaving Manning's office in 1913, the firm was designing the Megunticook Golf Club and the property of Mrs. Charles Henry in nearby Rockport, Maine.²⁹

Steele left Manning's firm in 1913 to tour Europe, and in 1914 he opened his own office in Boston. Steele's practice was characterized primarily by private work for wealthy clients, many of whom became close friends. Steele abhorred public projects directed by committees, which he felt spoiled all hope of creativity. The Camden Library project, therefore, is one of his few public projects. Despite this prejudice, Steele found the Camden garden committee a "fine, lively" group of people. Steele advocated that a good landscape architect studies the personality of the person for whom a place is to be created. As he wrote: "He wanders into the house to see what kind of books she reads, what kind of furniture and bric-a-brac she gathers about her. He gets her talking about her travels and the places she likes the best and ones she does not like. He probes to discover, not what she has, but what she dreams of having; not what she does, but what she would like to do."³⁰ Despite Mrs. Bok's funding for the library project, she preferred that the library committee remain the client, and Steele probed the personal preferences of the committee, and the Town of Camden, to discover his vision for the library grounds and amphitheater. At Camden, committee members repeatedly emphasized the need for simplicity, practicality, and economy. They wanted a design that was not fussy, and where maintenance, which was extremely important, could be kept to a minimum. Most importantly, the committee hoped to use local people to build and supervise the project, serving both the cultural, social and economic needs of the community.³¹

Steele's design work grew steadily, eventually serving clients from Maine to California, though the bulk of his clientele remained firmly established in the Northeast. The Camden project was created in the midst of Steele's friendship and professional relationship with Mabel Choate which began in 1926 and lasted more than thirty years. He redesigned the gardens at Naumkeag, Choate's Shingle Style summer home in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Here he created the Afternoon Garden (1926), the Chinese Garden (1936), and his most famous Blue Steps (1938). The national significance of Steele's work at Naumkeag was recognized in the property's designation as a National Historic Landmark (No. 75000264) in 2007. Other projects under design and construction at the same time as the Camden Amphitheatre include his work for Standish Backus (1929-1940) at Grosse Point, Michigan, and Manchester, Massachusetts; the Seyburn family (1929-1932), also in Manchester; and the Doubleday family in Ridgefield, Connecticut (1928-1932). In all of these cases Steele drew his design inspiration from a mix of Beaux Arts traditions, including Italian, French, English and Chinese design. The use of flowers often was limited to pots or small garden beds in key locations; instead his work was based on sweeping expanses of turf, carefully detailed stonework, and rhythmic repetitions of trees often used to reinforce the lines of his design elements.³²

In Paris in 1925 Steele visited the International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts (Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Moderne) where he became entranced by European Modernism. The emerging movement advocated honesty and appreciation for the qualities of construction materials, designs freed from ornamentation, and a return to simple forms, creative functionality, and a general

²⁹ Warren Manning, client list (Manning Papers, University of Massachusetts, Lowell).

³⁰ Fletcher Steele, as quoted in Karson, *Steele*, 108; en 1, 334. Quotation comes from "Westport, Connecticut," lecture, n.d. (Fletcher Steele Papers, Library of Congress), 1-2.

³¹ Fletcher Steele, office memorandum, Camden Library Conferences, 1928 (Camden Public Library archives).

³² Karson, *Steele*, 105-114, 125-132 & 204-217.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 27**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

harmony and balance of clean lines. It grew to encompass a design philosophy that transcended all forms of art: architecture, decorative arts, painting, furniture design, and landscape architecture, and bred such well-known designers as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann, and other students of the Bauhaus school. Most influential on Steele's own philosophy and work was the work of the French modernists: Pierre-Émile Legrain, André Lurçat, Gabriel Guévrékian, André and Paul Véra, and Tony Garnier. Steele lectured and wrote about his fascination with French Modernism, and in 1930 in "New Pioneering in Garden Design," published in *Landscape Architecture*, he exposed his American colleagues to the bold innovations in residential design emerging in the work of French designers.

Steele gradually incorporated ideas from the Paris exposition and his subsequent study of the French modernists in his own projects. As fine art transitioned from the neoclassical to modern, Steele captured these design details with extraordinary skill and mastery. The experimentation with modern principles, which he so admired at the 1925 exposition in Paris and observed in the subsequent work of the French Modernists led him at Camden to abandon the traditional axis, create a landscape on several levels, celebrate the marked vertical element of the white birches and columnar evergreens, and emphasize the visual effects of plant materials as a design element within the larger composition.³³ Most notable among his executed works exhibiting the modern influences are his Afternoon Garden (1926) and Blue Steps (1938) for Mabel Choate at Naumkeag (NHL) in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and his innovative solution for the design of the Camden Amphitheatre.

A popular writer and speaker, Steele gave lectures to garden clubs and improvement associations, speaking on topics such as village improvement and garden design as fine art. He wrote more than 150 articles for publications that included *Landscape Architecture*, *Garden Magazine*, *House Beautiful*, *Country Life in America*, *The Garden Club of America Bulletin*, *Horticulture*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Country Life*, and *House and Garden*.³⁴ In his *Design in the Little Garden* (1924), one of the books in the Little Garden Series edited by Mrs. Francis King, Steele advocated functionalism in designing small spaces, saying: "too many flower gardens become slave drivers." He proposed avoiding the monotonous, democratic, sameness of suburban yards by creating a private garden in the backyard, with boundary planting to achieve privacy and to control the view.³⁵

In 1929 and 1930 he wrote a pair of articles, one for *House Beautiful* and the other for *Landscape Architecture*, where he examined the transition from a love of nature in the nineteenth century tradition toward the acceptance of non-traditional materials and forms in modern practice, particularly the concept of plants being used for their aesthetic form rather than strictly horticultural value. In 1964 Steele published *Gardens and People*, compiled from hundreds of short essays written throughout his career; the book captured the themes repeatedly exhibited in his work and his writings, such as landscape architecture as fine art, innovations in design, garden theaters, and "charm" in the garden, which Steele considered the true measure of artistry in landscape design.

As his career drew to an end in 1968, Fletcher Steele had designed more than 700 private gardens and only a handful of public spaces. These public projects include the Hopkins World War I Memorial at Williams College, the Bloomfield Hills Subdivision in Detroit, Michigan, and a handful of small business, school, church, hospital, and memorial projects. Most of these public landscapes (and a large number of his private residential designs) have been subdivided, completely lost, or simplified. Only twenty of Steele's landscapes retain their historic integrity, and of those, only three are accessible to the public: Naumkeag (NHL) and Mission House in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and the Camden Amphitheatre.³⁶

³³ Karson, *Steele*, 128 & 130.

³⁴ Karson, "Steele, Fletcher," in *Pioneers*, ed. Birnbaum and Karson, 376; Karson, *Steele*, 311-313.

³⁵ Karson, *Steele*, 69-71; also Robin Karson, "Forthcoming," *VIEW, The Magazine of the Library of American Landscape History*, Summer 2008, 28. A master list of Steele's publications appears in Karson, *Steele*.

³⁶ Karson, *Steele*, 283-291, quoted in LANDSCAPES, "Camden Library Grounds Camden Amphitheater and Harbor Park:

Historical Antecedents and the Fusion of Design Traditions

Fletcher Steele and the Beaux Arts Tradition

Steele's 1913 European travels took him to Portugal, Spain, North Africa, Italy, France, Germany and England. Throughout his travels he took extensive notes on the places he visited: gardens, parks, museums, cemeteries, city squares, fountains, street plans, and important architecture. Coupled with the technical skills he had gained during his apprenticeship with Manning, this trip allowed Steele to observe the artistry and aesthetic expression of earlier design traditions, a hands-on exploration of art and design principles over the centuries. Out of this trip, Steele developed many of his landscape ideas, including the use of wide paths, turf, proper proportions for pergolas, the use of decorative arts (sculpture, pots, stone work) for maximum design impact with little maintenance, and the careful observation of the good and the bad in European design traditions. Some sites left permanent impressions on the young designer, including Villa Lante, (which Steele considered Italy's most charming garden), St. Peter's Square in Rome, Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, and Place Vendome in Paris, which Steele considered "flawless."³⁷ From the ruins of early Greek amphitheaters to the most celebrated of Italian Renaissance villas, Steele meticulously absorbed the details and the grand scheme of these European marvels. When he returned to Boston to open his own practice, Steele began to shape his own, distinct interpretation of these traditional designs. Later trips to Europe, as well as his own keen observations as a garden artist, deepened and expanded his design art.

The Beaux Arts design tradition began to dominate American architectural and landscape practice in the last decade of the nineteenth century with the work of the Olmsted firm; McKim, Mead and White; Carrere and Hastings, Guy Lowell, and Charles Platt. Nineteenth-century landscape architects, whose practice was rooted in the traditions of the English design school of the eighteenth century, turned to more classical typologies as America strove to express its coming of age as a culturally educated nation and an international power. The blending of neoclassical design forms in building and site design accelerated after the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, dominated the design of urban civic centers and public buildings in the City Beautiful era that followed, and continued to drive both public and private projects into the early twentieth century. Frederick Law Olmsted's sons, in particular, redefined the firm's artistic expression in this neoclassical form as private clients and public agencies looked to traditional European models for their design inspiration. Formal design, Beaux Arts principles, and European prototypes shaped the summer resorts of Bar Harbor, Newport, Long Island's *Gold Coast*, and the shores of the Great Lakes.

An important impetus to the Beaux Arts movement was Charles Platt's *Italian Gardens* (1894). Based on Charles and William Platt's travels to Italy, the book was illustrated with photographs of the gardens and grounds of the country estates that had been built for nobility and papacy outside Rome during the Renaissance and Baroque eras. Many villas had been altered over time and many were in a neglected condition. The book not only demonstrated the value of such travels, it encouraged in the United States a rich appreciation for elegant neoclassical design and the desire of the American wealthy for such designs on their own estates. This attitude coupled with the Olmsted firm's work at Biltmore, near Asheville, North Carolina, and the World's Columbian Exposition inaugurated an era in which American landscape architects sought training in Beaux-Arts design. Other works on Italian garden design, of the period, of which Steele was undoubtedly familiar, include Janet Ross, *Florentine Villas* (1902), A. Holland Forbes, *Architectural Gardens of Italy* (1902), H. Inigo Triggs *The Art of Garden Design in Italy* (1906), and George Sitwell, *On the Making of Gardens* (1909).

In contrast to the bold City Beautiful effects, there emerged a more refined taste for the quiet beauty of the Italianate garden, with its intimate garden terraces, cascades, and grottos. Noted landscape historian John Dixon Hunt wrote of the important role of Edith Wharton's garden-writing in the diffusion of Italianate garden design in the United States: "Its achievement was to review essential elements of context, the 'dialogue' within those spaces of art and nature -- and analyze them in ways that enabled their translation into new climates and varied cultures without encouraging merely imitative designs."³⁸ In *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904), Wharton was keen to recognize Roman antecedents in the villas and gardens of the Renaissance and Baroque era rather than the Greek models. Wharton understood and described the relationship of art and nature which she astutely observed in the Italian villas, and spoke of "garden magic" as a peculiar quality of these gardens. She reminds us too that the gardens which American design students and their clients traveled abroad to see were in a decaying condition -- often mere ruins of their former grandeur. What was most important for a designer like Steele was the influence and sway Wharton's sensibilities and observations held over the realm of potential clients, whose travels to Europe and aesthetic preferences shadowed Wharton's own.

Wharton engaged her readers and shaped the expectations of clients. She wrote: "But a piece of ground laid out and planted on the principles of the old garden-craft will be, not indeed, *a garden as well adapted to its surroundings as were the models which inspired it.*" In answering the traveler's question, "What can I bring away from here?" Wharton responded: "Not this or that amputated statue, or broken bas-relief, or fragmentary effect of any sort, but a sense of the informing spirit -- an understanding of the gardener's purpose, and of the uses to which he meant his garden to be put."³⁹ Steele's own emphasis on "charm" was similar to Wharton's concept of "garden magic." In *Gardens and People*, he attempts to define charm, which he believed was the true measure of artistic achievement: "Charm is a living spirit...Charm in the garden grows out of love of the land so deep that it hurts to leave home for a day; so natural that it is part and parcel of children's play, men's work, and old folks' leisure."⁴⁰ Steele had woven such intimacy of scale and familiarity of place into his design for the Camden theater more than thirty-five years earlier.

Steele's mastery and manipulation of Beaux-Arts design principles (which predominate in his early work) met the practical and aesthetic needs of the Camden project and fulfilled the expectations of his clients. Steele worked exclusively in formal landscape design until the mid-1920s. Through his travels and his academic training, including his years at Harvard, he was well-versed in Beaux-Arts principles and conventions. His work was highly respected among his clients and his peers, and his estate design for Ethan Allen in North Andover, Massachusetts (1915-1923), had been featured in *American Landscape Architecture*, a juried portfolio selected by Frederic Law Olmsted Jr., Charles N. Lowrie, and Noel Chamberlin, and published in 1924.⁴¹

Professor Emeritus Reuben Rainey of the University of Virginia has provided one of the most insightful explanations of the early twentieth landscape architect's approach to estate design, one that describes the methods Steele, as an accomplished estate designer, practiced in his design of gardens for a period revival building. It was one that he readily applied to the amphitheater project:

The grounds in the immediate vicinity of the residence would be treated in a formal fashion, with terraces axially organized along sight lines to provide a transition from the dwelling to the landscape, as well as to create functional, well-defined volumetric spaces to fulfill the particular needs of the client. This design strategy was in part a response to the predominant trend in late

³⁸ John Dixon Hunt, "The Quality of Garden Magic," Introduction to Reprint edition, *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, by Edith Wharton, 1904, reprint (New York: Rizzoli and The Mount Press, 2008) n.p.

³⁹ Wharton, *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, pp. 12, 13, & 220-221.

⁴⁰ Steele, *Gardens and People*, 220-221.

⁴¹ Philip H. Elwood Jr., ed., *American Landscape Architecture* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1924), 158.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 30**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century American architecture of creating period revival buildings. Such buildings called for a formal treatment of the site -- garden terraces and crisply defined outdoor spaces in harmony with the materials and design of the building. Like their architect counterparts, American landscape architects avoided the exact replication of historical styles; rather they interpreted them freely and imaginatively, using regional plants and construction materials.⁴²

At Camden, much of Steele's design was drawn directly from this Beaux-Arts tradition including the spatial relationship of the library and grounds, the axial sequence of the descent to the floor of the amphitheater, the sophisticated development of terraces, the marriage of formal and informal elements of design, the orchestration of views and vistas from multiple points within the grounds, the use of thick plantings to create a sense of privacy and enclosure, and details such as the double staircase, grotto, and symmetrically paired pavilions. Steele's space was created to serve a functional need, but its function is subservient to his artistic effect and intent. At the rear of the library, Steele's delicate design for the horseshoe stairs framing the spouting fountain recalls Jean Androuet du Cerceau's reinterpretation of Italianate design in the famous horseshoe staircase (1632-34) at Fontainebleau outside Paris, though executed in a more delicate, more intimate scale driven by the diminutive scale of Loring's library building.⁴³ At Camden, Steele lifted his design beyond imitation of a classical form, instead through innovation and artistic genius he captured the charm that he believed was the true measure of great art.

The Open Air Theater

Open air theaters became popular features in American public parks and college campuses in the early twentieth century. Designed for large audiences, most of these American outdoor theaters were inspired by early Greek and Roman theaters, celebrated in the writings of early twentieth century writers, including Frank Waugh (1869-1943), Sheldon Cheney (1886-1980) and Henry Inigo Triggs (1876-1923). Carved into the hillsides of Greece, these large ancient public theaters seated upwards of 17,000 people on stone benches set in semi-circular tiers with sides extended like a U around a stone floor which served as both stage and orchestra for thespian performances. Usually an altar stood in the middle of the orchestra floor. Often, like the Theater of Dionysus, a wide path or road might separate and divide the rows of seating into upper and lower sections, providing convenient daily access around the theater when not in use.

Most often the seating did not extend into a U shape, but instead remained as a semi-circular form around a circular stone floor, such as the theaters at Syracuse and Epidaurus. The stage buildings, or skene, were designed as a long rectangle that extended into the circular floor of the theater, sometimes broken into two buildings with a passage between. Early twentieth century scholars believed that a wooden platform was constructed across the end of the floor, serving sometimes as stage, sometimes as backdrop to the theater performance. Later, the Roman theater evolved from the Greek precedent by pushing the stage up against the auditorium seating, creating a semi-circular orchestra pit in front of the raised stage platform. In all cases, the theaters were believed to have been designed with wooden backdrops, columns or buildings shielding the audience from the views down the hillside so that they would not be distracted from the performances by views of distant scenery.⁴⁴

⁴² Reuben Rainey, "Gillette, Charles Freeman," in *Pioneers*, ed. Birnbaum and Karson, 140. Gillette, a contemporary of Steele, worked primarily in Virginia and had also apprenticed with Warren Manning.

