



# Borderland State Park

## *Self-Guided Architecture Tour*

### About Borderland State Park

Borderland State Park is the former estate of Oakes and Blanche Ames. The Commonwealth purchased the 1250-acre Borderland property from the Ames family and opened it as a state park in 1971. It has since grown to encompass more than 1780 acres. Borderland hosts a number of activities, including hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and fishing.

Incorporated in 1972, Friends of Borderland, a 501(c)3 nonprofit group, helps maintain the intrinsic resources and aesthetics of the park through volunteer work, programs and fundraisers. Through their preservation efforts, they are able to assist in the protection of this unique park for future generations. Visit their website at: [www.friendsofborderland.org](http://www.friendsofborderland.org)

Borderland is owned and operated by the Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation. For a listing of parks and events, visit the DCR Web site at: <http://www.mass.gov/dcr>

At Borderland, there is a \$5 (MA residents) / \$6 (out of state) per car parking fee payable at the grey machines in the Visitor Center parking lot. Annual and senior parking passes are available in the office.

All pets must be leashed while in the park.

### About Oakes and Blanche Ames

#### Oakes Ames

A prominent Harvard botanist who specialized in the study of orchids, was a great-grandchild of Oliver Ames, who founded a highly successful and well-known shovel shop in North Easton, Mass., in 1804.

Ames shovels played a crucial role in the building of the railroads and in the California and New Zealand gold rushes and they were, for a time, considered legal tender on the frontier. Other local former Ames estates include Sheep Pasture and Stonehill College, both in Easton.

#### Blanche Ames Ames

An artist and woman's suffrage cartoonist, descended from an entirely unrelated branch of Ames. Her father, Adelbert Ames, served in the American Civil War and was the first graduate of West Point Military Academy to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Blanche's maternal grandfather, Benjamin Butler, was a Union general during the Civil War whom President Abraham Lincoln considered for vice president during Lincoln's campaign for a second presidential term. Butler declined, feeling that the nation needed him more on the battlefield than in Washington.



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Welcome to the Ames Mansion at Borderland State Park. This self-guided tour highlights some of the architectural features of the family's 100-year-old English manor-style home while providing a brief history of its construction. This self-guided tour takes approximately 15-20 minutes. After your self-guided tour, check out some more photos of the Ames family and the construction of the home inside the visitor center (open daily).

## Begin in front of the mansion

As you can see, the mansion is large, totaling over 22,000 square feet of living space on three floors. There are 20 rooms, 11 fireplaces, and 8.5 bathrooms.

Oakes Ames, a Harvard botanist, and his wife, Blanche, an early woman's suffragist and artist, began planning the home on Valentine's Day, 1907. "I am anxious," wrote Oakes in his diary that day, "to build an English style of country house with diamond paned windows and odd wall angles that give an appearance of coziness and informality."

The family moved into the home in September 1911, though it was not fully complete until January 1912.

Looking at the front of the mansion, it is apparent that the home is built of stone. In fact, three main types of material were used: fieldstone, granite (quarried in Quincy, MA) and steel-reinforced concrete. Interestingly, much of the stone you see are fieldstones recovered from stone walls that were present on the Borderland property. Talk about recycling!

The wing of the home to your left, or the east wing, houses a two-story library containing about 6,000 books. Surrounding the diamond-paned windows are granite columns. Granite stone is also just below the roofline of the mansion and around many other windows.

The bell on the roof of the library was not always at that location and is not an original feature of the home. It came from an abandoned sugar plantation in Cuba which had been destroyed during the Cuban revolution against Spanish rule in the late 1800s. Oakes had the bell shipped to America in 1910, and for a time, it sat at the east side of the driveway.

To the right of the home's main door are a series of archways. At the top of each of these arches is what is called a keystone, a wedge-shaped stone that holds in place the two halves of each arch.

## Proceed to the back of the mansion by heading to the right, around the garage

As you pass the car garage, it is interesting to note that this home was one of the first in the area to have one since, in 1910, the automobile was still a very new commodity. Some other rare features at the time include electricity throughout the home and a central heating system.

Once around the back of the mansion, you can again see granite surrounding the windows. Also note that most of the windows on the ground floor are actually doors, which allowed for quick access to the outdoor world from every room on the first floor—even the bathroom and closets!



To the right is a screened-in porch. Above one of the arches is a single polished granite stone that shines in the sunlight — see if you can spot it!

Look above the screened-in porch, you will find two more sun patios. When constructing the mansion, Oakes and Blanche wanted to incorporate a strong connection to the outdoor world; giving as many interior rooms access to the outdoors. Each one of those patios connected to three interior rooms respectively.

Now look away from the mansion, down the hill. At the base of this hill is where Oakes and Blanche installed their first grass tennis court. Later they relocated and installed a clay tennis court, where it is today. Oakes and Blanche were both active tennis players, winning many doubles tournaments.

## Continue around the back of the mansion until you reach the rock garden

Oakes, being a well respected botanist wanted this specimen garden in which you are standing in. Behind those glass doors was Oakes' laboratory, where he spent countless hours working and studying. He enjoyed escaping his work and stepping outside to this beautiful rock garden. Look around the rock garden, you will find unused slabs of granite and large field stones, which is left over material from the construction of this estate. They sure did reuse!

This concludes the self-guided Architecture Tour of the Ames Mansion. Feel free to continue down to the right and explore the home's gardens. Please join us for a guided tour. For times and date, visit [www.mass.gov/dcr](http://www.mass.gov/dcr).