

HISTORY OF SHARKSMOUTH ESTATE

The Stone House was built as the summer home of Harriot Appleton and Greely S. Curtis of Boston. It was designed in 1868 by the firm Ware and Van Brunt, who had just completed the design of Harvard's Memorial Hall. Built in 1869, the walls of this beastly and beautiful home are made of pure granite from Rockport, MA. The stairway was salvaged from the John Hancock House and still glimmers with each step. The third floor was added a decade after the original construction to accommodate an ever-expanding family.

The house is situated on a high promontory at the center of the forty-acre estate and overlooks the Massachusetts Bay. At one end of the ½ mile shoreline stands a dramatic undercut rock formation, historically known as Sharksmouth. From this landmark the estate takes its name. Development of the estate also included a "cottage" (also built in 1869), a caretaker's house, stables, barns, pasture land, a henyard, orchards, gardens, and a network of paths and avenues that tie it all together as one self-sufficient entity.

Greely Stevenson Curtis (1830-1897) was a born sailor and soldier. Following the example of his friend Richard Henry Dana he dropped out of college to sail "before the mast". Greely's father, James Freeman Curtis (1791-1839) served on the U.S.S. Constitution during the War of 1812 and as a Captain in the US Navy ("The bravest and handsomest man in the Navy", reminisced Admiral Farragut years later). In 1861, upon the fall of Fort Sumter, Greely immediately joined the Second Massachusetts Infantry and, later, the First Massachusetts Cavalry, quickly distinguishing himself in battle ("The boldest man I know", wrote his tent-mate Robert Gould Shaw). In 1863, after the Battle of Gettysburg Greely was forced to retire from the army, debilitated by malaria.

Harriot Appleton Curtis (1841-1923) was the daughter of industrialist Nathan Appleton. She grew up on Boston's Beacon Hill (as had Greely). Harriot's half-sister Fanny married the poet Henry Longfellow. Harriot's youth ended in July 1861 with the sudden deaths of both her sister Fanny and her father. The one light of her life amongst so much devastation was Greely, to whom she had become engaged secretly as he had set off to the Front.

Harriot and Greely were married in 1863. They traveled often and had no real home. On one of their many trips to the North Shore they visited and stayed with the Danas in Manchester-by-the-Sea. Richard Henry Dana built and enjoyed the first summer home in Manchester (1845), overlooking Grave's Beach (now Dana Beach). Greely and Harriot fell in love with the property next door – Sharksmouth. The death of Harriot's mother in 1867 provided the Curtises with a large inheritance. They immediately bought a house atop Beacon Hill and land on this wild but attractive property in Manchester. Soon the Stone House was under construction.

Harriot and Greely had five sons and five daughters. Daughter Elinor married the painter Charles Hopkinson in 1903, and a house was built for the couple. After the Curtis sons moved away and after the death of Harriot Curtis, the four unmarried Curtis daughters lived together, moving with the seasons between Boston and Manchester. They are known amongst the Curtis family as "The Aunts". Their eccentricities and hands-on good works were legendary. Daughters Harriot and Margaret also stood out in golf and tennis, each winning the National Championship. A constant visitor to the house was their cousin Sumner Appleton, founder of the SPNEA. The last Curtis daughter died in 1974 -- the Curtis daughters kept the Stone House intact and unchanged during their fifty-year reign. The Stone House and Sharksmouth as a whole continue on in Trust for the Curtis and Hopkinson descendants, now into the seventh generation.