⁴³ Karson, in *Steele*, 128, recognized the similarity of the double stairway to that of Fontainebleau. The stairway design was especially suitable in compressed spaces; similar stairways were adopted for the Rococo-period Kaffeehaus overlooking the secondary axis in the Boboli Gardens in Florence and for Swan House in Atlanta, Georgia, by American landscape architect Philip Schutze

⁴⁴ Sheldon Cheney, *The Open Air Theatre* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley), 13-23.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 31**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Adapted from their Greek and Roman precedents, the smaller garden theater of the Italian and French Renaissance villas were dramatically smaller and less architectural than their earlier public counterparts. These private theaters were set in small niches, as specialized garden rooms, usually found off the cross axis of the garden or nestled into small corners of each villa's landscape design. With no pergolas or pillars to frame the background, and clipped hedges instead of built-up wings or backgrounds, these spaces were truly *teatro di verdura*. The most characteristic garden theaters, usually featured by early twentieth century garden writers, were the Italian Renaissance examples at Villa Gori, the Villa Marlia, and the Villa Collodi (a.k.a. Villa Garzoni). These private theaters featured a flat, grassy floor of gravel or lawn where chairs or benches could be placed and a raised stage with cypress or clipped evergreen hedges or masses of trees and shrubs surrounding the stage and auditorium. According to theater critic Sheldon Cheney, in these garden theaters, "the green turf of the stage floor and the green hedges, harmonizing in one soft background, produced a perfect setting for the action."⁴⁵

In his book on the outdoor theater, Cheney defined another prototype -- called the "nature theater" -- inspired by Das Harzer Bergtheater (1903) in Thale, Germany. This theater type was set on a wooded mountainside, with a dramatic natural view over the wooded valleys and hills of the German countryside. Rough wooden benches were set on stone terraces overlooking a flat open space framed at the rear by a rustic wooden railing to prevent actors from tumbling off the precipitous hillside beyond. Six years later (1909) Rudolf Lorenz designed a nature theater in the woodlands of Lucerne, Switzerland. Its intimate wooded setting created a bowl in the middle of the woods, with a small steeply-sloped bank separating the orchestra floor and stage of the theater from the wooden audience seating which rose steeply over the performance space. This theater type celebrated art in nature, with minimal architectural intrusion on the beauty of the natural scene, and was quickly adapted in various forms to many American outdoor theaters.⁴⁶ Of the three types, this form was the least expensive to construct and to operate.

At Camden, Steele fused these three theater types into his own, blended design. Steele took the form of the early Greek theater as the basis for his Camden design. The U-shaped form with its blended orchestra/stage floor, his rubble stone seat risers, and the massive scale of the stairs connecting the amphitheater floor to the library reflect the ruins of these early performance arenas that he visited on his European journeys. Steele captured the acoustical benefits of his sculpted hillside to his advantage, just as early Greek theater designers understood the acoustical benefits of their own hillside theaters. From the Italian and French Renaissance villas, Steele captured the more intimate scale of the garden theater, the use of lawn instead of stone for the central floor and billowy masses of trees and shrubs framing the seating areas, perhaps recalling Edith Wharton's response to the great grassy semicircle at the foot of the ilex-clad hill at Villa Conti (a.k.a. Torlonia) in Italy, a place which Steele also greatly admired.⁴⁷

Steele's inspiration for the broad, stone-edged stairs and terraces of turf and stone that form the structure of the Camden Amphitheatre likely stemmed from his visits to Sicilian ruins during his European excursions, tempered by a fascination for the stone-edged turf stairs he observed on the grounds of French chateaus outside Paris. At Taormina, he was entranced by the ruins of Greek theaters in the form of a steeply pitched semi-circular *cavea* that faced a simple open stage through which magnificent views of sea and distant hills were visible. Here, ancient stonework, bleached in the sun and roughened by age and weather, took the form of roughly cut blocks joined together to form the evenly spaced tiers of seating and low enclosure walls. Years later in an attempt to define the charm of a designed landscape in *Gardens and People* (1964), Steele described

⁴⁵ Cheney, 90-91.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 64-78.

⁴⁷ Wharton, *Italian Villas, 155-156*. Steele had closely modeled the cascade sequence at the Ethan Allen Estate after the one at Villa Conti (a.k.a. Torlonia).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 32**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

his own youthful impression of the Greek theater. Assuming the personae of a student touring Sicily he wrote of finding the coastal town of Taormina lacking in charm until “one morning he walked up a hill and found himself pickled in charm. It was concentrated in the grandeur of the Greek Theater. Bare bones of sky, sea, and mountains were bleak, the size of walls, floor, and ceiling prodigious. Yet that could not disturb the sense of deep, warm appeal which affected him like sympathy in the adamant rock. Immensity could not scare away charm.”⁴⁸ Not only was the grand scale of the Greek theater with its magnificent view of Mt. Etna and the Mediterranean Sea spectacular, but the overlay of a later Roman design, including its grandiose stage backdrop and perimeter wall with blind arches all rendered in brick gave it additional charm and interest.

In contrast to the formality, grand size, and rigidity of the Greek and Roman theaters he observed in Sicily and at Pompeii and Rome, Steele seems to have drawn considerable inspiration from the smaller Italian amphitheaters that appeared in the Renaissance and Baroque eras as a feature of the palace or villa garden.⁴⁹ Undoubtedly familiar with the famous amphitheater in the Boboli Gardens in Florence, he was most likely impressed by the late Baroque racecourse at Villa Borghese in Frascati outside Rome, which architect Charles Platt had highly praised in *Italian Gardens* (1894) as a popular resort where in early summer people gathered to sit on the grassy steps and walk about on the lawn. Platt remarked: “Although there are no races, I have quite seen enough of a gathering here to give an idea of its ancient look on a gala-day. No more charming a theater for outdoor entertainment, either equestrian or athletic, could possibly be imagined.”⁵⁰ In such prototypes, Steele appreciated the aesthetic appeal of the broader tiers of steps for seating where turf rather than stone dominated, a less formal arrangement of walls and steps that encouraged greater freedom of movement and an overall pleasing sense of enclosure provided by dense groves of stone pines. As Platt had observed, such an open design encouraged multiple informal uses and encouraged groups of people to congregate and interact.

Steele moved beyond a strict interpretation of these Mediterranean prototypes to mix design vocabulary from other sources. Steele was likely impressed by the stonework and spatial effects present in Le Notre’s terraces and stone stairways at royal chateaus at St. Cloud and Sceaux outside Paris, which, although built to be grand and seemingly endless in spatial organization, were at the time of Steele’s visit aged, weathered, and in decay. Steele’s preference for natural materials and his celebration of the dramatic view to Camden Harbor draw their inspiration from the German nature theater. He drew details from the English Arts and Crafts movement and the American Colonial Revival in reconciling his landscape design with the architecture of the library and garden pavilions. Steele’s successful mastery of natural forms including his use of native plants and indigenous stone, in both natural and cut forms, is evident throughout the design. Using the eighteenth century English convention known as the “ha-ha”, Steele captures this topographic trickery in his series of walls that obscure the visual interruption of Atlantic Avenue as it crosses the scenic view from the amphitheater to the harbor, and the obscuring of Camden’s busy Main Street from view of the library yard. Yet none of these elements are a direct interpretation of their historic precedent. Instead, Steele molds the design ideas into his own unique style, finely crafting their details into an exceptional artistic interpretation of the form.

Melding Architecture and Landscape Architecture

Charles Loring’s Georgian Revival design for the library building and the garden pavilions are echoed in Steele’s use of brick walls, iron railings and garden arches, and espaliers which unite landscape and architecture into a carefully fused, highly collaborative organization. The garden pavilions in particular are characteristic of

⁴⁸ Steele, *Gardens and People*, 217-218.

⁴⁹ Early in his career, Steele settled on a U-shaped configuration for a hidden, woodland theater at the Ethan Allen Estate in North Andover, Massachusetts. On a modest scale this design maintained the perfect geometrical symmetry of the Greek hemicycle, but by extending the ends of the seating to form a rectilinear grid brought a sense of enclosure and intimacy to the design. This basic configuration appears at a larger scale, in greater prominence and with notable innovations, in the Camden Amphitheatre.

⁵⁰ Charles A. Platt, *Italian Gardens*, 1894, reprint, with an overview by Keith N. Morgan (Portland, Oregon: Sagapress/Timber Press, 1993), 27-28. William Platt’s photographs of the racecourse are illustrated on pages 14 & 29.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 33**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

eighteenth and early nineteenth century English gardens that were absorbed into the vocabulary of the English Arts and Crafts garden and were then transformed by American designers to fit the stylistic program of the American Colonial Revival garden. Steele's simple, primarily native plant palette and his use of climbing hydrangea to soften the stone retaining walls reflected this Colonial Revival and Arts and Crafts influence and undoubtedly mirror the plant preferences of his mentor, Warren Manning. The design for the Camden Amphitheatre, in its larger form and in the richness of its design details, exhibits Steele's mastery of the Beaux Arts traditions and remains an extraordinary example of his artistry in this design tradition.

Loring came from a prominent Boston family and shared his office with Fletcher Steele at 7 Water Street in Boston. Their close association allowed for a carefully balanced and crafted synthesis of building and landscape. A graceful, classically-inspired entrance was added to the rear of the building to provide a visual point of focus and sense of connectedness between the floor of the amphitheater and the public library. When two small buildings were needed to flank the view to the distant headlands of the harbor, Loring was commissioned to design them in the form of garden pavilions, tying their composition to the Colonial Revival styling of the library building itself. The garden pavilions served functional as well as aesthetic purposes: not only was there was need for the storage of "practical necessities" associated with various types of performances, but also strong corners were needed to anchor the south end of the theater and counter the sloping angle of Atlantic Avenue. Instead of hardy plantings that he felt "would get out of hand in short order," Steele called for "features of permanent size at these corners [ones] not interfering with important views," and ones that would become "obvious dependencies of the Library building in material and design, thus helping to tie the whole scheme together."⁵¹

The Camden Amphitheatre is a careful blending of art and nature, past and present, and the Colonial Revival and Arts and Crafts movements. The romantic reinterpretation of American colonial architectural design was one of the most prevalent design movements in the early twentieth century in both domestic and public architecture. Charles Loring's Georgian Revival design for the library building and the garden pavilions are echoed in Steele's use of brick to emphasize the piers flanking the various entrances to the property, to fashion the lighting pedestals, and to accent walls. These details unite the landscape and architecture into a carefully fused, highly complementary organization. The garden pavilions in particular are characteristic of eighteenth and early nineteenth century English gardens that were absorbed into the vocabulary of the English Arts and Crafts garden and were then transformed by American designers to fit the stylistic program of the American Colonial Revival garden. Steele's simple, primarily native plant palette and his use of climbing hydrangea to soften the stone retaining walls, along with the iron railings, garden arches, and espaliers reflected the merging of Colonial Revival and Arts and Crafts influence.

Steele's close collaboration with Charles Loring resulted in a fusing of landscape design and architectural prowess where one does not dominate, but instead complements, the other. This close collaboration links the Camden project with other period designs where the association of architect and landscape architect resulted in a successful merging of Colonial Revival architecture with the Arts and Crafts garden. This stylistic interplay also appears in Steele's memorial gateway at Williams College and links his work with that of other practitioners of the same period, including Ralph Griswold's design for the grounds at Pittsburgh's Chatham Village (NHL), Charles Gillette's estate work in Virginia, and the close collaboration of Arthur Shurcliff, William Perry, and others in the pioneering research and design of buildings and grounds at Williamsburg, Annapolis, Monticello, and Mount Vernon.

⁵¹ Fletcher Steele office memorandum, "Camden Library, Conferences on Submitting Model Showing Preliminary Study" (typewritten manuscript, Camden Library archives, n.d.), 2.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 34**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Steele effectively reconciled his naturalistic amphitheater of turf and stone with the Colonial Revival architecture of the library and garden by introducing brick coping, piers, and walls to transition from one to the other and to merge the region's natural character and cultural heritage. Steele designed a high stone wall with brick trim to separate the library lawns from the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Main Street. The wall curves behind the south and east side of the library, separating the library lawn from the amphitheater in a stylized interpretation of the English eighteenth century ha-ha. He reinforced this illusionistic detail in the long stone-edged steps of turf that fit into the sloping topography and gradually descend to the sunken road (Atlantic Avenue). Here, the grassy lawn seemingly flows without interruption from the theater into the park on the opposite side of the road and descends toward the harbor. Steele masterfully adjusted the open end of the theater to the angle and slope of the road, creating a seamless transition from the theater to the open view of the park beyond and obscuring the visual interruption of the road. This topographic device captured the beauty of the flowing greensward and functioned much like the English ha-ha that separated the manor house grounds from its cattle pastures without interrupting the scenic beauty of the landscape.

The English Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century celebrated nature in material and artistic form. Steele's successful emulation of natural forms within the amphitheater design includes his dramatic accents of native birch, elm, and spruce within the planted composition. His mastery of native stone, in both its natural and cut forms, is evident throughout the theater, serving as the symphonic thread that both unites and interrupts movement in his landscape design. The use of granite millstones and brick walls for the cylindrical lampposts within the theater proper provided another juxtaposition of materials that artfully reconciled nature and culture.

Coordination with the Harbor Park Project

The same year (1928), as the initial models for the Camden Amphitheatre were being presented to the Library Committee, Mrs. Bok had the Olmsted Brothers, who were finishing the Village Green, turn their attention to the remaining lots between the Camden Public Library and the head of Camden Harbor. Here, the Olmsted Brothers were commissioned to design a public park for Camden. Since the amphitheater project was still in its study stages, and work on the park design had not yet begun, a series of meetings or "conferences" were held with Fletcher Steele, the committee members, Mrs. Bok, Charles Loring, and the Olmsted Brothers to discuss the design relationship between the library, amphitheater, and park. It is clear from the written records of those meetings that both designers had specific opinions about the design relationship between the two properties, yet their professional concern for the role of their project within the larger landscape, the relationship between the two landscape projects and their desire to successfully meet the client's needs required respectful discussion and consideration by all parties.

In a memo dated October 6, 1928, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. wrote: "I am strongly inclined to think that the best axis for the theater unit is not at right angles with Atlantic Avenue, as shown on Mr. Steele's first rough draft study, but...about fifteen degrees to the eastward. By giving the theater unit a completely curvilinear outline...and by making it a little wider than that suggested by Mr. Steele's first rough indication, its outline toward the library can be made normal to the axis of the building, establishing a pleasant and simple relationship which is very desirable."⁵² Two weeks later Steele countered in his own memo to the committee, supporting his original choice for the amphitheater axis and asserting that "the harbor axis should aim at the opening between the distant headlands, rather than at some nearby point, as suggested by Mr. Olmsted."⁵³

As the park design progressed, the Olmsted firm suggested flattening the hill across Atlantic Avenue from the library to open a more dramatic view to the harbor from the street. Steele disagreed, stating that "I like its

⁵² Office Memo, Olmsted Brothers to Camden Library Committee, 6 October 1928 (Library of Congress).

⁵³ Memo, Fletcher Steele to Camden Library Committee, 24 October 1928 (Camden Public Library archives).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 35**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

quaint picturesque quality and outline, and find it useful in framing the harbor view which lies farther south, as seen from the Library. I should miss the enframing if it were removed.”⁵⁴ The conversation continued until the following spring when Steele wrote “everyone agreed it would be a serious mistake to have the hillside cut down between Atlantic Avenue and the water as was suggested by Mr. Olmstead [sic] for his part of the work. I believe this would be obvious to Mr. Olmstead [sic] when he next visits the ground. In any event I shall be glad to have a conference with him on the subject when the occasion arises.”⁵⁵ For his part, Steele agreed to soften the design of the wall on the corner nearest the library, creating a shallow curve and a set of steps to connect the library yard to the public sidewalk. The retention of the hillside in the park was critical to Steele’s design for the library yard, where his brick and granite stone wall served as a ha-ha to mask the busy village streetscape below. Harbor Park was designed and constructed between 1928 and 1935. Although the park design complimented the Camden Amphitheatre, it retained its own, aesthetically distinct naturalistic design vocabulary and remained a separate, yet intimately connected, companion to the outdoor theater.

