

= Elmwood ( Cambridge , Massachusetts ) =

Elmwood , also known as the Oliver @-@ Gerry @-@ Lowell House , is a historic house and centerpiece of a National Historic Landmark District in Cambridge , Massachusetts . It is known for several prominent former residents , including : Thomas Oliver ( 1734 ? 1815 ) , royal Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts ; Elbridge Gerry ( 1744 ? 1814 ) , signer of the US Declaration of Independence , Vice President of the United States and eponym of the term " gerrymandering " ; and James Russell Lowell ( 1819 ? 1891 ) , noted American writer , poet , and foreign diplomat .

The house , originally on a 100 @-@ acre estate , was built in the Georgian style about 1767 by Thomas Oliver , scion of a wealthy merchant family in the Province of Massachusetts Bay . Abandoned by the Loyalist Oliver at the outset of the American Revolutionary War , the property was confiscated by the state of Massachusetts . It was purchased by Elbridge Gerry , who used it as his family residence until his death in 1814 . The house was sold by his heirs to the Lowell family , and was the birthplace and residence of James Russell Lowell for most of his life . During Lowell 's ownership significant portions of the original estate were sold off , and his heirs sold the house to Arthur Kingsley Porter , a Harvard University professor . He bequeathed the property to the university , which now uses it as the official residence of its President .

Architecturally the house has retained most of its Georgian character , and has had only modest exterior additions and modifications . Although it was decorated in a Victorian style by the Lowells , Harvard restored the interior to a more traditional Georgian style when it took over the property . The house is not open to the public . In addition to the property owned by Harvard , the National Historic Landmark District encompasses the adjacent Lowell Park , a state @-@ owned park which was once part of the original Oliver estate .

= = History = =

= = = Oliver , Revolution , and Gerry = = =

The house now known as Elmwood was built about 1767 by Thomas Oliver , appointed Lieutenant @-@ Governor of Massachusetts in the spring of 1774 . The estate , located on the western edge of Cambridge , Massachusetts , at that time consisted of about 100 acres ( 40 ha ) of rolling fields with a commanding view of the Charles River . Oliver 's property extended from Fresh Pond in the north across the Charles River to what is now the Boston neighborhood of Brighton to the south , then part of Cambridge . It was not far from the 1759 mansion built by his brother @-@ in @-@ law John Vassall , now the Longfellow House ? Washington 's Headquarters National Historic Site .

On September 1 , 1774 , pursuant to orders given by Governor Thomas Gage , British Army troops removed provincial gunpowder from a magazine in what is today Somerville . This activity caused a spontaneous rising of militia throughout the province amid rumors of actual violence that is known as the Powder Alarm . The next day Oliver was able to dissipate a crowd that formed in Cambridge ( near present @-@ day Harvard Square ) by going to Boston , conferring with Gage , and reporting that no further military movements were planned . However , the crowd followed him home and compelled him to resign his office , which he did under protest . Oliver and his family shortly thereafter fled to Boston .

Early in the Siege of Boston that began after the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775 , the house was occupied by troops that eventually became part of the Continental Army ; one of the building 's notable occupants during this time was Benedict Arnold , then in the Connecticut militia . After the Battle of Bunker Hill it was used as a hospital . When the British military evacuated Boston in March 1776 , the Olivers , like many other Loyalists , traveled with them to Nova Scotia . Oliver eventually settled in Bristol , England , where he died in 1815 .

The Massachusetts government confiscated Oliver 's property during the American Revolutionary War , and sold it in 1779 to Andrew Cabot . In 1787 Elbridge Gerry purchased the Cambridge estate , which became his home . In the aftermath of the XYZ Affair , for which Gerry was unjustly criticized

, Elmwood was the scene of protests in which Gerry was burned in effigy . Gerry served as Governor of Massachusetts in 1810 and 1811 ; redistricting of the state in 1812 prompted the coining of the term " gerrymandering " to describe the practice of shaping legislative districts in partisan ways . In March 1813 Gerry took the oath of office as Vice President of the United States in the house ; he died in 1814 in Washington , D. C. Gerry rented out large parts of the estate to tenant farmers . He sold and later repurchased land near the Charles River from a relative , who operated a landing and storehouse ; the area ( located near the present @-@ day Eliot Bridge ) became known as Gerry 's Landing .

= = = Lowell family = = =

Ten acres , including the house , were purchased from the Gerry family in 1818 by Charles Russell Lowell , Sr. of the Lowell family . It was in this home that James Russell Lowell was born on February 22 , 1819 .

