

HOMER COMPOUND

The third of the Stephenson sub-division that ended up in Hannah Louise Libby's name remained hers no more than five years. Within a year of Minerva Libby's death, Hannah had married Alonzo Googins. On December 28, 1880, the Googinses secured a \$300 note to Charles C. Wiggin with land between B Street and the Marginal Way. It was paid off April 23, 1881.

Four days later, Hannah and Alonzo borrowed \$1,000 from Benjamin Scott Larrabee and mortgaged all of Hannah's east shore property she received from Minerva Libby (except Lot 210).¹ It was to be paid back in three years.

Presumably, this was the capital they expected to use to build their own house for summer visitors on the land just released by Wiggin, near *The Checkley*. By that fall, they apparently had gotten as far as building the carriage house,² which would provide safe storage for lumber, etc. to be used the next year to complete the structure. That fall they needed more money, and they borrowed \$400 at 7 percent to be due in four months from local attorney and future Maine State Historian, Augustus Moulton.³

In spite of the mortgages, on March 11, 1882 they sold Lot 29 for \$125 near their future house to John Cloudman and John M. Allen as well as one on the east shore (#209) to John Wiggin for \$75. In fourteen months, Hannah had traded her equity in land for \$1,700.

The Googins' lives changed forever upon the appearance of the Homer family that summer. Alonzo went from a future hotel owner to house builder.

For reasons fixed in family lore,⁴ Charles S. Homer Sr. and his sons, Charles S. Jr. and Arthur, decided in the summer of 1882 that Prout's Neck would become their permanent summer spot. Son Winslow was in England at the time, and it hardly

¹ On the same day the Googinses transferred Lot #210 to Winslow Lawton and John Massure of Westbrook, for \$100.

² It is reported that examinations of Homer's Studio indicate the structure dates from approximately the same period as the "Ark."

³ While a Fabuis M. Ray was the nominal mortgagee, he immediately assigned it to Moulton, who did not record the assignment until it was paid off by Charles Homer, Sr.

⁴ See Lois Homer Graham's retelling of the Homer settlement at Prout's Neck in Winslow Homer in the 1890's: Prout's Neck Observed, Patricia Junker, editor, 1990, p. 27.

seems possible family correspondence did not keep him in the loop of decision making. No family letters or cables appear to be extant from that period.

Alice Homer bought her lots from George Milliken on July 18, 1882, and she and Arthur began building their summer house shortly thereafter. A month later, Charles Sr. purchased Lot 29 from Cloudman and Allen for \$175. (They realized a 40 percent profit over three months).⁵

On August 10, 1882, eight days before buying Lot 29, Charles S. Homer Sr. entered into a contract with Hannah and Alonzo Googins to buy all of Hannah's land she received from her father in the southwest quadrant of Prout's Neck and to have Alonzo build a house based on detailed architectural specifications.⁶

It is impossible to determine when the Homer family commenced negotiations with Hannah and Alonzo Googins, but the handshake had to provide enough lead time for an architect to be consulted and designs approved and drawn.

An additional factor would have extended the time for an agreement to be formalized. The second floor plans of the "Ark's" rear wing show what was to be a studio with a fire place.⁷ A nineteenth century summer cottage may well have had a fireplace in a living room, but it would be highly unusual for one to exist upstairs. By the time heat may be needed on a second floor, the summer season would have passed. One is led to an assumption that the studio was expected to be used after everyone else had vacated Prout's Neck.

The fireplace has the stamp of Winslow Homer's direct involvement in planning the design of the building. Although Winslow was in England, communication by transatlantic cable was as instantaneous as it took a messenger to deliver it. Surface mail took a week. In spite of the extra time it may have taken to reach a consensus on the studio's layout and have it incorporated in the house plans, the contract was signed only 23 days after Alice and Arthur bought their lots.

⁵ This transaction appears to be indexed under Charles S. Horner rather than Homer. (Book 488 at page 493 in the Office of the Cumberland County Registrar.)

⁶ The specifications follow as Appendix B.

⁷ See Junker, "Expressions of Art and Life in the *Artist's Studio in an Afternoon Fog*" in *Winslow Homer in the 1890's: Prout's Neck Observed*, which reproduces upstairs plans for the "Ark" drawn by Portland architect, John Calvin Stevens.

The contract was completed⁸; Charles Sr. took title from Hannah and Alonzo Googins and paid off the Moulton mortgage in late January, 1883. On March 5, 1883, he and his wife, Henrietta, conveyed to son Charles all the land south of C Street and north of the Marginal Way.⁹ The parents were retired, and the money for the house and land would have come from son Charles, who, as a chemist had developed Valspar for Lawson Valentine's Valentine & Co. and eventually became Chairman of the Board.¹⁰

Whether due to being a resident in the house his bother paid for, the disruptions of home life when he was trying to work, or both, is unknown, but, when Winslow Homer arrived at Prout's Neck the next summer, it was with the intent of moving the stable and turning it into his residence and studio.