Steele’s collaboration with the Olmsted Brothers provided a carefully considered design that took into account the improvements planned for Harbor Park, including the opening of the vista to the harbor from the amphitheater and his awareness of the mill stream viewing terrace and the knoll on the opposite side of Atlantic Avenue as important extensions of his own design. The two plans were designed to dovetail with each other, and Steele’s influence drove the grade of the knoll opposite the library. As the designs for Harbor Park evolved, the placement of paths, finish grading, plantings, paths and benches provided an effortless flow from one property to the other, linking the public landscape from the top of High Street to the Harbor. Olmsted scholar Charles Beveridge wrote of this collaboration: “The artistic value and design quality of the Amphitheatre is more readily evident than is that of the Harbor Park. This is partly because Fletcher Steele created designs that were clearly the result of brilliant manipulation of natural materials, clearly works of art.” Balancing Steele’s artistry, Olmsted’s design for Harbor Park played an equally valuable role in the entire landscape arrangement. According to Beveridge: “No other harbor on the coast of Maine has a public space that contributes as much beauty to the whole setting of the harbor and the town as does this small hillside park. The hill mirrors the shape of the mountains behind and hides from view the stone wall of the library grounds along Atlantic Avenue. In all these ways the park enhances the visual quality and character of the spaces that surround it -- the library, the Amphitheatre, the harbor, the village, the mountains.”⁵⁶

Harbor Park and the Camden Public Library and Amphitheatre significantly enhanced the character of Camden’s Main Street and harbor. Coupled with the Village Green, tree-lined streets, and the other economic improvements driven by Camden’s summer residents, Camden was transformed from a sleepy, struggling fishing port into a culturally rich summer destination. More than a beautification program, however, these projects employed out-of-work local residents at the height of the Depression, and left a lasting cultural legacy for Camden that remains an important aspect of community life today.

Fletcher Steele and the Modernist Movement

When distilled to its simplest geometry, Fletcher Steele’s design for the Camden Amphitheatre steps beyond these historic traditions to foreshadow the abstracted geometric design that defines twentieth century Modern landscape design in the United States -- a design style that Steele continued to explore and refined in his later body of work. The theater can be simplified into a series of concentric arcs that form a perfect half-circle or hemicycle linked to a rectangular parallelogram on the ground plane, truncated by the diagonal line created by Atlantic Avenue. Cutting through the pure geometry of the U-shaped bowl like the slice of a broad knife is the

⁵⁴ Fletcher Steele, office memorandum, “Camden Library, Conferences on Submitting Model Showing Preliminary Study,” (Typewritten manuscript, Camden Library archives, n.d.), p.1.

⁵⁵ Fletcher Steele office Memorandum, 29 May 1929 (Camden Library archives).

⁵⁶ Charles Beveridge, in LANDSCAPES, 23-24

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 36**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

broad rubble stone stairway linking the ground plane to the upper terrace. The stairway created a strong axis which following Beaux Arts principles aligns with the rear entrance to the library, at the same time it creates a tension with the orientation of the amphitheater which has been turned to face the harbor. In this seemingly incongruous juxtaposition of disparate axes, Steele has skillfully introduced a bent axis that is critical to his manipulation of three-dimensional space and the overall success of his design. Expressed here as a proto-modern detail, the bent axis marks the landscape architect's exploration of French modernist principles and one of the earliest applications of Modernism to American landscape design. The dynamism expressed by the bent axis resonates throughout the theater as grassy aisles and secondary stairs slice through the terraces and disappear into the wooded borders of the design. Steele also eliminated the traditional boundary between audience and stage in his creation of a space where theatrical productions can be staged in two directions, facing either toward or away from the harbor.

Steele's contributions to Modernism in American landscape architecture represent one of the most important themes in interpreting and documenting the national importance of the Camden Amphitheatre. Steele's biographer Robin Karson has written "Steele's gardens reflect a deep, continuing interest in experiment rather than adherence to a specific style. Along with his writings, they constitute a link, arguably *the* link, between nineteenth-century Beaux Arts formalism and modern landscape design."⁵⁷ In her comprehensive text, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, landscape historian Elizabeth Barlow Rogers describes Steele as an avid design critic as well as a proponent of the Modernist movement. According to Rogers, the 1925 Paris exposition and Steele's subsequent study of the work of the French Modernists had tremendous impact on his design philosophy and willingness to experiment with new ideas. Like other scholars, Rogers acknowledges the widespread influence of Steele's 1930 article, "New Pioneering in Garden Design," on the rising generation of landscape designers, saying that Steele's work on the East Coast and Thomas Church's in California "were pivotal in bringing a modernist sensibility to American landscape architecture."⁵⁸ She also identifies Steele's work for Mabel Choate at Naumkeag (NHL) as a masterpiece representing what she calls the "transitional modernist garden."⁵⁹

While the work of the French modernists at the 1925 Paris exhibition may have sparked his interest, it was Steele's continuing examination of more complex and diverse works by designers that he knew through contemporary French periodicals and his subsequent visits to Europe, that he came to truly understand modernism. His 1930 article "New Pioneering in Garden Design" for *Landscape Architecture* for the first time exposed American designers and students of design to the innovative principles that would free them from the both the orthodoxy of Beaux Arts design and the naturalistic design theories that continued to persist in Harvard's graduate curriculum.

According to scholar of Modern landscape design Mark Treib, Steele's well-illustrated and insightful article became the first source of information about the French movement accessible to American designers and students, mainly because most of the publications and periodicals on French Modernism were written in French and few American designers or critics shared Steele's competency in the language.⁶⁰ Garrett Eckbo and Daniel Kiley, who were students in Harvard's Graduate School of Landscape Architecture in the 1930s and became proponents of the American Modernism movement in landscape architecture, both recognized Steele's influence on their early careers. Kiley considered Steele's article as "pivotal in his own career" and of great significance generally in the field of landscape architecture.⁶¹ According to Kiley: "Steele was the only good

⁵⁷ Karson, *Steele*, xix.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 437.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁶⁰ Marc Treib, *Garrett Eckbo: Modern Landscapes for Living* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 22-23.

⁶¹ Karson, *Steele*, 161; en. 101, 335. Quotation is Karson's based on her telephone interview with Daniel Kiley, 8 April 1988.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 37**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

designer working during the twenties and thirties, [and] also the only one who was really interested in new things....Steele was the one who looked up the modern French architects to see what they were doing with gardens. The idea that the garden didn't have to be symmetrical, or static, was a revelation in the field."⁶²

Eckbo was most inspired by Steele's lectures at Harvard and, subsequently visited Steele's Boston studio to closely study a number of the master designer's projects; these included the Camden Library and Amphitheatre; various gardens at Naumkeag; the Seyburn garden; the grounds of Mary Schofield's home at Peterborough, N.H., including the Waterfall Terrace and mill ruins; the West Garden with its forced perspective at Ancrum House in the Catskills; and the circular swimming pool at Lisburne Grange, the home of Samuel Sloan, with its pinwheel arrangement of scroll-like pruned hedges. According to Steele's biographer, "Eckbo sensed that Steele's gardens were offering a link between the Beaux Arts formalism that had dominated design in the first quarter of the century and the modernism that was transforming painting, sculpture, and architecture...He was also inspired by the talent and energy with which Steele wrought his work and by his frank questioning of the assumptions of his colleagues and predecessors." It was Steele's overall attitude toward "experimentation," as much as his designs, that sparked Eckbo to explore modernist ideas and study Steele's work as an adjunct to the traditional curriculum being offered in Harvard's graduate program in landscape architecture.⁶³ In an interview many years later, Eckbo recalled Steele's role as a transitional figure in bridging the gap between traditional design and modernism. He explained the reasons he was drawn to Steele's design approach: "He interested me because he was an experimenter, he wasn't content to keep repeating the formula—which we were still being taught was the only way to do things...His vocabulary was traditional but, like any good designer, he was taking the vocabulary handed him by the culture and manipulated well. I was also impressed with him as a human being. He seemed to possess great humanity, to be a leader."⁶⁴

Harvard's graduate curriculum in landscape architecture was controlled by Henry V. Hubbard in the early and mid-1930s. Despite his invitations to Steele to lecture to students, Hubbard remained resistant to change and continued to elevate works of nature above those designed by practitioners. His teaching and writings were rooted in traditional practice, whether informal or formal. In 1938 articles by Eckbo, Kiley, and fellow student James Rose appeared in *Architectural Record*, calling for an end to traditional practice and dramatically altering the course of landscape architecture and landscape education in the United States.⁶⁵ Soon after, English landscape architect Christopher Tunnard, author of *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* (1938), was recruited to head the graduate program in landscape architecture at Harvard. According to Treib, Tunnard's book would remain the foremost English-language tract on modernism until the publication of Eckbo's *Landscape for Living* in 1950.⁶⁶

Considered by landscape historian Melanie Simo to have "one of the most penetrating minds that ever discussed Modernism," Eckbo continued to be the most articulate of the three pioneering modernists.⁶⁷ Sharing Steele's interest in defining the essence of fine art, he explored the dichotomy between the formal and informal, nature

⁶² Karson, *Steele*, xix, en 1, 331. Kiley's quotation comes from his telephone interview with Karson, 8 April 1988.

⁶³ Karson, *Steele*, 232; en. 56, 337. Quotation and analysis are Karson's, based in part on correspondence by Garrett Eckbo, to Robin Karson, 26 July 1988, and Karson's telephone interview with Eckbo of 19 April 1988.

⁶⁴ Garrett Eckbo, telephone interview with Robin Karson, 19 April 1988, as quoted in Karson, *Steele*, xix.

⁶⁵ The three articles were republished in *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*, ed. Marc Treib (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). The three articles were Garrett Eckbo, Daniel U. Kiley, and James C. Rose, "Landscape Design in the Primeval Environment", *Architectural Record* (February 1940); "Landscape Design in the Rural Environment", *Architectural Record* (August 1939); and "Landscape Design in the Urban Environment", *Architectural Record* (May 1939).

⁶⁶ Christopher Tunnard, *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* (New York: Scribner, 1938). Note: in 1937-38, German modernist Walter Gropius had previously been appointed the head of Harvard's School of Architecture.

⁶⁷ Simo, 60. According to Simo, Eckbo's previous experience living and working in California led him to reject Hubbard's philosophy and rebel against the school's curriculum.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 38**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

and art, in an article for the *Magazine of Art* in 1941, saying: “The formal garden forces architecture upon the landscape, the informal garden forces the landscape upon architecture. Neither does anything toward the basic problem of garden design: the integration and harmonization of the structural geometry of man with the biological growth and freedom of nature....The fundamental fallacy seems to be that a choice between the two extremes is necessary. The argument has been to take either biology or geometry; why not biology plus geometry?”⁶⁸

At Camden, Steele explored the careful balance between biology and geometry, and the integration of landscape and architecture. Steele’s use of the abstract is another element to be viewed as innovative or proto-modern, particularly the marked vertical accents that Steele incorporated in his design of the amphitheater. Steele’s display provides a sense of informal balance and interest while inventing with the natural forms a highly unique design vocabulary. His apprenticeship with Manning created an appreciation for native plants. His keen interest in exploring plants as artistic objects within the landscape led him to repeatedly favor white birch (*Betula papyrifera*) as a dramatic, vertical element within his landscape compositions. In the Camden Amphitheater, Steele used columnar evergreens such as arborvitae (*Thuja sp.*) to add drama to the planting scheme. Instead of selecting a plant palette that simply represented those most favored by the client, Steele carefully selected his plant materials for their contributions of color, texture and form within the larger design. In the Camden Amphitheatre, he selected native spruce, arborvitae and other evergreens for their soft, dark cushioning backdrop, and then repeated the evergreen accents by using columnar arborvitae to contribute to the three-dimensional interest within the theater seating. Specimen birch clumps, a favorite of Steele’s, were planted beside boulders to add a light, graceful visual punctuation which stood in strong contrast to the opacity of the evergreens. Permitting views through the trunks, the birch clumps were virtually transparent at ground level, yet added captivating patterns of shadow and sunlight to the smooth green lawns on the floor and seats of the theater. Native elms and occasional maples provided a canopy or ceiling to Steele’s outdoor room.

Landscape historian and Steele’s biographer Robin Karson was the first to recognize the genius of Steel’s design for the Camden Amphitheatre and Public Library and describe its highly significant proto-modern characteristics. As a consultant to the recent preservation plan for the amphitheater, she revisited the significance of the Camden project in the context of Steele’s career and in the introduction of modernistic design in the United States. She wrote:

Steele created over seven hundred landscape projects characterized by grand spatial mastery, sophisticated historical quotation, and inventiveness in planting design and architectural ornament. His landscapes exhibit a vitality and expressiveness that virtually none of his colleagues’ work matched... [Steele investigated] the limits of the Beaux Arts formalism that had defined landscape design in the early years of the century. But the first tangible evidence of the effects of modernism on Steele’s work appeared in the Camden Amphitheatre. The bent axis was revolutionary for its day; Steele’s near-abstract use of white birch to break up the long, curving sweeps of stone terrace was also without precedent in the history of American landscape design.⁶⁹

Steele’s innovative use of the bent axis in his Camden design is generally accepted as evidence of his early experimentation with Modernist principles. Freed from the traditional neoclassical arrangement that aligned garden areas as extensions of buildings, Steele adjusted the open end of the amphitheater until it properly captured the view of the harbor, despite its lack of orientation to the parent building (the library). He then

⁶⁸ Garrett Eckbo “Outdoors and In: Gardens as Living Space,” *Magazine of Art* 34, no. 5 (October 1941), as quoted in Treib, *Garrett Eckbo*, 15.

⁶⁹ Karson, *LANDSCAPES* 7-8.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 39**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

carefully linked the view from the library to the center of the theater with an angled axis, drawn down the fieldstone steps to the center of the theater floor where the larger U-shaped seating arrangement could then redirect the view to the harbor. Steele's 1930 essay, "New Pioneering in Garden Design," drew attention to the landscape problem presented by the axis and the dramatic ways the French Modernists Pierre-Émile Legrain and Tony Garnier created informal, "occult" balance and "shattered" the axis. In a 1933 article, "Space Design" in *Park and Recreation*, Steele acknowledged his own efforts and those of other American designers to escape from the rigid requirement for axial symmetry. Instead of focal elements within the composition aligning on primary and secondary axes, he called upon park designers to abandon the traditional axis in favor of a bent axis.⁷⁰

It is clear from Steele's writing that the bent axial arrangement of elements was both an aesthetic and a practical solution for the design of the Camden Amphitheatre. As he explained:

To lie in proper axial relation with the harbor, it was necessary to build the theater at an odd, arbitrary angle with the axis of the library. Building and theater were connected by a broad flight of steps where the round end of the theater meets its straight side walls. A similar flight of steps was built symmetrically across the theater, leading to an informal play-field. All steps were built in gardenesque fashion, with native plants such as Wineleaf Cinquefoil (*potentilla tridentata*) in the joining. The eye is satisfied with this apparently simple relation of building and theater garden.⁷¹

Landscape scholar Marc Treib, who has closely studied the work of Garrett Eckbo, has identified the destruction of the axis as one of six axioms of modern landscape design. Treib's essay "Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture" was one of the first to seriously explore the roots of Modernism in American landscape design. The other axioms central to modernism include: denial of historical styles, a rational approach to design, one determined by the conditions presented by the site, circumstances, and social needs, concern for spatial qualities over pattern, the use of plants as botanical specimens or sculpture, and the integration of building and garden.⁷²

Just as important as the bent axis, the view from the amphitheater to the harbor was a significant design consideration that required proper framing to achieve its full potential. To contain the view, however, Steele paradoxically reestablished a sense of order and axial symmetry at the southern entrance. Here he returned to the precedent of the Italian gardens of the Renaissance and sought to harmonize his designs for the southern entrance with the Colonial Revival design of the brick garden pavilions and library. At the time of construction, he explained his practical rationale:

At the harbor end there was danger of too weak enframement of the view if only vegetation were relied upon. Moreover, heavy planting was prevented by need of keeping open the end view of the library building from the side street. Plants soon grow up to hide views. Instead it was decided to place little buildings on either side. They would serve as ticket booths if ever needed, as housing for electric connections and switches, for storing collapsible chairs, as tool houses. They have proved useful and help the picture.⁷³

⁷⁰ Karson, *Steele*, 104-105; Steele, "New Pioneering," 163-164, 172 & 176-177; Fletcher Steele, "Space Design," *Park and Recreation* (September 1932), 17-18.

