

**THE LOWTHORPE SCHOOL OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE FOR
WOMEN, GROTON, MA, 1901-1945:
AN OVERLOOKED CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN NEED OF
AWARENESS AND PRESERVATION**

JENN THOMAS

MLA candidate, University of Colorado/Denver
work-in-progress

In 2003 the town of Groton, Massachusetts produced a map defining three historic districts for the village. One property, the location of the former Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture for Women at 14 Main Street, defined the southern most boundary just outside of District 2. Even though a Federal style house, “the Prescott House”, was built on the site in circa 1820 and had strong connections to Groton history, it was excluded from the declared historic district. By 2006 the town of Groton, with funding from the Community Preservation Act, completed the “Community Wide Preservation Project—2006.” A Massachusetts Historical Commission “Form B—Building” survey for the house at 14 Main Street was completed. A revised Groton historic districts report was written and the property was integrated.

Yet the Form B—Building report declared the period of significance as late 1700s – 1898. The Lowthorpe School operated from 1902 to 1945, and then was incorporated into the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. By ending the declared period of significance at circa 1898, the building survey ignored an important period of the property’s history, completely omitting the Lowthorpe School’s impact on the historic Prescott House, the buildings that were added to the property during the Lowthorpe period and the acres of landscape where women students learned their craft.

In 2007, I completed a graduate preservation paper exploring the historic influence of the Lowthorpe School on the Prescott House, the addition of other buildings during the period, and the remaining extant landscape elements on the property. I also began to explore completing an addendum survey for the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) which would include the Lowthorpe history. Luckily, the MHC had a new annual budget and they hired a preservation consultant, Sanford Johnson (the one who completed the building survey) to do a “Form A—Area Survey” that described the 20th century history of the property. He and I worked together to complete the survey’s historical narrative for Lowthorpe. It was submitted to the MHC in late spring 2008. The report outlines a brief but detailed account of the school’s history and describes the remaining additional Lowthorpe buildings and garden elements. No supplemental photographs or graphics, however, accompanied the report.

I have been researching both Lowthorpe and one of its 1932 graduates, Denver landscape architect Jane Silverstein Ries, since 2002. I had enough Lowthorpe archival information to paint a broader ‘then and now’ survey of extant and demolished elements. The goal of this poster and presentation is to graphically highlight some of these findings and emphasize the importance of the Lowthorpe period to the property at 14 Main Street in Groton. To date, no one has attempted such documentation. This initial comparative analysis of archival materials and current conditions outlines some of the property’s history and the historic preservation challenges that face its present occupants, the Country Day School of the Holy Union.