



Town of Concord
Concord Historical Commission
141 Keyes Road, Concord, MA 01742
Tel: (978) 318-3299 Fax: (978) 318-3291
www.concordma.gov

Historical Significance Assessment Form

Address: 900 Tanglewood Drive

Type of Building(s) Under Review: Residence

Date of Construction: 1899

1) Is the Structure(s) Included on the Historic Resource Survey? Yes No
If No, Continue to Question 4.

2) How is it listed? Individual Area Form Streetscape Other
Historic/Area/Streetscape Name: Woodis - Isaac Lee - Wright Farm

3) Rating on the Historical Resources Inventory Form:

Highest Priority High Priority Medium High Priority Other Priority Non Applicable

4) Is this a property significant for its Age, Role in Concord History, Association with a Noted Resident(s), Architectural Style, or as the Location of an Important Event? Yes No

If Yes, it significant for its: Early Date Role Played in Concord History

Residence of a Noted Resident Architectural Style Location of Important Event

Please Explain: PLEASE SEE ATTACHED STAFF REPORT

5) Is the structure(s) a contributing element of an historic streetscape? Yes No

Please Explain: PLEASE SEE ATTACHED STAFF REPORT

6) Is the property listed on the National Register of Historic Places? Yes No

7) Is the Property Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places? Yes No

If the answer to question #3 is Highest or High Priority, and/or Yes to either question #6 or #7, the structure will be considered to be Historically Significant and must be reviewed by the Concord Historical Commission at its next meeting. If the answers to these questions are No, then the Preservation Status of the Property will be reviewed on the next page.

Preservation Status Details	The original elements are intact and unaltered	Some changes are present but the historic character is intact	Changes over time have significantly altered the original design and appearance
Integrity - The integrity of the exterior architectural details have been preserved (i.e., there have been no character defining exterior alterations since construction and/or renovations have been made according to Secretary of the Interior Standards in materials and procedures?)		X	
Original Construction Location or Site - The structure has not been moved or relocated from where it was originally built.	X		
Alteration – Are the alterations made over time in harmony with the original design, style or period of construction?		X	
Surrounding Site and Landscape – Has the original character of the surrounding landscape been maintained?		X	

Additional Comments: PLEASE SEE ATTACHED STAFF REPORT.

This Property is considered to be:

X **Historically Significant** and a public hearing on the proposed demolition of the building will be scheduled for review at the Concord Historical Commission’s next available meeting.

 Not Historically Significant and No Further Review is required. A Copy of the Decision will be sent to the Building Division for their property files.

Determination Made By: Ann Clifford and Melissa Saalfield

Date: November 15, 2022



Surveyed by the Concord Historical Commission in 1992, the Ellen, Elizabeth and Emma Williams House, also known as “Tanglewood,”¹ at 900 Tanglewood Drive (1899) meets the criteria for listing the National Register for its role in Concord’s development as one of the first two residential country estates built overlooking Concord’s rivers in the 1890s. (Criterion A). Unfortunately, the other contemporary country estate of this distinction, the Charles Francis Adams House on Fairhaven Hill (1899), was razed by fire in 2019.

900 Tanglewood Drive also meets Criterion C as an excellent example of a three-story Federal Revival House. The architect of “Tanglewood” is unknown, but other grand country houses along the Sudbury River built in the early years of the twentieth century were designed by architects Thomas Mott Shaw (315, 317, 345 Garfield Road); Herbert Dudley Hale (240 Fairhaven Hill Road) and Mary Almy and Lois Lilley Howe (153 Garfield Road). Lois Lilley Howe designed a similar three-story Federal Revival House in Cambridge at 49 Hawthorne Street in 1900. Local carpenter/builder Charles Newell Miner (1856-1946) constructed the “mansion of the Misses Williams...at Conantum” in the summer of 1899.²

Unlike the other country houses that followed, this trend-setting structure was commissioned by a group of single women. It represents substantial gains in women’s property rights between the Federal era of the 1790s and the Federal Revival era of the 1890s.

¹ [Bigelow, Ellen \(7\) = ell77221.htm \(bigelowsociety.com\)](http://bigelow.com/ellen/ellen7.html)

² CN Miner is credited as the builder in the *Concord Enterprise*, April 13, 1899, p. 10. Charles Newell Miner was born in Lincoln, Massachusetts, lived during the 1890s in Seirra Madre, California and in Puerto Rico, but spent most of his life in Concord. Other structures built by Miner include his own home at 50 Everett Street (ca. 1900), where he had his carpentry shop and the First Church of Christ Scientist at 7 Lowell Road, designed by the architect Richard Derby of Derby and Robinson (1914). He was a member of the Corinthian Lodge in Concord from 1921 until his death in 1946. See Ancestry.com and MHC Survey forms

900 Tanglewood Drive ushered in an era of country-estate building on Concord's hills and overlooking her waterways that lasted through the 1930s. It was the first house built on Conantum, the name assigned by Henry David Thoreau to the ridge west of the Sudbury River.