⁷¹ Fletcher Steele, untitled manuscript, ca. 1931 (Fletcher Steele Papers, Rochester Historical Society).

⁷² Marc Treib, "Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture," in *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*.

⁷³ Fletcher Steele, untitled manuscript, ca. 1931 (Fletcher Steele Papers, Rochester Historical Society).

Steele was a proponent of elevating landscape design to the caliber of the other fine arts. His search, as reflected in “New Pioneering in Garden Design,” for an artistic expression in landscape design was the equivalent to the modernist ideals being expressed in the other fine arts.⁷⁴ Scholar Robin Karson refers to Camden Amphitheatre’s “nearly abstract” qualities making direct reference to Alfred Barr’s analysis of modern painting. Barr, the director of the Museum of Modern Art and one of the most influential voices in America on modernism, distinguished between “pure-abstractions” and “near-abstractions” stating that in the later case “the artist, starting with natural forms, transforms them into abstract or nearly abstract forms.”⁷⁵

Another scholar to examine the transition from Beaux Arts design to Modernism is Professor Terry Schnadelbach of the University of Florida, who sees modernism in American landscape architecture as specifically embracing the “twentieth century search for new forms” and employing construction techniques that were “inconceivable in the earlier classical period.” He explains the concept of “abstract classicism” as it applies to the work of Fletcher Steele and his contemporaries, particularly as it relates to the three-dimensional modeling of space and the availability of mature nursery materials in the 1920s that could be readily transplanted to instantly produce large-scale spatial effects:

The modernist idiom is separate from abstract classicism in that the latter was simply the stripping away of ornamentation and composite forms to reveal primary classical forms. Abstract classicism, when combined with new materials or technologies, produced new forms completely original and distinct from their predecessors. It is these innovations and the resultant style that may be called modern. The technology of instant landscape was one of the introductions to modernist design. It involved new construction techniques and machinery. It allowed for the planting of unified *bosques* and *allées* which was nearly impossible before, as mass uniformity was very difficult to achieve when growth was begun with young specimens. It was certainly never achieved before with fully mature specimens. The production of even-stands within nurseries was also a new technology. New even-stand massing produced a new aesthetic that supported the abstraction of space and form.⁷⁶

There is a distinctive quality of three-dimensionality in Steele’s original design. Steele carefully manipulated the difficult topographic conditions of the Camden site and gave structure to a new spatial form -- vertically with terraces, circular stairways, and broad bands of stone-edged stairs -- horizontally with intersecting geometric forms, long and narrow vistas, and in some cases illusionary devices. Steele achieved what he called in his seminal article on modernism, “occult balance,” by departing from formal symmetry in his details for the amphitheater, including his use of large, random boulders, informally placed clumps of birch, and his break with the rules for axial symmetry. Steele continued to explore the sculptural qualities of space and the possibilities presented by the volumetric compression of stairway construction. In 1936 his design for an outdoor spiral staircase for the Wesson Smithwick Garden was selected for the cover of the catalogue for the exhibition on Contemporary Landscape Architecture held at the San Francisco Museum of Art. At Naumkeag in 1933 Steele created the South Lawn, his first acknowledged work where he sculpted the earth based on abstracted forms derived from the surrounding landscape, and in 1938 he completed the Blue Steps where without ambivalence he embraced Modernist principles of design.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Karson, *LANDSCAPES*, 7-8; *Steele*, 159 & 161.

⁷⁵ Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 13, as quoted in Marc Treib, *Garrett Eckbo: Modern Landscapes for Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 22. According to Treib, the search for abstraction figured importantly in Eckbo’s interpretation of modernism in landscape architecture.

⁷⁶ Terry R. Schnadelbach, *Ferruccio Vitale: Landscape Architect of the Country Place Era* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 37. Schnadelbach argues that while Steele is generally recognized as the pioneering modernist in landscape architecture, almost all Vitale’s work from the 1920s included design innovations representing the beginning of modernism in landscape.

⁷⁷ Karson, *Steele*, xxi & 161; Steele, “New Pioneering,” 163-164. A notice for the museum exhibition and an illustration of the

Complexity, Collaboration, and a Distinct Regional Style

In September 1930, as the work on the Camden Amphitheatre neared completion, the *Boston Post* described the amphitheater: “A garden theater, the only one of its kind in the country, which combines the ancient beauty of classical Greece with the rugged verdure of the State of Maine.” The writer continued, “Although many residents of the town may not realize that the little theater is a gem of landscape architecture, the place brings out the latent appreciation of beauty that is present in most of us. The longer one gazes at the place the greater it impresses.”⁷⁸

It is the rich complexity and artistic genius of the Camden Amphitheatre that sets it apart as an outstanding example of early twentieth-century American landscape design, created at a time when the search among artists, architects, and landscape architects to define a distinct American style reached its zenith. The growing sophistication of American culture as reflected in the movement for village improvement and philanthropy for the fine arts (music and drama) demanded creative genius and an exploration of American landscape architecture that could respond to the restrictions of funding, maintenance issues, and design limitations of public projects. Steele’s skill in combining elements from the Colonial Revival, English Arts and Crafts, with an idealized form of the native landscape, reveal a complete mastery of each aesthetic movement and the genius to combine them to enhance and energize his larger composition.

Steele’s symbolic depiction of the rockbound coast of Maine coast in his amphitheater design is rendered with a great deal of imagination and a high degree of workmanship. Not only does the design exhibit a quality of abstraction derived from French Modernism, but it also mirrors the search of American painters for a distinctly American form of expression. Culturally sophisticated, Steele certainly was aware of this artistic movement including the work of American artists such as Arthur Dove, Georgia O’Keefe, and John Marin; Steele may have found Marin’s abstract depictions of the Maine coast and islands particularly inspiring.

Integral to the sense of regionalism apparent in Steele’s Camden work is the use of native trees and shrubs and the extensive and naturalistic use of locally quarried native rock. Atypical of Steele’s other work, these characteristics predominate at Camden and seem to place it at the forefront of what Henry V. Hubbard and Theodora Kimball called “the modern American landscape style” in their *Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design* (1917).⁷⁹ This practice encouraged an astute study of nature and natural forms, the exclusive or predominant use of native plants, the development of naturalistic stone masonry techniques, and the careful presentation of views. The style links him with Warren Manning, his mentor, and other twentieth century designers who reserved these techniques for the outer reaches of estates where informality, naturalism, and a sense of the wild were desirable. It also placed him among practitioners such as O.C. Simonds, Wilhelm Miller, and Jens Jensen, who were engaged in a search for a pure American style in the early decades of the twentieth century. Interestingly this artistic movement emerged at the same time the popularity of Colonial Revival architecture and interest in America’s past gained momentum. Plantings of locally appropriate native trees and shrubs and what was perceived to be colonial garden forms were viewed as compatible with the new regionally-based Colonial Revival architecture. This allusion to the colonial origins of New England and Camden’s past is

catalogue with Steele’s drawing appeared under the heading, “Contemporary Garden Art in California,” in *Landscape Architecture* 27, no. 3 (April 1937), 158-159; Henry Russell-Hitchcock wrote the catalogue’s introduction. The South Lawn and Blue Steps are considered the most evocative and iconic work of Steele’s modern phase; see Rogers, *Landscape Design*, 437-438.

⁷⁸ Joseph D. Harrington, “Garden Theater Gem of Beauty in Camden, Me.,” *Boston Post*, Sept. 12, 1930.

⁷⁹ Henry Vincent Hubbard and Theodora Kimball, *Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 58. Hubbard’s reference to “modern” should not be confused with the Modernist movement or Modern Landscape design; instead he used the term to differentiate twentieth-century practice with its emphasis on native plantings and indigenous land forms from the nineteenth-century naturalistic style defined by Frederick Law Olmsted and others.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 42**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

further echoed in the use of millstones, the selective placement of brick walls, the quarry-like character of the amphitheater, and the stately brick pavilions.

Steele's collaboration with Charles Loring resulted in a careful balance of architecture and landscape. Their close working relationship (they shared the same office in Boston) provided for an effortless balance and blending of the buildings with the landscape. When the initial design for the amphitheater was presented, Loring suggested a door at the rear of the library could provide an appropriate focal point for the view from the floor of the amphitheater to the building. This door, and Steele's subsequent design of the double staircase and Fauns Garden, was the first stage in a careful descent from the library to the amphitheater. As the design development progressed, Steele integrated Loring's preference for brick in key locations along his stone walls, while Loring's design of the brick pavilions served as a perfect solution to frame the view and tie the landscape composition back to the architectural vocabulary of the library building. Steele's plan, on the one hand, created an overall unified composition that complemented the architecture of the library with its historical references to the nation's past and, on the other hand, dramatically reorganized and refashioned the existing topography to create a completely independent, multi-functional outdoor space.

Similarly, Steele's collaboration with Hans Heistad enhanced the arrangement and craftsmanship of the stone work and contributed a valuable understanding of local plants. Heistad brought significant local experience from his work with the Olmsted firm at Chatwold in Bar Harbor to his designs for Weatherend. Trained in Northern Europe, Heistad brought to the Maine landscape a sensibility and deep appreciation for the rockbound coast and the native evergreens. His characteristic style is seen in the creation of stone structures, extensive stone-masonry terraces and retaining walls, as well as a romanticized imagery of coastal trees and wild plants. Heistad was instrumental in the selection and acquisition of plants native to Maine coast.

An Outstanding Example of the Outdoor Theater

Although Fletcher Steele was inspired by early Greek, Roman and Renaissance prototypes, he had no interest in directly copying classical prototypes for the design of Camden's outdoor theater. Instead, he focused on the underlying structure of historical antecedents and selectively adopted and combined certain elements to achieve a unique synthesis of design that was ideally suited to the topography of the site and the tastes and lifestyle of his clients. Steele undoubtedly was inspired by examples such as the grand Renaissance period amphitheater at the Pitti Palace in Florence's Boboli Gardens and the race-course at the Borghese Villa, which Charles Platt in his *Italian Gardens* (1894) and Edith Wharton in *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904) had both eloquently praised. His own work included the woodland theater at the Ethan Allen Estate and applied similar spatial principles to projects such as the swimming pool at Lisburne Grange and the descent to a secluded circular garden of turf at Wingfield. Certain contemporary examples may have held greater interest for him and other designers, for example the theater at Cranbrook, Myron Hunt's work at Pomona College, and the Olmsted firm's garden theater at the Conklin Estate on Long Island. Steele seems to have been particularly interested in the artistic problem posed by the outdoor theater, and certainly was well-acquainted from his travels in Europe with the ancient Greek theaters of Sicily, Roman examples at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and Renaissance and Baroque examples throughout Italy and France.

The Camden Amphitheatre represents an unusual, highly artistic, and enduring interpretation of the common landscape genre -- the outdoor or open-air theater. In America, this landscape type grew in popularity from the first decade of the twentieth century, when it first appeared on private estates and educational institutions and became associated with the nation's growing cultural sophistication. In 1903 William Randolph Hearst funded the construction of the Greek Theater at the University of California at Berkeley (NHL), a copy of the ancient Greek theater of Epidauros.⁸⁰ In 1905 the artist colony at Cornish, New Hampshire, built a small temple in the

⁸⁰ Frank Waugh, *Outdoor Theaters: The Design, Construction and Use of Open-Air Auditoriums* (Boston: Richard G. Badger,

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 43**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

grassy esplanade on sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens's property, to put on "A Masque of Ours" written by poet Percy MacKaye, artist Maxfield Parrish, composer Arthur Whiting, playwright Louis Shipman and, his wife, landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman.⁸¹ The temple was designed as an ephemeral setting for their summer theater program and as such does not survive today. Similar private estate theaters were constructed by the MacDowell family at their home in Peterborough New Hampshire, and at Gifford Pinchot's Grey Towers in Milford, Pennsylvania. Both of these private theaters are extant, though in varied stages of preservation. Across the country, the Outdoor Forest Theater in Carmel, California, was built in 1910.⁸²

At the same time, several outdoor theaters were designed for college campuses across the United States. The Greek Theater at Pomona College in Claremont, California, was designed by Myron Hunt in 1913 and the same year the Olmsted Brothers designed an Open Air Theater for Bryn Mawr College, outside Philadelphia. During the same period, Frank Waugh designed the Rhododendron Garden at the Massachusetts Agricultural College for outdoor graduation ceremonies and Shakespearian productions.⁸³ In 1915, architect Marcus Burrowes designed a Greek theater at "Cranbrook", the farm of George Booth near Detroit; it later became the nucleus for the Cranbrook (NHL) educational institutes.⁸⁴ In 1916, landscape architect Loring Underwood designed the Outdoor Theater at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York.⁸⁵ In 1917, Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, created their Pageant Green. Most of these theaters have been lost or substantially changed to meet the ever-changing demands of their student populations.

By 1920 larger, community-funded open air theaters designed to serve wider audiences had begun to appear in public parks across the nation. The architectural firm of Purcell & Elmsley designed the Open Air Theater in Anoka, Minnesota, in 1914. Today called the Windego Park Auditorium Open Air Theater, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (No. 80001934).⁸⁶ Landscape architect Jens Jensen designed the Players' Green for Columbus Park in Chicago; the stage was an informal lawn surrounded on three sides by trees and separated from the audience lawn by a narrow brook. Jensen included natural "players' greens" in many of his other, private, projects.⁸⁷ The City of St. Louis and the St. Louis Advertising Club built the St. Louis Municipal Opera, an outdoor theater on a hillside in Forest Park in 1917. The Muny, as it became known, continues to serve as a cultural icon for the city of St. Louis.⁸⁸

Spurred by the popularity of outdoor theaters, in 1917 Professor Frank Waugh (1869-1943) wrote *Outdoor Theaters: The Design, Construction and Use of Open-Air Auditoriums*. Waugh headed the Department of Landscape Architecture at the Massachusetts Agricultural College, now the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He wrote several textbooks on landscape architecture, often promoting the use of indigenous plants in naturalistic compositions and the concept of landscape architecture as fine art. Waugh was particularly impressed by a small horseshoe shaped theater he discovered in Dresden's city park during his travels to Europe in 1910. He carefully made measured drawings of the small woodland theater which he later published in *Outdoor Theaters* and several other books. Following Jensen's lead, he created an informal outdoor theater and gathering place in the Rhododendron Garden on the campus of the Massachusetts college. He consulted on the recreational development of the nation's national forests, which included the design of outdoor theaters, and in

1917), 80-84.

⁸¹ Alma M. Gilbert and Judith B. Tankard, *A Place of Beauty: The Artists and Gardens of the Cornish Colony* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2000), 18-19.

⁸² Waugh, *Outdoor Theaters*, 123-125.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 75-79, 96-97 & 93-95.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-106; Cranbrook Schools Historic Timeline, 1915 (http://schools.cranbrook.edu/flash/timeline_final.swf).

⁸⁵ Waugh, *Outdoor Theaters*, 85-88.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 107-109.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 128-130; Robert E. Grese, *Jens Jensen* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), 82-84.

⁸⁸ Waugh; *Outdoor Theaters*, 52; "Muny" at www.en.wikipedia.org.

the 1930s wrote the handbook, *Landscape Conservation*, to guide the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps in national and state parks and forests.⁸⁹

In *Outdoor Theaters*, Waugh described the uses of outdoor theaters for Greek dramas, Shakespearian productions, pageants and masques, and other informal programs. He emphasized that outdoor theaters were best suited to simple productions which did not require elaborate stage settings. Waugh discussed the design considerations for outdoor theaters, and described more than twenty examples of outdoor theaters built in America in the early twentieth century. Finally, he described the garden theaters of Italian villas built during the Renaissance. These artistic garden theaters, though only a small detail in a larger layout, were an integral part of the larger garden design. Sometimes they terminated an axis; sometimes they occupied the space between two buildings; and sometimes they filled a nook or angle of the garden. They were small, intended for the accommodation of the members of the household and their guests.