Winslow agreed to pay his brother \$1,200 for four lots conveyed by a deed signed by Charles on May 3, 1884. Considering other lots had been sold for about \$100 each, it appears the price included moving and construction costs for the residence/studio. The purchase price was likely backed up by a personal note.

The studio was finished in late June or early July 1884.¹¹ Homer, who had not been able to do serious painting since he left England in 1882, reported, in his tongue-in-cheek humor, to his brother on May 28, (no year written on the note) "...my factory after being shut down for two years is to be opened the month of June- everyday Superintendent engaged, & hands. Payroll \$3 per day."¹²

The Googins' financial picture had not improved after completion of the "Ark" and sale of its surrounding land to Charles Sr. Two month later, in March 1883 they borrowed another \$638, mortgaging two lots near the *Southgate House* for \$238 and, for \$400, re-mortgaged to George M. Oliver the lots already the under \$1,000 mortgage to Benjamin Seth Larrabee. The \$238 was paid in a timely manner.

⁸ Although the deed to Charles Sr. states the premises were improved by a frame or unfinished house, the description is probably a mere recitation of the contract. The deed to Charles Jr., dated 3 weeks later, refers to a house and stable erected on the premises.

⁹ For some reason, the six lots at the north corner of B and C Streets are omitted from the deed into Charles, Jr., but that omission seems to be ignored in subsequent deeds.

¹⁰ Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. and Franklin Kelly, "Reconstruction'" *Winslow Homer*, Catalogue National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1996 p. 160 and Elizabeth B. Johns, *Winslow Homer - The Nature of Observation*, 2002, p.175.

¹¹ Cikovsky, Jr. and Kelley, "Chronology" by Charles Brock p. 397.

¹² Johns, *Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation* 2002 pp. 132 & 185.

However, in May of 1884, both Oliver and Larrabee issued notices of foreclosure by publication. Filing a published foreclosure notice gave the defaulting mortgagor one year to satisfy the note or lose the property. The Googinses had 82 lots on each side of K Street (Jocelyn Road) and Eastern Point at risk.

Six months later, the Homer family came to the rescue. Charles Homer Sr., probably with son Charles' money, bought all lots east of I Street (Winslow Homer Road) facing Shell Cove (except for the two conveyed out by Googins) and Easter Point. Hannah Louise and Alonzo received \$400 and their mortgages were satisfied.

The Homers acquired the rest of Hannah Googins' subdivided lots. On July 6, 1888, Charles Homer Jr. purchased lots 127 through 138, inclusive from Seth L Larrabee for \$300. The land was swampy, of little value, and the first Homer parcel to eventually become part of the Sanctuary. Larrabee had purchased the plot with other lands from Hannah Googins on March 26, 1883 for \$500. Essentially, the Homers ended up owning all of Hannah Louise Googins' lots.

MARY E. LIBBY and EDWARD PROCTOR

The central portion of the subdivision had been awarded to Benaiah Libby, who established *The Willows* as a summer house. Upon his death on January 1, 1878, his two unmarried daughters, Ella O. and Mary E., inherited his lands. The ladies were his only children.¹³

Ella was born in 1851, and her sister in 1861. Their mother had died two years before their father.¹⁴ The operation of *The Willows* fell upon these young women. They apparently were equal to the responsibility. Unlike their cousins, when the subdivided lands were ready to be marketed, they bided their time.

Furthermore, their sales to summer people were concentrated on the land behind and south east of *The Willows*. The cottages would be in sight of summer house, and the residents undoubtedly added to the social mix of the house's patrons.

¹³ Information recited in deed from Mary E. Libby to Smithers, Sept. 18, 1920 Cumberland Co. Registry Bk. 1060 p. 291.

¹⁴ Findagrave.com; record added by Charles 4-10-10.

Their first sales from the subdivided lots occurred on September 3, 1883 and were four adjoining lots to four people from New York City, Louisa E. Nevins, Anna K. Nevins, Charles E. Thomas, and Mary T. Agnew. 1886 saw a few more sales of lots, some to the same New Yorkers and one to Frank Moss of NYC. (Both Thomas and Moss were artists, the former more well known.) Ella died at the age of 35 on June 8, 1887, leaving a 25-year-old Mary to fend for herself.

Mary sold a couple of her lots, and in January 1888, borrowed \$2,500 from Jennie F. Pennell, James Pennell's daughter and mortgages *The Willows*. Although the note had a three-year term, she paid it off in two.

In 1888, she made two sales that are significant to Prout's Neck. On May 25, she sold a series of lots situated behind *The Willows* and north of the wetlands to J. Vaughan Merrick. J. Vaughan, his brother, Thomas B., and Thomas' son-in-law Charles E. Morgan were buying land to create a compound to rival that of the Homers. The Merrick brothers of Philadelphia were natives of Hallowell, Maine, and had become wealthy, Thomas as a druggist and J. Vaughan as an engineer.

