

CONTEXT

The completion of the War Between the States created a vastly different fabric of American society. The South was left impoverished, as it experienced the eclipse of its agrarian economy by the opening of the Great Plains. Westward expansion was no longer hobbled by the need for those political compromises that had created the State of Maine. Northern industry had benefited from the largest economic stimulus seen by the nation to date and advanced technology, both products of war.

American economics during the last quarter of the 19th century were shaped by three major forces: rapid payment of the Civil War debt, an expanding economy due to the wealth created from newly tapped natural resources, and a monetary system based on the fixed supply of gold. The result was the ever-increasing value of the dollar. From 1870 to 1890, the dollar gained almost 40 percent in value.

A deflating dollar hurts the common man, who must pay back debt with interest and increasingly more valuable dollars. Those with money to lend benefited doubly. This created the Gilded Age, when the rich got richer and the poor got poorer.

This is not to say there wasn't a developing middle class in the North, which prospered most from war spending. The resulting massing of capital positioned that region to benefit from the nation's extraction of natural resources. Industry was thriving, immigrant labor was cheap, and plenty of money could be accumulated. Once acquired, there would be enough money, especially among the upper middle class, to pay for leisure and season-long summer holidays for the family. Those of the wealthy class became very wealthy.

Yet, not all was rosy for those of comfortable circumstances. The United States had no central banking system that could modulate economic swings. Between 1870 and 1895, the nation experienced no less than six business cycles.¹ A family's fortunes could be wiped out at any downturn, if investments weren't monitored carefully.

Then, as today, the resort industry was most responsive to the variances of a fluctuating economy. It was against this backdrop that the summer community of Prout's Neck began to develop.

¹ Leonard P. Ayers, *Business Cycles Since 1831*, Courtesy of the Cleveland Trust Company, October, 1940.

A spade-shaped end of a small peninsula extending into the ocean at the mouth of the Scarborough River, Prout's Neck's geography greatly influenced its development. An environment of constantly changing sea, rocky cliffs, sandy beaches, windswept barrens, and swamps within a stone's throw of each other, proved an irresistible attraction for many. Its relative isolation ensured that those who were seeking peace would find it.

Its compact nature assured it would never accommodate the critical mass of upper-middle class and wealthy people needed to become a social Mecca along the lines of Bar Harbor or Newport.

Prior to the influx of summer visitors, "Prout's" was a site of agricultural enterprise. Very few fishing boats emanated from its shores. Pine Point, on the opposite side of the mouth of the Scarborough River, was far better suited to that industry.

Normally, one would expect several families might be found farming an area the size of Prout's Neck. But, this was not the case, due to its soils.

Prout's Neck contains four soil types², none noted for its fertility. As a result, it could not support more than one farm operation. For many years, it was the Prouts; by mid century, the "Neck" was owned by Captain Thomas Libby and farmed by his family.

The best of the weak soils, Hinckley gravelly sandy loam, lies exclusively across the northwestern third of the "Neck." It is suitable for hay and pasturage, and will support row crops only if irrigated and fertilized heavily.

Scarboro sandy loam, found in the center of the "Neck," comprises most of the northwestern portion of the present-day nature sanctuary. The soil is found in depressions; runoff is slow and drainage is affected by high water tables. The areas where this soil is found are wetlands.

The other two soils are differentiated by topographical slope. The southeastern and northwestern sides of the "Neck" are composed mainly of Hollis very rocky sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes. The southern land of Prout's Neck is of the same type, but on 8 to 20 percent slope.

² See Soil Survey of Cumberland County, Maine; Soil Conservation Service of the USDA in cooperation with the Maine Agricultural Experiment Station, Based on surveys 1961 to 1968; printed 1974; pp. 19-21, 31.

The Hollis soils have thin layers of topsoil and many rock outcrops. Those on the steeper slopes are thinner, and the depth to bedrock is generally 14 inches, rather than 16 inches on the 3 to 8 percent slopes. These soils support pasturage and woodland.

After the Captain's death, to facilitate the division of lands among his heirs, a map was drawn in 1879 featuring 521 lots, mostly 50 x 100 foot parcels, and filed in the County Registrar's Office. Generally, the lots were drawn over less productive soil types.³

The initial development of summer cottages was on Hollis soils of 3 to 8 percent slope. Only later, was the steeper sloped Hollis soil built on.⁴ Regardless of the enthusiasm that produced the Libby subdivision of over 500 lots, the reality of the soils dictated how the land would eventually be parceled out among summer residents.

The immutable geography of Prout's Neck channeled human efforts to create a summer colony. This relatively small, out-of-the-way piece of land, all but surrounded by ocean, offered beach and rocky surf, marsh and wild wind-swept terrain, but little room for farming, much less commercial enterprise. Such an environment attracted those who desired and needed few diversions, other than what coastal Maine's untamed nature and familiar social interaction might provide. They were people who, if not of an artistic bent, experienced a romantic sense of pleasure to wake and walk among the surroundings of Prout's Neck. They reflected the ideals of mid-Victorian culture.

Libby family members well understood the limitations of the newly subdivided land and, except for Mary E. Libby, choose to turn their lots into cash as quickly as they could, and use the money for their particular enterprises. This opened the Libby subdivision to entrepreneurs from surrounding towns and Portland, who enjoyed "Prout's" with their families and friends, as they sold lots to summer people. Similarly, a few urban families took advantage of the Libby divestiture to create summer compounds. Gradually, over 20 years from the creation of the subdivision, ownership in the lots evolved into the hands of summer people from as near as Westbrook and Gorham, ME to as far as Washington D.C., Galveston, and Chicago.