Waugh advised his readers that the ideal size of an outdoor theater was 200 people, and that the space should be made compact and intimate to offer the best acoustical and psychological effects. The best way to achieve this was to “contract the size of the theater, to bring the audience and performers closely together, and to give the place a strong feeling of enclosure.” He wrote:

It is still exceedingly important that the audience and the performers should feel a sense of intimacy and personal relationship fostered by the privacy of the place...the best methods of securing this privacy, from the standpoint of landscape architecture, are to be found in the employment of trees, shrubs, and hedges. Large tree masses are most generally useful. Straightly trimmed hedges with severe outline and monotonous color masses can certainly be made very effective under some conditions...Since it is the purpose of all these plantings to supply first the background for the spectacle and second a quieting enclosure, the simpler and more monotonous compositions are the better.⁹⁰

Fletcher Steele was undoubtedly familiar with Waugh’s publication and, based on his first-hand knowledge of Italian garden theaters as well as ancient classical forms, was well-suited to apply his own creative energy to Waugh’s basic practical advice. In his own book, *Gardens and People*, Steele references Villa Collodi, the example Waugh gives in his book for the Italian garden theater.⁹¹

In 1918, California author Sheldon Cheney published *The Open-Air Theater*. Cheney had launched *Theater Arts Magazine* in 1916. In *The Open-Air Theater*, he described the “Open-Air Theater Movement” as a reaction against sophisticated, artificial city life, and he divided outdoor theaters into three types: the Greek theater, which was sometimes a replica of a specific theater from antiquity; the forest theater, with a natural background and a hillside for the audience; and the garden theater, which, somewhat more than a clearing in the woods, relied on an underlying architectural structure. Cheney pointed out that the most notable examples of garden theaters were those of Italian villas.⁹² Steele’s work for the Camden Public Library Committee celebrated Cheney’s concept of a garden theater and shared Waugh’s philosophy on the use of indigenous plants and his arguments defining landscape architecture as fine art.

⁸⁹ Linda Flint McClelland, “Waugh, Frank Albert,” in *Pioneers*, ed. Birnbaum and Karson, 434-436; Linda Flint McClelland, Introduction to Reprint Edition, *Book of Landscape Gardening* by Frank Waugh, 1926, reprint (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press in association with the Library of Landscape History, 2007), 3.

⁹⁰ Waugh, *Outdoor Theaters*, 38 & 40-41.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 15-28, 31-62, & 131-135.

⁹² Cheney, *Open-Air Theater*, 5 & 10-11.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 45**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The Camden Amphitheatre represents a highly important transition of the outdoor amphitheater form from a private estate to a common feature that appeared over and over again on the public landscape in the town parks, state parks, and national parks that took form during the New Deal, which closely followed the completion of Steele's Camden work. While it may be difficult to trace the influence of Steele's amphitheater design to specific examples of the New Deal era, he contributed (as did the many California examples) to the popularity of the property type. Certainly the Player's Dell at the College of William and Mary (1947) reflects similarities to Steele Camden project in its use of Colonial Revival detailing and the arrangement of lawn seating, enclosure, stage and water scenery as a backdrop to the stage. Other examples which followed, sponsored by the CCC and WPA, took form in the following decade, including the Red Rocks Amphitheater in the Denver Mountain Parks, the outdoor theater at Wintersmith Park in Oklahoma, or the amphitheater in Mt. Tamalpais, Marin County, California. Hans Heisted planned an outdoor theater for the Camden Hills Recreation Demonstration Area (later State Park), although it was never constructed. Steele's protégé, Garrett Eckbo, created his own rendition of a circular outdoor theater enveloped by dense vegetation in his theoretical community design for Contempoville. All of these projects explore the adaptation of early Greek and Roman outdoor theaters to an American form, but the landscape design of Steele's amphitheater attains a level of artistry unparalleled and certainly unsurpassed in either the private practice that preceded his work at Camden or the vast amount of public work that followed.

Philanthropy, Country Planning, and Village Improvement

Mary Louise Curtis Bok of Philadelphia and Camden, Maine, was one of the most influential and philanthropic summer residents of the region. Mary Bok was the only child of Cyrus H. K. Curtis, owner of the Curtis Publishing Co. which published the *Ladies Home Journal* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Her father had grown up in Portland, Maine, and built a summer cottage on Penobscot Bay in Camden in 1902. Mary Louise Curtis married Edward Bok in 1896.⁹³

As editor of the *Ladies Home Journal*, Edward Bok introduced his family to such influential people as President Theodore Roosevelt, President Calvin Coolidge, author Rudyard Kipling, author Helen Keller, actress Annie Russell, pianist Josef Hofmann, violinist Ephraim Zimbalist, conductor Leopold Stokowski, and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. Bok persuaded these and other prominent figures to write articles for the *Ladies Home Journal*. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. contributed several articles, including his thoughts on the City Beautiful Movement and civic improvement. Bok's close friend J. Horace McFarland, president of the American Civic Association, wrote articles encouraging small towns to improve their living conditions and stimulate aesthetic thinking. He and Bok cooperated to save Niagara Falls from electric power producing dams. Bok wrote editorials about community beautification, and in 1913 he founded the Merion Civic Association at their Philadelphia home to promote community spirit and coordinate improvements in the neighborhood. Bok's love of flowers and gardens led him, in 1924, to give prizes for the best-kept front lawn in Camden; in 1925 to propose flower baskets like those he had seen in Holland for the streetlight poles in Camden; in 1926 to establish the annual Bok Garden Club Awards; and in 1926 to hire Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. to design the Bok Tower Gardens (NHL) carillon and park at the Bok winter home in Lake Wales, Florida.⁹⁴

Sharing her husband's interest in civic improvement and following the lead of village improvement societies in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and other New England resort towns, Bok became an advocate for Camden's

⁹³ Eleanor Ames, Conversation with Enid Okun, 19 August 2008. Unpublished program notes by Enid Okun referenced in Eleanor Ames, "A Remarkable Woman's Patronage," *Maine Olmsted Alliance for Parks and Landscapes Newsletter* (Summer 2002), 8.

⁹⁴ Johannes L. Krabbendam, *The Model Man: A Life of Edward W. Bok, 1863-1930* (Utrecht, 1964), 126-133 & 212-224; John Williams, *History of Camden, Maine*, 345, 361, 388-389, 414, 436 & 456.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 46**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

beautification. The movement for civic improvements gained impetus following the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, with the City Beautiful movement and the emergence of the city planning profession in the United States. Planners and civic leaders alike promoted reforms in municipal government and called for city planning to achieve well-kept streets, beautiful parks and civic centers, organized street systems, Beaux Arts government buildings, favorable sanitation, and other civic improvements. By 1920 the City Beautiful movement found its corollary in the less well-known Country Planning movement which, supported by the American Civic Association promoted analogous improvements in rural towns and villages.⁹⁵

Village improvement, considered to be a branch of civic art, was defined as "the conservation, improvement, and utilization of public property," and was one of several causes supported by the profession of landscape architecture as well as organizations such as the Federation of Women's Clubs, the Garden Club of America, and the Women's National Farm and Garden Association.⁹⁶ Dramatist Percy MacKaye, a proponent of the emerging movement for the widespread development of community theaters and the author of *The Civic Theater* (1912), urged American communities to establish local theaters, saying "No better investment—in pleasure and the resultant attraction of wealth—could be made by a country community than an outdoor theater."⁹⁷

Such concern for the visual beauty of America's towns and countryside occurred at the same time New Englanders became interested in celebrating and in many cases reinventing their Colonial heritage. Spurred by Andrew Jackson Downing's writings, the idea for village improvement societies took form in the founding of the Laurel Hill Association in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1853. The idea rapidly grew and by 1880, according to scholar of American city planning Jon Peterson, Massachusetts had twenty-eight such societies and Connecticut between fifty and sixty, many of them originating in communities along the coast or in the mountains interested in attracting the summer carriage trade. By 1900, the National League of Improvement Associations (later called the American League for Civic Improvement) had formed commingling proponents for urban and rural improvements, as well as those supporting visual and social reform. Intended to perpetuate the nineteenth century practices of scenery preservation and naturalistic park design, the American Park and Outdoor Art Association was founded in 1897, attracting members from the broadening landscape architecture profession. In 1904 the two organizations merged to form the American Civic Association, which for many years was led by J. Horace MacFarland. In January 1904 Edward Bok introduced a "Beautiful America" page as a regular feature of the *Ladies Home Journal*. By September 1905 there were reportedly 2,426 village improvement societies nationwide. Leaders of these organizations and alliances felt that such civic improvements would enhance visual beauty and order and the activities they generated would lead to moral development, productive citizenry, and an improved quality of life.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ The American Civic Association issued a pamphlet, *Country Planning*, in 1915; it was written by landscape educator Frank A. Waugh, who inspired by his travels in Europe and the findings of President T. Roosevelt's Commission on County Life, had published *Rural Improvements* the year before and established a landscape extension program to assist local communities in Massachusetts in improving public roads, village commons, and the grounds of public buildings (schools, city halls, railroad stations, etc.).

⁹⁶ Frank A. Waugh, "Village improvement in relation to planting," in *The Standard Cyclopaedia of Horticulture*, ed. L.H. Bailey, vol. III (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 2658.

⁹⁷ Percy MacKaye, "Introduction," in *Outdoor Theaters*, by Frank A. Waugh, 5.

⁹⁸ Jon Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 108-117 & 152. Landscape architects had historically been advocates for village improvement. In June 1849 Andrew Jackson Downing had written "On the Improvement of Country Villages" which was published in *Rural Essays*, ed. George William Curtis, 1853. In 1904, Warren Manning had written "The History of Village Improvement in the United States" for *The Craftsman*. Prof. L.H. Bailey, of Cornell University, chaired the Commission on Country Life and edited the commission's report, which led to the Smith-Lever Act (1914) supporting state agricultural extension services that included assistance for rural improvements. In addition to his writings, Frank Waugh also organized a national conference on the topic in the early 1920s for the Russell Sage Foundation with Mrs. Francis King, president of the Women's National Farm and Garden Association, as the keynote speaker.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 47**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Sharing in these beliefs, Mary Bok used her family wealth to affect such changes in her beloved Philadelphia, as well as the summer communities with which her family had long associations. While she shared her husband's enthusiasm for civic improvement, Mary Bok also shared her parent's love of music. She majored in music in school and she was proud of her father's gifts of magnificent pipe organs to the City of Portland, Maine, and to the Congregational and Episcopal churches in Camden. After her mother's death in 1910, Mrs. Bok became involved with the Settlement Music School in Philadelphia, which provided free music classes to poor and immigrant children. In 1917 Mrs. Bok donated a building to the school in memory of her mother.⁹⁹

At the end of World War I, revolutions occurred in Russia, Germany, and Hungary. Many of the greatest musicians in Europe lost their government supported jobs in the aftermath of these upheavals. When the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music closed, after the Bolshevik Revolution, Josef Hofmann, Ephraim Zimbalist, and Leopold Stokowski went to Mrs. Bok and begged her to bring some of the musicians to America. She created the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, named for her father, in 1924 to employ them all. The Curtis Institute provided free tuition, free instruments and free travel to auditions and summer study for students. The world-famous faculty taught students "not only how to sing or play, but also the history of music, the laws of its making, languages, ear training and music appreciation." Mary Bok served as president of the Institute from 1924 to 1969, financing it, directing its administration, and attending student recitals.¹⁰⁰

Mary Bok's philanthropic work in Camden began in 1916 when she purchased the hillside parcel in Camden where the Ocean View Hotel had burned to the ground, and donated it to the people of the town for use as a library and public park as soon as the funds for the building could be raised. The fundraising took ten years because of the disruption of World War I. In the end Mary Bok persuaded her father and his friends, John Gribbel and Chauncy Keep, each to contribute \$5000 to set up a library trust with her.¹⁰¹ She appealed again to the men in 1926 when it was rumored that a gas station would be built on the vacant lot in the center of town where the Bay View Hotel had burned in 1917. Each contributed \$5,000 to purchase the lot and hire the Olmsted Brothers to create the Village Green, a "restful spot of green in the heart of the town...[to] be kept extremely simple in its treatment, in general character like an old New England Common."¹⁰² The success of the plan lay in its simplicity: a single curving path, benches, and fencing of heavy chain linked to granite posts, all viewed from the street.¹⁰³

In the summers the Curtis Institute closed its doors, as faculty members toured Europe and America, giving concerts and recitals. Mrs. Bok financed their travels and paid for their students to accompany them. Because the Atlantic crossing took up to two weeks, each way, a more convenient summer program was desirable. The Boston Symphony Orchestra spent its summers in Bar Harbor and Stockbridge, and the members of the New York Symphony spent summers at Lake Chautauqua in western New York.¹⁰⁴

In 1928, when work on the library was nearing completion, Mary Bok turned her attention to neighboring Rockport. She purchased fourteen old houses, most of them along Mechanic Street on the east side of the harbor on Beauchamp Point. She restored them for the faculty of the Curtis Institute. She purchased a large frame building on Main Street, near the Goose River Bridge, and renovated it as a "Community House" where Curtis students had their quarters and ate their meals in a common dining room. Mrs. Bok purchased Captain Eel's house and boat barn on the west side of the harbor and renovated the barn so the musicians of the summer

⁹⁹ Unpublished program notes by Enid Okun referenced in Ames, "Remarkable Woman's Patronage," 8.

¹⁰⁰ Ames, Conversation with Enid Okun, 19 August 2008; unpublished program notes by Enid Okun.

¹⁰¹ Ames, "Remarkable Woman's Patronage", 8; Williams, 186 & 328.

¹⁰² Ames, "Remarkable Woman's Patronage", 8.

¹⁰³ Williams, 391-392; Ames, "Remarkable Woman's Patronage", 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ames, Conversation with Enid Okun, August 19, 2008; Cleveland Amory, *The Last Resorts* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 295; Jeffrey Simpson, *Chautauqua: An American Utopia* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 72-73.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 48**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

colony could give concerts in the boat barn on Sunday afternoons and again each Sunday evening. The audiences included summer people and local residents from all the neighboring towns. Faculty and students of the Summer Music Colony also gave concerts at the Camden Opera House and Camden Yacht Club.

With an eye toward beautifying the surroundings of the Summer Music Colony and to provide jobs for unemployed local residents, in 1930, Mrs. Bok purchased land around the Rockport Harbor from the Rockland-Rockport Lime Company, a miserable collection of derelict sheds, lime kilns, and ice houses. She hired family friend Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. for the "Rockport Harbor Improvement Project, to recover to its original condition the natural rocky shore." Olmsted was just finishing the Bok Tower Garden and Sanctuary (NHL) in Florida for Edward Bok, and was working on two projects in Camden. The Rockport project called for shanties to be torn down and wood to be distributed to deserving people of the town. It called for a reconditioned shore front, a new parking area, and native plantings. On the east side of the harbor, along Mechanic Street properties, the Olmsted Brothers were to recondition the harbor side of the lots and plant to the shore.¹⁰⁵ Mrs. Bok purchased the old Rockport Hotel and had it torn down for a park. In 1948 she donated the hotel property to the Town of Rockport for a library. She also purchased derelict, frame commercial buildings along Central Street and had the Olmsted Brothers tear them down to make Mary-Lea Park and Walker Park. At Mrs. Bok's request, the Olmsted firm directed this work, hiring local men to do the work, including Hans Heisted.¹⁰⁶

As the Depression continued, both the *New York Times* and the *Camden Herald* ran stories about Mrs. Bok's efforts to end unemployment in Camden. On December 18, 1930, a headline on page one of the *New York Times* read: "Mrs. Bok Provides Jobs to All, Ending Idleness at Camden, Maine." The banner headline of the *Camden Herald* that same day read: "'There Must Be No Unemployment in Camden,' Says Mrs. Bok." The *Camden Herald* told of her writing to the town manager and requesting him to come to Philadelphia to discuss the matter with her the week before Christmas. She offered to pay for projects that could be accomplished even in cold weather. In 1931 she paid for the renovation of the Camden Opera House and the town offices; the improvement of the Opera House fire escape; the demolition of the old, unsightly McKinley Stable on Mechanic Street; and the improvement of the Hosmer Pond Road. In 1937 and 1938 she paid to construct the Public Landing on the site where the vacant Camden Anchor-Rockland Machine Company had burned to the ground. Finally in 1947 she hired the Olmsted Brothers to prepare a landscape design for the Camden Yacht Club.¹⁰⁷

Comparative Analysis

Against this local backdrop, there is little question that the Camden Amphitheatre figured prominently in Mary Bok's efforts to promote village improvements and cultural events in the summer resorts of coastal Maine. But it is the success of the design and the ingenuity that landscape architect Fletcher Steele brought to the project that elevates it to national level of importance. In this sphere of public work, it compares with the Lily Pool NHL (1936-1938) in Chicago's Lincoln Park, designed by landscape architect Alfred Caldwell (1902-1998) in the prairie style. Inspired by his mentor Jens Jensen and the work of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, Caldwell poetically interpreted the Midwestern landscape through the use of native plants, stratified stonework, and a natural-looking prairie river with a waterfall that symbolized its source. This work exemplifies the Midwestern

¹⁰⁵ Harriet Pattison "Maine Landscapes," *Maine Gardens: Nature and Design*, (Rockland: Published in conjunction with the conference "Maine Gardens: Nature and Design," July 12-15, 2007), 33; Ames, 10; Elza Ann Viles "Mary Louise Curtis Bok Zimbalist: Founder of the Curtis Institute of Music and Patron of American Arts" (PhD dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bryn Mawr College, October 1983) 72-73.