In the 1850s , Lowell dealt with many personal tragedies , including the sudden death of his mother and his third daughter , Rose . His personal troubles as well as the Compromise of 1850 convinced him to spend a winter in Italy after coaxing from William Wetmore Story . The trip was financed by the sale of land around Elmwood , and Lowell intended to sell off even further . Ultimately , 25 of the original 30 acres ( 120 @,@ 000 m2 ) were sold to supplement Lowell 's income . His personal troubles continued : his son Walter died while overseas , his wife Maria White Lowell died in October 1853 , his father became deaf , and his sister Rebecca was deteriorating mentally such that she often went without speaking for weeks . He had difficulty coping and became a recluse at Elmwood for a time until an invitation to speak at the Lowell Institute resulted in a job offer at Harvard College . He accepted the job , with the request he be allowed to study abroad for a year first .

Lowell returned to the United States and began his duties at Harvard in the summer of 1856 . Still grieving the loss of his wife , however , he avoided Elmwood , lodging instead in an area known as Professors ' Row on Kirkland Street in Cambridge along with his daughter Mabel and her governess Frances Dunlap . Lowell and Dunlap married in 1857 . After the death of Lowell 's father in January 1861 due to a heart attack , he moved back to Elmwood with his family . Despite avoiding the home for so long , he was pleased to be back . He wrote to his friend Charles Frederick Briggs : " I am back again to the place I love best . I am sitting in my old garret , at my old desk , smoking my old pipe ... I begin to feel more like my old self than I have these ten years " . However , Elmwood 's expenses drained him , with taxes at \$ 1 @,@ 000 a year . As early as 1867 , he considered renting out Elmwood and moving into a smaller home elsewhere but never did . Instead , to ease his financial plight , he began to sell off land in 1870 until only two and a half acres remained .

Lowell remained at Elmwood for the remainder of his life , except during the period between 1877 and 1885 when he served as Minister to Spain and Great Britain . At Elmwood , he wrote some of his best @-@ known works , including The Vision of Sir Launfal , The Biglow Papers , and A Fable for Critics , all published in 1848 . It was Lowell who named the house " Elmwood " . He mentions the home in some of his poetry :

Lowell 's friend and fellow poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow also wrote a poem about the house called " The Herons of Elmwood " .

In the summer of 1872 , when Lowell traveled to Europe , he rented the house to Thomas Bailey Aldrich . Years later , in 1877 , when Lowell was appointed Ambassador to Spain , he rented the home to the violinist Ole Bull . Shortly after Bull 's death in 1880 , the Norwegian poet , playwright , and novelist Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson was the guest of Bull 's widow at Elmwood for three months . Upon Lowell 's return to the United States in 1885 , he stayed at Elmwood until his death . He died in the home on August 12 , 1891 .

= = = 20th century to present = = =

After the death of James Russel Lowell the house was inherited and used seasonally first by his daughter Mabel the wife of Edward Burnett then by their children . Arthur Kingsley Porter purchased

Elmwood and the remaining lands from the Lowell heirs in 1920 . Porter , a Harvard professor , used the house as a private residence , but also taught some of his classes there and allowed students to use his extensive library . Under the terms of his will , the property was bequeathed to Harvard upon his death in 1933 , although his wife was granted lifetime occupancy . She died in 1962 , at which time Harvard took full control of the property .

After major renovations Elmwood was occupied by Franklin L. Ford , who served as Harvard 's Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for most of the 1960s . Acting President Derek Bok moved his family to its bucolic grounds in 1971 amid security concerns originating in student protest activity near the then @-@ president 's residence on Quincy Street . The house has been the official residence of Harvard presidents since . It still houses portions of the Lowell library .

The Harvard @-@ owned property and the adjacent state @-@ owned Lowell Park were declared a National Historic Landmark District in 1966 . Lowell Park was established in 1899 as a memorial to James Russell Lowell . It was paid for in part by private subscription and also with some public funds , and donated to the state in 1898 . It was at first administered by the Metropolitan District Commission as part of the Charles River Reservation ; the MDC 's successor , the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation , is now responsible for the park .

= = Architecture = =

Although parts of Elmwood 's interior have been altered , its exterior has not changed greatly over the years . It is a large , square , clapboarded structure in Georgian style with brick @-@ lined walls and two chimneys . The floor plans on each floor are the same : two rooms on either side of a central hall housing a staircase . The windows on the first and second floors have decorative cornices , and a 19th @-@ century balustrade surrounds the roof . The exterior entranceway is flanked by Tuscan pilasters supporting a classic entablature decorated with a frieze . Above the entablature is a large window with Ionic pilasters on either side , topped by a triangular pediment .

The building has had some modifications and additions , made principally during the Lowell ownership period . Additions housing more modern services and a library were added to the west side of the house , and first @-@ floor windows in the front parlor and dining room were replaced with French doors . A one @-@ story porch with balustraded roof deck was added on the north side of the house , and a terrace was installed on the south side . The Lowells decorated the house in a Victorian style ; Harvard restored the building interior to an 18th @-@ century style when it took over the property .