At the turn of the 20th century, this land on the north side of the Fitchburg Turnpike was a vast, working farm with a long history with the Woodis and Lee families going back to the 1660s. The Lee family owned the property throughout the 19th century and their 1764 farmhouse, built for Woodis Lee Jr., still stands at 509 Tanglewood Drive (formerly 509 Garfield Road).

The Lee farm and nearby Conant farm were favorite spots of Thoreau, who visited in all seasons to view the landscape from Conantum and Fairhaven Hill and to walk "Lee's Cliff" where he had gone as a boy for picnics with his family. Thoreau named the area Conantum in about 1845, while living on Walden Pond and writing the first draft of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. He wrote, "There is a pleasant track on the bank of the Concord, called Conantum, which I have in my mind; -- the old deserted farm-house, the desolate pasture with its bleak cliff, the open wood, the river-reach, the green meadow in the midst, and the moss-grown wild-apple orchard,--places where one may have many thoughts and not decide anything."³ According to William Ellery Channing, Thoreau used the Native American-sounding "Conantum" for the area, inspired by the early resident and neighbor of the Lees, "old Eben Conant...that ancient New England farmer."⁴ This distinctive literary name was later adopted by the experimental mid-century modern community planned by Carl Koch for the northern portion of the ridge.



"Map of Concord, Mass. Showing Localities mentioned by Thoreau in his Journals" Compiled by Herbert W. Gleason, 1906.

Although 900 Tanglewood Drive is not shown on this map, it was in fact standing in 1906 near Lee's Cliff (circled), a section of Thoreau's "Conantum."

Note the farmhouses of I.S. Lee and E. Conant.

³ Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 1849.

⁴ William Ellery Channing. *Thoreau: The Poet-Naturalist* (Boston: Charles E. Goodspeed), 1902.

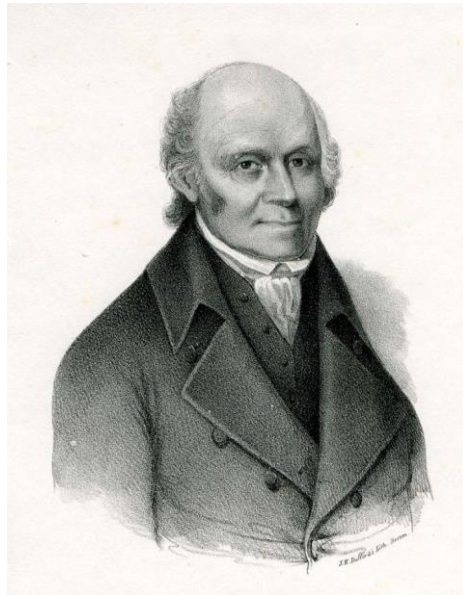
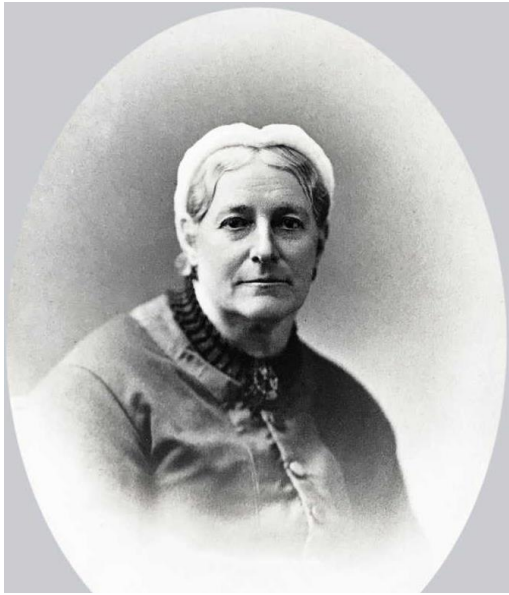


1928 This early tourist map by Helen Bodley Map shows favorite spots of Thoreau on and near the Lee farm: Lee's Bridge, The Cliffs, Fairhaven Bay. It also shows the Sudbury River as a scenic location enjoyed by en plein air artists.

At the close of the century in 1898, Elizabeth and Emma Williams, two middle-aged, unmarried, affluent Bostonians purchased the 129.82 acre farm from Isaac Stearns Lee's daughter Sarah Wright. The Williams sisters moved there with their 85-year-old widowed mother Ellen Bigelow Williams, who described herself to the census taker in 1900 as a farmer and the head of household.