¹⁰⁶ Pattison, "Maine Landscapes," 33.

¹⁰⁷ Williams, *History of Camden*, 570-571, 588, 613 & 624; Letter, William B. Marquis to Cary Bok, 28 January 1969 (Bok Family Papers, Camden, Maine).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 49**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

interpretation of fine art and regionalism in landscape design, a celebration of indigenous forms and creative genius, which Caldwell's contemporaries and current-day scholars call the "prairie spirit."

It also merits comparison with Meridian Hill Park NHL (1920-1933) in Washington, D.C., a public garden sponsored by the National Fine Arts Commission and designed by a succession of landscape architects including George Burnap and Horace Peaslee, with planting plans by New York landscape architects Vitale, Brinckerhoff, and Geiffert. The design for the grand, formal park was modeled after the Renaissance gardens found in the world's great capital cities. A grand allée incorporates an illusionistic device derived from French palace gardens. The stepped character of the park design is reminiscent of the former King Victor Emmanuel III's gardens. In contrast to the Camden grounds, the Meridian Hill project represents a more conventional interpretation of the Beaux Arts aesthetic for an American public landscape. While an exemplar of established formal, Beaux Arts principles, the property lacks the regional character, artistic ingenuity, and modernist bent of Steele's work at Camden.

A comparison with other outdoor theaters includes nationally recognized examples such as Myron Hunt's Rose Bowl NHL (1922), Burnham Hoyt's Red Rocks Amphitheater (proposed NHL), and the Fishing Bridge Museum and Theater NHL (1929-1931) at Yellowstone National Park. These outdoor theaters were all designed by architects of considerable importance and national acclaim and reflect the contributions of the landscape architecture and architecture professions to the design of the outdoor theater. The Rose Bowl was massive in scale and when first constructed could hold 57,000 patrons; its massive scale, close adherence to classical prototypes, and strong architectural structure stands in stark contrast to the intimacy, complexity, and regionalism of the Camden theater. In addition, the Camden Amphitheatre ranks in character and integrity with several outdoor theaters built in the 1910s and 1920s and associated with nationally important historic districts; these include Jens Jensen's Players' Green in Chicago's Columbus Park (NHL), the Greek Theater in the Denver Civic Center (NHL pending), and the outdoor theater at Cranbrook Institute (NHL) in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

Several other New Deal projects offer context for comparison, including the Mt. Tamalpais Amphitheater (Cushing Memorial Theater) outside San Francisco in Marin County, California. This theater was redesigned and constructed by the CCC in the 1930s. With stone-edged seats and a bowl-like perch on the side of the mountain hill, the theater offers the broad prospect common to the ancient Greek theater form, while the woodland setting and use of native stone links it to the German nature theaters. With a seating capacity of 3750, it is much larger and more rustic in its detailing than the Camden Amphitheatre. The influence of the Italian Renaissance persisted in many publically funded New Deal projects with the cascade and amphitheater prototypes being transformed at Oakland, California, and in the nearby Berkeley parks into elegant hillside rose gardens.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, for the Fort Worth Rose Garden (1934) in Texas, the Kansas City firm of Hare and Hare adopted the neoclassical cascade form to house a horticulturally rich collection of garden tea roses, with small garden pavilions offering shelter from the hot Texas sun. The colorful horticultural collection stands in direct contrast to the simple, native palette of green and gray with striking silvery vertical accents Steele introduced at Camden. The Lake Matoka Amphitheater (Player's Dell) on the campus of William and Mary was designed and constructed in 1947. It represents an excellent expression of American modernism in an outdoor theater, though its deterioration and ultimate renovation in 1976 incorporated contemporary changes into the 1947 design.

Professor of Landscape Architecture Linda Jewell at the University of California, Berkeley, has closely studied the design process that resulted in some of the nation's most well-known western outdoor theaters. Interested in the separation of design and construction that occurs in the mid-twentieth century as landscape designers

¹⁰⁸ Phoebe Cutler, *Public Landscape of the New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985), 42-45.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 50**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

become less involved in the actual construction of their projects, she has closely studied what she describes as a complex, interactive process of design and construction that characterized earlier work and peaked in the construction of amphitheaters by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the New Deal, under the supervision of national and state park landscape architects. The process she and a colleague described applies as much to Steele's Camden project as well as amphitheaters built or improved at Mt. Tamalpais in California and the Red Rocks Park outside Denver, Colorado:

Throughout history, designed landscapes have been created through an incremental and interactive process of design, construction, observation and re-design. As construction progressed, both the partially completed improvements and the emerging intricacies of a site, such as the unexpected exposure of bedrock or a newly revealed vista, informed designers how to craft the relationship between the site and the design intervention. Variations in this process underlie our most influential landscape design from the great gardens of Italy, France and England to more recent icons such as Central Park and Dumbarton Oaks.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

According to landscape historian and Steele's biographer, Robin Karson:

Of the approximately seven hundred landscapes Steele designed, only about twenty have survived with their essential integrity intact. Of these, three are currently accessible to the public. For this reason alone, the Camden Public Library Amphitheatre would be a cultural treasure of considerable significance. But because it is also one of Steele's finest works its value transcends that of artifact. The Amphitheatre is art as surely as a painting by Frederick Church or a symphony by Aaron Copeland. Like Church and Copeland, Fletcher Steele combined ground-breaking originality with tradition to create something deeply, eminently right for its place. But unlike paintings (which deteriorate slowly) or symphonies (which don't deteriorate at all), Steele chose a medium defined by growth and decline.¹¹⁰

The Camden Amphitheater was designed and executed by Fletcher Steele on the cusp of a new era: the transition between ever-popular Beaux Arts design that dominated the early decades of the twentieth century and the emerging Modern era that came to dominate the mid-twentieth century and on which his writings, if not his actual design work, would exert considerable influence. Steele's travels to France and his impressions from the International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts in 1925 significantly influenced his design vocabulary and expressed itself in his landscape architecture. His design for the amphitheater was one of the first expressions of this new vocabulary, one that ingeniously melded the formality and Colonial Revival style of the library building into an abstracted representation of the native Maine coast. Transforming the library into a hillside villa, he created a compact and masterly descending sequence in keeping with his astute understanding of Italian villa design and previous estate design practice that not only led the visitor's attention to a sun-dappled lawn, or garden room below, but allowed it upon arriving to be suddenly torqued, in a grand *tour de force*, towards an unexpected and grand view of the harbor. Steele's juxtaposition of heavy fieldstone and granite walls and steps, grass seats, and boulder accents celebrated the construction materials readily available in coastal Maine and gave the project an authentic American character and regional identity.

¹⁰⁹ Linda Jewell and Steve Rasmussen Cancian, "'Keeping the Boys Busy': Outdoor Theatres of the Great Depression: On-site, incremental design gives form to the complex relationship of site and structure," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 24, no. 3 (2004): 187.

¹¹⁰ Karson, *LANDSCAPES*, 7-8.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 51**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Overlaid on this architectural fabric, Steele carefully designed the planting program for the amphitheater using native Maine plants. Thick bands of evergreens frame the amphitheater, while clumps of white birch add striking vertical accents to the inner terraces and seating areas. Finally, Steele completed his artistry with the sweeping curves of shrubbery masses and details for light fixtures, railings, arches that were reminiscent of the French Moderne and English Arts and Crafts gardens. Set within the backdrop of native materials and traditional building forms and fabrics, the combined palette created a design that was highly evocative of nature yet innovative in its abstract qualities. Aligning the amphitheater on axis with the view of the harbor instead of the building was a design innovation that took its first step toward the new Modern era. Instead of the built landscape dominating the land, it was designed in response to it, a design philosophy that would frame landscape architecture for the rest of the twentieth century.

The overall effect of Steele's complex design process and meticulous attention to detail was one of simplicity and solidity -- a sylvan theater nestled into a naturally occurring concave basin reminiscent of the ruins of an ancient civilization, the native rocky coastline, and to some degree an old and abandoned Maine quarry. Throughout the whole composition there is a dynamic tension that creates a complex variety of dichotomies: the natural versus the artificial, the exposed and weathered surfaces of the rockwork versus the smooth and soft turf of the terraces and theater floor, open sunlit areas versus the dark recesses of evergreen groves, continental versus American influences, and an idealized symbolism of a birch-studded and rockbound shoreline echoed in the distant view of the harbor and distant headlands.

Today the library grounds and the amphitheater remain remarkably intact as a studied, carefully preserved reflection of Steele's genius as an innovative landscape architect. The Camden Amphitheatre is one of only a handful of Steele's designed landscapes to have survived, and one of only three open to the public. It is unparalleled in its design innovation, choice of materials, artistry, and composition. Its high quality of preservation, continued relationship to the harbor, and ongoing careful and sensitive management ensure its preservation and its historic integrity for the future.

Steele's ingenuity lies in his synthesis of traditional conventions, a creative process in which he manipulated and adapted them to contemporary needs and tastes, and sense of artistic creation and innovation with which he bent the rules and explored modernistic ideas. The Camden Amphitheatre is one of the few public commissions designed by Fletcher Steele, yet it represents an exceptionally sophisticated understanding of public space, outdoor theater design, and civic engagement, including the use of local labor to construct the project. When considered against Steele's larger body of private commissions, the amphitheater is a unique expression of neoclassicism, finely crafted and carefully detailed, enhanced by Steele's early experimentation with Modernist principles. It is a seminal expression of eclectic regionalism masterfully executed with such artistry that it proves the hypothesis that, under the hand of a master, landscape architecture is truly a fine art.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Books and Scholarly/Professional Articles:

- Adams, William Howard. "Breaking New Ground: Twentieth Century American Gardens." In *Keeping Eden: A History of Gardening in America*. Ed. Walter T. PUNCH. Boston: Bulfinch Press in association with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, 1992, 63-79.
- Ames, Eleanor G. "A Remarkable Woman's Patronage." *Maine Olmsted Alliance for Parks and Landscapes Newsletter*, Summer 2002.
- _____. "Celebrating Camden: A Century of Landscape Design." (In three parts). *Camden Herald*. June 27, July 18, and August 1, 1991.
- Amory, Cleveland. *The Last Resorts*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952.
- Belanger, Pamela. *Inventing Acadia: Artists and Tourists at Mount Desert*. Rockland, Maine: Farnsworth Art Museum, 1999.
- Beveridge, Charles E. "In Search of Camden's Harborside Park." *Maine Olmsted Alliance for Parks and Landscapes Newsletter*, Autumn 1999. Also <http://www.maineolmsted.com/journal/articles/gard/camden.html>.
- Birnbaum, Charles, and Robin Karson, eds. *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
- Bok, Edward. *The Americanization of Edward Bok*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921.
- _____. *Twice Thirty*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.
- Bosworth, Richard. *Rome: Memories of Times Past*. San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2008.
- Brown, Dona. *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.
- Cheney, Sheldon W., ed. *Theater Arts Magazine*. 1916-1921.
- _____. *The Open-Air Theater*. New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1918.
- Christensen, Karen, and David Levinson, eds. *Heart of the Community: The Libraries We Love*. Berkshire Press, 2009.
- "Contemporary Garden Art in California," *Landscape Architecture* 27, no. 3 (April 1937): 158-159.
- Contemporary Landscape Architecture*. With an introduction by Henry Russell-Hitchcock. San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1937.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 53**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Culbertson, Kurt. "*Landskap and Tradgard: The Contribution of Scandanavian-Americans to the Development of landscape Architecture in America*" (<http://kurtculbertson.blogspot.com/2011/01/landskap-and-tradgard-contribution-of.html>).

Cutler, Phoebe. *Public Landscape of the New Deal*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

DK Travel Guides. *DK Eyewitness Travel ROME*. London: Dorling Kindersley Travel Guides, 2006.

Eckbo, Garrett. *Landscape for Living*. New York: F.W. Dodge (*Architectural Record*), 1950.

_____. "What Do We Mean by Modern Landscape Architecture?" *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*, 27 (August 1950): 268-271.

_____. "Outdoors and In: Gardens as Living Space." *Magazine of Art* 34, no. 5 (October 1941): 425.

Elwood, Philip H., Jr. *American Landscape Architecture*. New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1924.

Gilbert, Alma M., and Judith B. Tankard. *A Place of Beauty: The Artists and Gardens of the Cornish Colony*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2000.

Gillman, Hope, and Mrs Ludwig von Lunt. "How a Gift Comes into Being." In *Camden-Rockport Bicentennial, 1769-1969*. Camden, Me.: Camden Herald Publishing Co., 1969. pp. 30-32.

Grese, Robert E. *Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

_____. *The Native Landscape Reader*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, with the Library of American Landscape History, 2011.

Griswold, Ralph E. "To What Extent has Landscape Architecture been Modern since the Renaissance?" *Landscape Architecture* 22 (July 1932): 266-299.

Holtwijk, Theo H.B.M., ed. *Bold Vision: Development of the Parks of Portland, Maine*. Portland, Maine: Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc., 1999.

Hubbard, Henry Vincent, and Theodora Kimball. *An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917.

Igleheart, Elizabeth A. "Hans Heistad, 1871-1945." *Landscape Architects and Designers: Biographical Dictionary*. August 1986. Accessed online, <http://maineolmsted.com/ad/heistad.html> 28 January 2011.

Imbert, Dorothée. *The Modernist Garden in France*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

_____. "The Design Legacy of Hans Heistad." *Maine Olmsted Alliance for Parks and Landscapes Newslette*. Fall 1991.

Jewell, Linda. "Great Site Works: Two California Theaters." *Places* 10, no. 3 (1996).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 54**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

- _____. , and Steve Rasmussen Cancian. “‘Keeping the Boys Busy’: Outdoor Theatres of the Great Depression: On-site, incremental design gives form to the complex relationship of site and structure.” *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 24, no. 3 (2004): 187-214.
- Karson, Robin. “Fletcher Steele and the Camden Public Library Amphitheater.” In *Maine Gardens: Nature and Design*. Rockland, Me.: Published in conjunction with the conference “Maine Gardens: Nature and Design,” July 12-15, 2007, 9-13.
- _____. *Fletcher Steele, Landscape Architect: An Account of the Gardenmaker’s Life, 1885-1971*. New York: Harry N. Abrahms/Sagapress, 1989.
- _____. “Manning, Warren Henry (1860-1938).” In *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*. Ed. Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000, 236-241.
- _____. “Steele, Fletcher (1885-1971).” In *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*. Ed. Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000, 375-381.
- Krabbendam, Johannes L. *The Model Man: A Life of Edward W. Bok, 1863-1930*. Utrecht, 1964.
- Lazzaro, Claudia. *The Italian Renaissance Garden*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- MacKaye, Percy. *The Civic Theatre in Relation to the Redemption of Leisure: A Book of Suggestions*. 1912.
- Masson, Georgina. *Italian Gardens*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1961.
- Mattor, Theresa, and Lucie Teegarden. *Designing the Maine Landscape*. Berkshire Publishing, 2009.
- McClelland, Linda Flint. “Waugh, Frank Albert (1869-1943).” In *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*. Ed. Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000, 434-36.
- Morgan, Keith N. *Charles A. Platt: The Artist as Architect*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985.
- Pattison, Harriet. “Maine Landscapes.” In *Maine Gardens: Nature and Design*. Rockland, Me.: published in conjunction with the conference “Maine Gardens: Nature and Design,” 12-15 July 2007, 27-35.
- Perrett, Antoine. “The History of the Country Estate: The Roman Farm.” *Country Life in America* (December 1935): 37-39.
- _____. “The History of the Country Estate: The Roman Pleasure Villa.” *Country Life in America* (January 1935): 37-45 & 76-77.
- Peterson, Jon. *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Platt, Charles A. *Italian Gardens*, 1894. Reprint, with an overview by Keith N. Morgan. Portland: Sagapress/Timber Press, 1993.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 55**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

- Rainey, Reuben. "Gillette, Charles Freeman (1886-1969)." In *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*. Ed. Charles Birnbaum and Robin Karson. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000, 138-141.
- _____. "“Organic Form in the Humanized Landscape’: Garrett Eckbo’s Landscape for Living.” In *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*, ed. Marc Treib. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993, 180-205.
- Rich, Louise Dickinson. *The Coast of Maine: An Informal History and Guide*. Camden, Maine: Down East Books, 1975.
- Roberts, Edith A., and Elsa Rehmman. *American Plants for American Gardens, Plant Ecology: The Study of Plants in Relation to Their Environment*. 1929. Reprint, with a foreword by Darrell G. Morrison. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Rogers, Elizabeth Barlow. *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001.
- Rolde, Neil. *Maine, Downeast and Different: An Illustrated History*. Sun Valley, California: American Historical Press, 2006.
- Schnadelbach, R. Terry. *Ferruccio Vitale: Landscape Architect of the Country Place Era*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001.
- Shepherd, Peter. *Modern Gardens: Masterworks of International Garden Architecture*. New York: Praeger, 1954.
- Shepherd, J.C., and G.A. Jellicoe. *Italian Gardens of the Renaissance*. 2nd ed. London: Tiranti, Ltd., 1953.
- Simo, Melanie L. *Forest and Garden: Traces of Wildness in a Modernizing Land, 1897-1949*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003.
- _____. "Regionalism and Modernism: Some Common Roots." In *Keeping Eden: A History of Gardening in America*. Ed. Walter T. PUNCH. Boston: Bulfinch Press in association with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, 1992, 45-62.
- Simpson, Jeffrey. *Chautauqua: An American Utopia*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999.
- Steele, Fletcher. *Design in the Little Garden*. Little Garden Series. Ed. Mrs. Francis King. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1924.
- _____. *Gardens and People*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1964.
- _____. "Landscape Design of the Future." *Landscape Architecture* 22, no. 4 (July 1932): 299-302.
- _____. "Lighting the Grounds." *House Beautiful*. June 1929.
- _____. "Modern Gardens." *Country Life* (November 1930).