The second notable sale was the first on the southern shore to C. Emma Cheney (Bishop Charles Edward Cheney) and Alice Louise Hyde (wife of James Nevins Hyde), all of Chicago. James Nevins Hyde was a second cousin once removed of Louisa E. and Anna K. Nevins of NYC, who had made earlier purchases from the Libby sisters.¹⁵

Hyde, a physician, was apparently a good friend of the Bishop. They are recorded to have been the third and fourth applicants in Chicago's national roll book 1201 of the Sons of the American Revolution on January 10, 1890.

Mary E. Libby finally sold a large portion of her subdivided lots in May, 1889. The purchaser is a real estate broker from Portland, Edward E. Proctor. Proctor was 38 years old and the son of John C. Proctor, also a real estate agent. By early 1891, Proctor moved to Wakefield, MA, where he remained.¹⁶ Unlike earlier investors in Prout's Neck, it appears he didn't maintain a summer cottage there.

¹⁵ Wheeler Family Tree of Wheeler 0717 and McCoy Family Tree of Maggie Geyer at ancestry.com & 1850 Census of NYC Ward 18 for Russell H. Nevins.

¹⁶ Earliest deed reflecting Wakefield as his residence was dated Feb. 20, 1891, Bk. 577 p. 167.

As part of the purchase price, Mary E. Libby took back a mortgage for \$10,500. The note was to be paid by January 1, 1890. Most 19th century mortgages acted as renewable notes, at the option of the mortgagee. Mortgagees would extend due dates; interest rates were negotiable.

However, on November 8, 1889, Mary E Libby assigned the mortgage to James Hopkins Smith of New York City.¹⁷ Most likely, the purchase was at a significant discount, but Mary E. Libby benefited from sales up to that date and freed herself from the uncertainty of selling what was left. Also, the assignment document evidenced that she had left Prout's Neck for Newburyport, MA.

Mary E. Libby retained ownership of *The Willows* and much of her land north of the subdivision. It appears she rented the summer house to other proprietors.¹⁸ It isn't until 1898 that she sold *The Willows* to her first cousin, Zenas L. Seavey for \$6,000. Her lands around the summer house are sold gradually from the 1880s to when she sold the last parcel in 1920. During this period, she was known to provide mortgages to summer residents in connection with land purchases.¹⁹

Because most deeds carry a symbolic consideration of \$1.00, it is impossible to determine how Edward E. Proctor's investment in Prout's Neck turned out. It took him almost 13 years to sell off the lots, and a large majority of sales were to folks who already owned property on "Prout's."

New summer residents who purchased from Proctor were Elizabeth, NJ, friends, George and Agnes Putnam and William and Mary Patterson²⁰ in '89 and '90; Annie C. Robinson in '97, and Lucy Cheyney Farr in 1899.

By mid 1891, Proctor essentially put his lots on a "floor plan." In addition to the first mortgage, now held by James Hopkins Smith, Proctor sold all the remaining lots to John A Smith of Portland. The sale acted like a second mortgage, and as Proctor continued to sell lots he obtained a lien release from his mortgagee and a

¹⁷ Smith's father, St. John Smith was a wealthy Portland commercial merchant, who was listed in the 1870 census with \$700,000 in assets. Proctor was about the same age as Smith's younger brother, Henry St. John Smith.

¹⁸ Stuart's Atlas of Scarborough and Higgins Beaches, 1895, shows Ira Foss as proprietor of *The Willows*.

¹⁹ To Agnes Hall Putnam of Elizabeth, NJ, Nov. 14, 1889; J. Vaughan Merrick, 1891.

²⁰ Although deeds note the Pattersons resided in Albany, they had come from Elizabeth, NJ; his company had assigned him to head its regional office in Albany for upstate NY and VT.

deed from John A. Smith. In this way, he had use of money that would otherwise be tied up in Prout's Neck real estate.

During the Panic of 1893, which lasted to the middle of 1895, Proctor sold nothing. The recovery was short, and in 1896 the economy was down again. In 1896, Prout's Neck's primary builder, Alonzo Googins, placed a mechanics lien on a cottage Proctor was building for resale.²¹

By 1900, 22 lots facing South Cove remained. Apparently, James Hopkins Smith's patience hadn't. He published a notice of foreclosure in December 1900. Within six months the mortgage was assigned to George W. Brown of nearby Cape Elizabeth, who, three months later, assigned it to Bessie F. Miller of Portland.

In between the assignments, Proctor sold six lots to Winslow Homer. The remaining lots were sold to Phineas Sprague on January 22, 1902. The mortgage was satisfied, and Edward E. Proctor's real estate venture, which he had begun as a young man, was finished.

Many of Proctor's sales came about from summer residents wanting to expand their holdings. This was the case with Charles Thomas, the Merricks, Hydes, Putnams, Spragues, and, notably, the Homers.

²¹ The lien, filed on September 28, 96 was for labor and materials supplied to "one and one half story wooden frame cottage" on lots 497 and 499, sold a year later to Annie C. Robinson, after which the lien was released.