These three self-sufficient women had been living on their own since 1873, when Ellen's husband John Davis Weld Williams died. Ellen Bigelow was raised by a single mother who had been widowed the year of her birth. When she was a child, women had few rights under British and U.S. common law. Under the common-law restriction of *coverture*, married women could not own property or act as their own agents at law, because "their legal personalities were merged with and therefore subsumed by their husband's legal standing.... Widows could not be heirs...nor could they legally write wills...but they were often accorded dower rights (traditionally one third of the husband's property.)"⁵ During her long lifetime, Ellen Williams would benefit from new laws that improved women's property rights, but did not live to see the 19th Amendment for the US Constitution, guaranteeing American women the right the vote.

⁵ Joan Hoff, *Law Gender and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 87-89.



Left: Ellen Bigelow Williams (ancestry.com). Right: John Davis Williams (Boston Athenaeum)

Ellen Bigelow's marriage to John Davis Williams, 22 years her senior, was probably arranged for economic reasons. The Williams family would live on the famous Elm Hill Estate in Roxbury from the 1830s to the 1870s, along with Ellen's widowed mother Sophia Bigelow. J.D. Williams was an importer of wine and liquor, whose lucrative business with his brother Moses Williams was the subject of scandal just after the Civil War. After his death, Ellen's son-in-law James T. Eldridge took charge of the family estate. In the Elm Hill Estate sale, real estate agent Eldredge advertised the "well known and beautiful place...without doubt, the most desirable and attractive estate within the same distance of State Street.... It commands on all sides the most extensive and charming view of Boston, the harbor, Blue Hills &c. the house is approached from either side through an avenue of magnificent elms of one-half mile in length."⁶



"Elm Hill," the Williams Estate, Roxbury, MA. Photo by A H Folsom, ca. 1870. Courtesy of Boston Public Library via Digital Commonwealth.

⁶ Find a Grave. John Davis Williams

Memories of the large Elm Hill estate in Roxbury must have lingered with the Williams women in the decades that they lived on the urban streets of Boston in the late 19th century. It is not known what inspired them to move to Concord at age 59, 63 and 85, but they must have been attracted by the familiar picturesque and rural quality of the Nine Acres Corner area overlooking the Sudbury River.



1946 Assessor's Map of Concord. The Lee Farmhouse and today's 900 Tanglewood Drive shared a driveway. After the Williams sisters constructed their Colonial Revival house, other large estates were constructed along Garfield Road in the early decades of the 20th century.

The Williams sisters may have rented the old farmhouse to a foreman and farmworkers once they moved into their fashionable new Colonial Revival house in about 1899.⁷

⁷ John Bruce is the Canadian caretaker and farmer associated with this farm in the early 20th century. John M. Bruce obituary. *Concord Enterprise*, May 28, 1941.

Characterized by “great charm and influence,” the sisters were known for their charitable and church work. Elizabeth Williams, deeply interested in the work of the Red Cross, “did her work quietly so that few know to what extent she had given aid.” Ellen died in 1901 and Elizabeth in 1916. After Elizabeth’s death, their widowed niece Christine Louise Williams Fessendon, moved in with the surviving sister, Emma (along with her second husband and a child from her first marriage). Emma Frances Williams remained the head of household until her death in 1928 and again passed the estate down a matrilineal line to Christine Fessendon who lived there until her death in 1963.

The Fessendons sold acreage during their lifetimes and the property was further subdivided as the “Tanglewood Cluster Development” by Edwin D. Brooks, Jr. in 1980. Brooks donated Scout Island to the Concord Land Conservation Trust in 1981 and subsequent owners, Barbara and William Schevill, donated an additional 9.6 acres for conservation purposes.

Resources:

[Bigelow, Ellen \(7\) = ell77221.htm \(bigelowsociety.com\)](#)

Channing, William Ellery. *Thoreau: The Poet-Naturalist*, Boston: Charles E. Goodspeed, 1902.

[Concord Land Conservation Trust Homepage - Preserving Open Space](#)

Digital Commonwealth

Concord Enterprise, April 13, 1899, p. 10.

Elizabeth Williams obituary, *Concord Enterprise*, Mar 22, 1916

Emma Francis Williams obituary, *Concord Enterprise*, Sept 19, 1928

John M. Bruce obituary. *Concord Enterprise*, May 28, 1941.

Find a Grave. John Davis Weld Williams (1799-1873)

Hoff, Joan. *Law Gender and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women*. New York: New York University Press, 1991.

Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey forms CON.429, CON.AU

Middlesex County Registry of Deeds.

Richardson, Laurence Eaton. *Concord Chronicle, 1865-1899*, 133

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