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 56**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

_____. "New Pioneering in Garden Design." *Landscape Architecture* 20, no. 3 (April 1930): 159-177.

_____. "New Styles in Gardening: Will Landscape Architecture Reflect the Modernistic Tendencies Seen in the Other Arts?" *House Beautiful*. March 1929.

_____. "Outmoded Rules of Thumb in Landscape Architecture." *The Vista*. Spring 1928.

_____. "Private Delight and the Communal Ideal," *Landscape Architecture* 30 (January 1941): 69-71.

_____. "Space Design." *Park and Recreation* (September 1932): 17-18.

_____. "Theatre Out of Doors." *Country Life* (September 1933).

Stilgoe, John R. *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939*. New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1988.

Streatfield, David. "Western Expansion." In *Keeping Eden: A History of Gardening in America*. Ed. Walter T. PUNCH. Boston: Bulfinch Press in association with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, 1992, 97-117.

Taylor, Albert D. "Landscape Architecture Today: Is the Profession Keeping Abreast of the Changes in Our Social and Economic Life." *Landscape Architecture* 23, no. 2 (January 1933): 85-96.

_____. "Notes on the Construction of Ha-Ha Walls." *Landscape Architecture* 20, no. 3 (1930): 221-24.

_____. "Notes with Reference to the Construction of Flagstone Walks." *Landscape Architecture* 12, no. 2 (1922): 117-19.

_____. "Notes with Reference to the Construction of Walks, Trails, and Terraces." *Landscape Architecture* 13, no. 4 (1923): 253-57.

Thompson, Deborah, ed. *Maine Forms of American Architecture*. Waterville, Maine: Colby College Museum of Art, 1976.

Tishler, William H., ed. *American Landscape Architecture: Designers and Places*. Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1989.

Treib, Marc, ed. *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.

_____, and Dorothee Imbert. *Garrett Eckbo: Modern Landscapes for Living*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Tunnard, Christopher. *Gardens in the Modern Landscape*. New York: Scribner, 1938.

Von Lunt, Ludwig. "Music Colonies of Camden-Rockport." In *Camden-Rockport Bicentennial, 1769-1969*. Camden, Me.: Camden Herald Publishing Co., 1969, 57-59.

Wharton, Edith. *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*. 1904. Reprint, with an introduction by John Dixon Hunt. New York: Rizzoli and The Mount Press, 2008.

Waugh, Frank A. *Book of Landscape Gardening*. 1926. Reprint, with an introduction by Linda Flint McClelland. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press in association with the Library of American Landscape History, 2007.

_____. *Outdoor Theaters: The Design, Construction and Use of Open-Air Auditoriums*. With an introduction by Percy MacKaye. Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1917.

_____. "Village improvement in relation to planting." In *The Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture*. Ed. L.H. Bailey. Vol. III. New York: Macmillan, 1925, 2658.

Williams, John R. *History of Camden, Maine, 1907-1930 and 1931-1950*. Rockland, Maine: Courier Gazette, Inc. 1989.

Other Published Articles

"'There Must be No Unemployment in Camden', Says Mrs. Edw. Bok." *Camden Herald*. December 18, 1930.

"Graduating Exercises will be Held Tonight by C.H.S. Seniors in Open Air Amphitheater." *Camden Herald*. June 18, 1931.

"Camden's Harborside Parks, Maine." *VIEW: Magazine of the Library of American Landscape History*. Summer 2003.

"Camden High's Graduation Exercises Christened the New Bok Amphitheatre." *Camden Herald*. June 25, 1931.

Clayton, Lauralee. "Heistad Legacy Continues, Rockport Daughter Pleased." *Camden Herald*. December 31, 1985.

"Convergence." *Camden Herald*. February 1, 2001.

Costigan, Lorie. "Amphitheater Plan Calls for Preservation." *Camden Herald*. February 8, 2001.

_____. "Camden Public Library Trustees Explain Park Bond Request." *Camden Herald*. May 8, 2003.

Davis, Georgeanne. "Restoring Camden's Historic Parks." *The Free Press*. May 29, 2003.

"Forthcoming." *VIEW: Magazine of the Library of American Landscape History*. Summer 2008.

Grima, David. "Amphitheater Plan Airs Tuesday." *Camden Herald*. February 1, 2001.

Groening, Tom. "Camden Library Revises Amphitheater Plans." *Bangor Dailey News*. March 6, 2001.

_____. "Library Grounds Plan in the Works." *Bangor Dailey News*. January 20-21, 2001.

_____. "Restoration Plan for Amphitheater Praised." *Bangor Dailey News*. February 7, 2001.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 58**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Harrington, Joseph D. "Garden Theater Gem of Beauty in Camden, Me." *Boston Post*. September 12, 1930.

"Large Audience Marvels at Playing of a Master." *Camden Herald*. July 29, 1926.

"The Library Building Fund is on Its Way up to the Top." *Camden Herald*. August 26, 1926.

"Mrs. Edward W. Bok Tells Rotarians of Work She is Doing to Beautify Camden." *Camden Herald*. August 28, 1930.

"Mrs. Zimbalist Dies at 93." *Camden Herald*. January 8, 1970.

Weisgall, Deborah. "Fighting Over the Future of an American Arden." *The New York Times*. November 15, 1998.

Wolf, Tom, Orlando Cole, and Irene Goldovsky Wolf. Bay Chamber Concerts 40th Anniversary Program Notes. July 2001.

Internet Articles

"Bok Tower Gardens – History." <http://www.boksanctuary.org>.

Cranbrook Public Schools. "Cranbrook Schools Historic Timeline, 1915." http://schools.cranbrook.edu/flash/timeline_final.swf

"Our Historic Theater." www.muny.org.

Russell, Catherine. "A Brief History of the Camden Library, Amphitheater, and Harbor Park." www.camden.k2bh.com. February 7, 2001, at the Walsh History Center, Camden Public Library.

Manuscripts

Hayden, Reverend Ralph. "Ladies and Libraries: A Brief Historical Sketch of the Camden Public Library." Speech by chairman of the Camden Public Library Building Committee, 1931. In "History of the Camden Public Library, 1896-1989." (Notebook at the Camden History Center.)

LANDSCAPES LA, with Robin Karson and Charles Beveridge. "Camden Library Grounds, Camden Amphitheatre and Harbor Park: Historic Landscape Treatment Plan." prepared for the Camden Public Library, 1997.

Mitchell, Christi. "High Street Historic District (Additional Documentation: Bok Amphitheater)." National Register Nomination, 2005.

Okun, Enid. "Tribute to Mary Louise Curtis Bok Zimbalist: Maine Garden Symposium." 2007.

Regan, Sally. "Notes for Chronology of Rockport Public Library." May 11, 1994.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 59**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Viles, Elza Ann. "Mary Louise Curtis Bok Zimbalist: Founder of the Curtis Institute of Music and Patron of American Arts." Ph. D. dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bryn Mawr College, October, 1983.

Wilson, Nedra Lynn. "Fletcher Steele and the Camden Library Amphitheater: Type and Innovation Towards Modernism." for Theories of Landscape Design Course, Radcliff College, Fall 1994.

Primary SourcesReverend Ralph H. Hayden Papers, Camden Historic Resources Collection, Walsh History Center, Camden Public Library, Camden, Maine

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library Conferences on Submitting Model Showing Preliminary Study." October 24, 1928.

Steele, Fletcher to Rev. Ralph H. Hayden. November 7, 1928.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library Report of Visit Made November 20, 1928."

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library Conference with Mrs. Hubbard." December 4, 1928.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library Conference with Miss Alden and Mr. Hayden at My Office." December 7, 1928.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library Conference with Mr. Hayden, Mr. Loring, and Mr. Steele, Preceeding Conference on Similar Points with Mrs. Hubbard and Miss Alden, January 31, 1929.

Campbell, George K. to Rev. Ralph H. Hayden. February 12, 1929.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library. #301." March 25, 1929.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden." March 29, 1929.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library." May 29, 1929.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library. # 301." August 22, 1929.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library. #301." August 30, 1929.

Steele, Fletcher. "Camden Library Conference with Mr. F. L. Olmsted and Mr. Zach." October 2, 1929.

Steele, Fletcher to Mr. Ralph H. Hayden. February 27, 1930.

Steele, Fletcher to Library Committee, Camden Public Library. July 1, 1930.

Fletcher Steele Papers, Rochester Historical Society, Rochester, New York

Steele, Fletcher; untitled manuscript describing Camden Library Amphitheater Project.

Fletcher Steele Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division

Marquis, William B. to Fletcher Steele. December 17, 1968.

Bok, Cary W. to William Marquis. December 11, 1968.

Steele, Fletcher to William B. Marquis. January 25, 1969.

Fletcher Steele Collection, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York, Syracuse.

Selected drawings and photographs, 1928 to 1950s.

Bok Family Papers, Stormy Bok, Camden, Maine

Marquis, William B. to Cary Bok. January 28, 1969. (with Camden Yacht Club memo.)

American Society of Landscape Architects, Washington D.C.

Membership List. 1922-1926.

Doolittle, Thomas, to Camden Public Library. May 24, 1999.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 60**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Knox County Recorder of Deeds, Rockland, Maine

Deed Book 211, p. 144. (Mary Bok to Inhabitants of Camden, Library Lot and Harbor Park.)

Deed Book 211, p. 145. (Mary Bok to Inhabitants of Camden, Library Lot and Harbor Park)

Deed Book 211, p. 285. (Mary Bok to Inhabitants of Camden, Village Green)

Deed Book 212, p. 171. (Chauncey Keep, John Gribbel, Cyrus H.K. Curtis, Mary Louise Bok to Inhabitants of Camden, Village Green)

Deed Book 231, p. 415. (Mary Louise Bok to Inhabitants of Camden, Harbor Park.)

Interviews:

Ann Morris interview with Stormy Bok, July 2, 2008.

Ann Morris interview with Enid Okun, August 19, 2008.

Ann Morris interview with Eleanor Ames, September 2, 2008.

Ann Morris interview with David Jackson, October 28, 2008.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. Previously Listed in the National Register. Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register. Designated a National Historic Landmark. Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #**Primary Location of Additional Data:** State Historic Preservation Office Other State Agency Federal Agency (Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division) Local Government University Other (Specify Repository): Camden Public Library; Rochester Historical Society; Franklin L. Moon Library, State University of New York, Syracuse New York.**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: 1.63 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	19	0494862	4895369

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundaries for the Camden Library Grounds and Amphitheatre are shown as the dotted line on the accompanying map entitled "Camden Public Library Amphitheater and Grounds / Camden Amphitheater Planting Plan by Zones," dated February 22, 1999.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries represent all of the contiguous area (1.63 acres) designed and executed by Fletcher Steele, including the grounds immediately surrounding the library building and comprising the amphitheater east of the library. This land is under the management of the Camden Public Library Board of Trustees. Land (.75 acre)

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY**Page 61**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

east of the amphitheater, also owned and managed by the Camden Public Library, which was maintained as a meadow during the 1928-31 period and has subsequently been developed for patron parking, has not been included within the proposed boundary because it lacks historic significance and integrity. With this exception, the remaining boundaries follow the historic property boundaries for the Camden Public Library.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 62

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: David P. Jackson (project director), Parks Director, Camden Public Library
Lucinda Brockway, landscape preservationist (contracted project consultant)
Ann Morris, historian (contracted project consultant)
Linda Flint McClelland, historian, National Park Service

Address: 55 Main Street
Camden, ME 04843

Telephone: (207) 236-7014

Date: 4-16-09; revised with comments from NPS staff 10-26-09 and 2-10-12

Edited by: Linda McClelland, Historian
National Historic Landmarks Program
National Park Service
1201 Eye Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

Telephone: (202) 354-2258

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM
August 23, 2012

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION**Photographs**

No.	Subject	Photographer	Date
1	Arabesque plantings on rear terrace of library, looking north	Jan Rosenbaum	5 Aug. 2008
2	Detail of Compass of the Winds (new), looking northwest	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
3	Amphitheater, looking east from double "horseshoe" staircase	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
4	View of Fauns Garden and "horseshoe" staircase, looking west	Jan Rosenbaum	5 Aug. 2008
5	Atlantic Ave. entrance with pavilion and arch, looking northeast	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
6	Detail of lantern and tripod, atop millstone-capped, brick pier	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
7	View across amphitheater, looking northeast	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
8	View of east side stairway, looking north to boundary plantings	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
9	View of west side stairway, looking west toward library	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
10	View across amphitheater, looking southwest	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
11	View of north side stage area, looking north	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
12	View up east side stairway, looking northeast	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
13	Long view towards Camden Harbor, looking south	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
14	Detail of stone walls, boulder, and plantings	Jan Rosenbaum	27 Aug. 2008
15	View of stairway at Main St. and Atlantic Ave., looking north	Jan Rosenbaum	15 April 2009
16	View of stone wall on Atlantic Ave., looking north	Jan Rosenbaum	15 April 2009
17	Children's Reading Plaza and entrance (new), looking northwest	Jan Rosenbaum	15 April 2009
18	Detail of pavilion (new) on south lawn of library	Jan Rosenbaum	15 April 2009
19	View across south lawn toward library, looking northeast	Jan Rosenbaum	15 April 2009
20	View of harbor from south lawn of library, looking southeast	Jan Rosenbaum	15 April 2009

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 1



Photograph 2

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 3



Photograph 4

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 5



Photograph 6

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

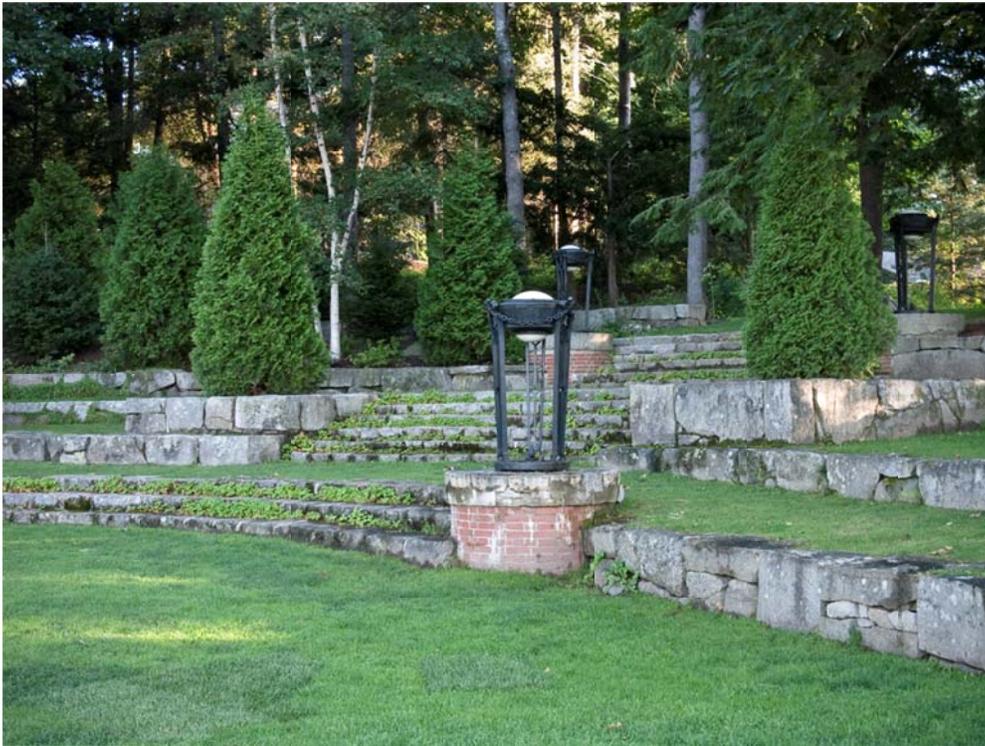
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 7



Photograph 8

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

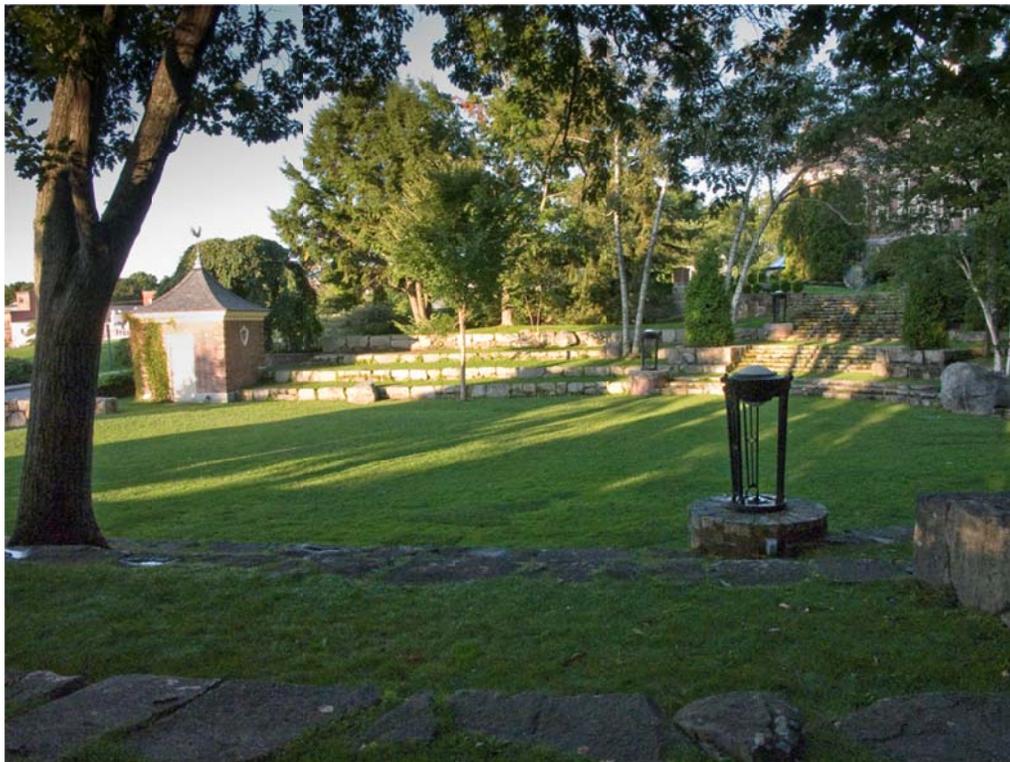
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 9



Photograph 10

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

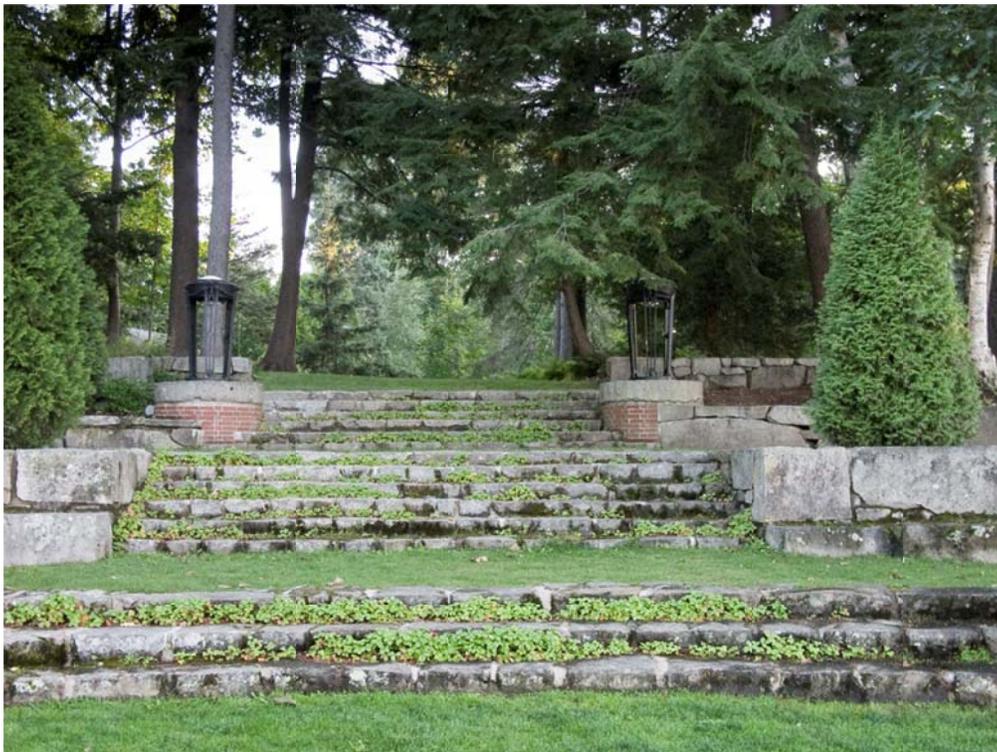
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 11



Photograph 12

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

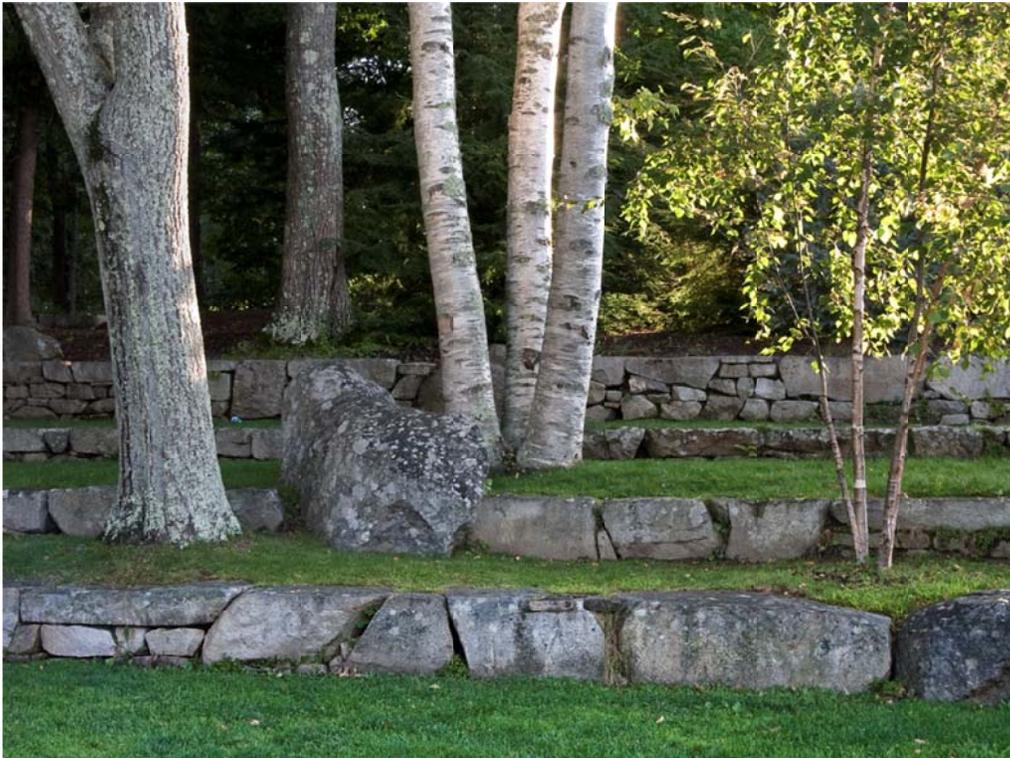
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 13



Photograph 14

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 15



Photograph 16

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 17



Photograph 18

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photographs

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Photograph 19



Photograph 20

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

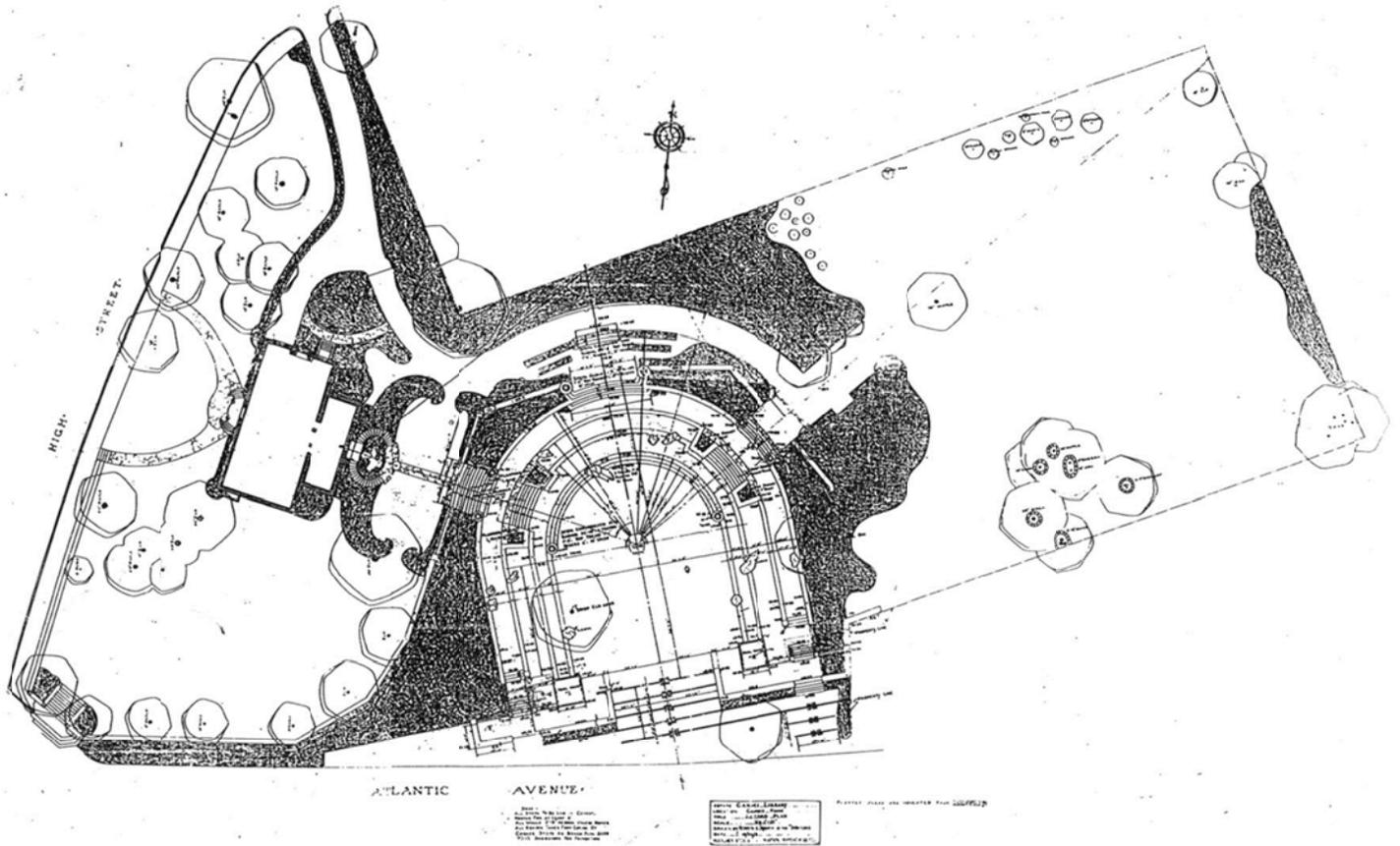


Figure 1. Plan, Camden Amphitheatre and Library Grounds, Fletcher Steele, 1931. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Figure 2. Designer's Model for Camden Amphitheatre and Library Grounds, ca. 1928. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.



Figure 3. Historic view of early construction (note horse-drawn cart). Courtesy of Camden Public Library.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Figure 4. Historic view of work crew on upper tier of amphitheater during construction.
Courtesy of Camden Public Library.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Figure 5. Full-grown tree ready for planting. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.



Figure 6. Boulder ready for installation. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Figure 7. Rear of library with double staircase and grotto during construction. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.



Figure 8. *Two Little Fauns*, by sculptor Benjamin Turner Kurtz. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Figure 9. View across amphitheater to southeastern entrance and pavilion shortly after planting. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.

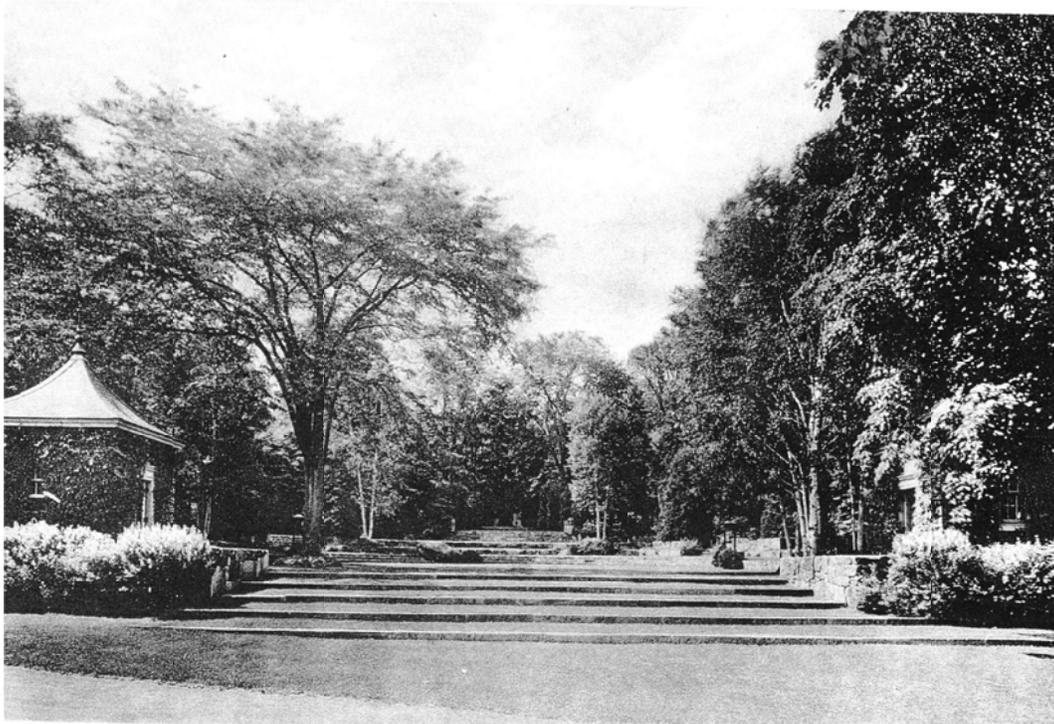


Figure 10. View looking north into amphitheater from Atlantic Avenue shortly after completion. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Figure 11. View looking south toward Camden Harbor during early construction (note existing elm at right). Courtesy of Camden Public Library.



Figure 12. View looking south across amphitheater toward Camden Harbor shortly after construction. Courtesy of Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Figure 13. View across Harbor Park, looking northeast to the entrance of amphitheater (top center). Courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site.



Figure 14. Historic view of theater production. Courtesy of Camden Public Library.

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATRE AND PUBLIC LIBRARY

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Figures

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Proposed NHL Boundary Map

CAMDEN AMPHITHEATER AND LIBRARY

USGS Map

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



Zone Easting Northing
 19 0494862 4895369