³ See Appendix A, Prout's Neck soil map.

⁴ The soil survey by the USDA noted, "Shallowness to bedrock severely limits the use of this soil for community development."

LIBBY FAMILY

During much of the 18th century, Prout's Neck was primarily shared by two owners. This split ownership continued, in a way, after 1788 when title was shared by two brothers, Robert and Thomas Libby. However, in 1830, Robert's share was bought out by his brother.⁵

This consolidation of land ownership is understandable in light of the growing family of Thomas Libby Jr. and Hannah Plummer Libby. By 1830, the couple had nine children who had to be supported on the thin soils of Prout's Neck.⁶

The 1850 census shows 12 members in the by then widowed Thomas Libby's household. Son Benaiah and his wife, Keziah, lived in their own home and had no children yet. The agricultural census of that year reveals the Libbys had 61 improved and 61 unimproved acres. Half the "Neck" was unusable for farming. They were able to produce enough food for their 2 horses, 10 cattle, 2 pigs, and 16 sheep. (Chickens weren't counted) Cash seemed to be produced mainly from 210 bushels of potatoes, 250 pounds of butter, and 40 pounds of wool.

Theirs was a modest farm operation. It is not surprising that, as the children established their own homes, the Libby family jumped to entertain summer visitors of the leisure classes.

The Libby family home became known as the *Prout's Neck House* and was most likely managed by Thomas Libby's daughters, Minerva and Sophronia. His eldest son, Silas, constructed a residence to the west of the father's house. This became known as *The Cammock House*. Son number two, Benaiah, built a home east of the father's, which was known as *The Willows* or *Sea View Cottage*. Further to the east, near the entrance to the "Neck" one of Thomas' grand-daughters, Elmira L. Coolbroth Kaler and her husband, John, built what has been variously known as *Ocean Cottage*, *Southgate House*, and *Black Point Inn*. Silas's son, Thomas J. Libby, built *The West Point House* to the east of *The Cammock House*. Silas's daughter Annie Maria married Ira C. Foss. Although the marriage was abruptly

⁵ Augustus F. Moulton, "Grandfather Tales of Ancient Scarborough" *Lewiston Journal Illustrated Magazine Section* p.A-2, Saturday, Dec. 19, 1925.

⁶ Kevin Farrar-Williams's contributions to findagrave.com Feb. 23, 2011, Black Point Cemetery.

shortened due to her death, Ira went on to become the noted proprietor of *The Checkley*.⁷

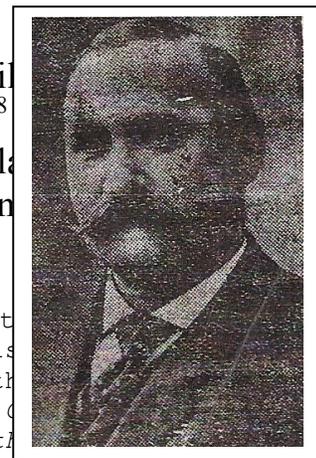
Thomas Libby Jr. died at the age of 86 on April 9, 1871. In the division of his estate, he gave his property on Prout's Neck to his two unmarried daughters, Sophrona Ellen and Minerva, and his two sons who lived on each side of him, Silas Jason and Benaiah. It wasn't until August 1875 that the siblings divided the buildings and tillable land among themselves.

The extent of the division is shown on the 1879 Stephens Plan as the portion without the numbered lots. East to west, Silas received Checkley Point and 8 acres to include the *Cammock House*; Minerva and Sophrona received 6+ acres with the *Prout's Neck House*; Benaiah retained his *Sea View House* and 12+ acres; the sisters received about 6 acres to the west of Benaiah's.

A year later, on August 5, 1876, probably due to a fatal illness, Sophrona conveyed all her interest in the land to Minerva. That fall, Minerva conveyed a 165' x 330' lot from a six-acre parcel to her sister Margaret's husband, Ebenezer (Eben) Seavey and 1¼ acre from the same piece to her niece, the daughter of her late sister Elmira, Elmira Coolbroth Kaler.

The later transfer is significant. It was obvious the Kalers, unlike the Seaveys, were intent on building a hotel and the Kaler deed is the first to convey rights to access the sea by walking paths, although it was given personally to Elmira and her heirs. To assure the easement, her uncles joined as grantors. This grant became the prototype for future easements that created the Marginal Way and communal access to the sea.

August 1876 also saw the one-day marriage of Silas's daughter Annie Maria to 20-year old Ira Calvin Foss.⁸ In October Silas conveyed to his son, Thomas J., the land around the son's home, the *West Point House*. Plans may have been underway to convey Checkley Point to



⁷ Frank Hodgdon, *Things That Aren't There Anymore*, at www.scarboroughmaine.com; See also the helpful submission by Darlene Langley, Kevin Farrar-Wallace, S. M. Smith, and John T. Hull, *Handbook Portland, Old Orchard Beach, Cape Elizabeth, Scarborough, and Westport, Maine*, 1888; J. H. Stuart and Co., *Stuart's Atlas of the State of Maine*, 1895.

⁸ Charles T. Libby, *The Libby Family in America 1602 - 1882*, p. 187; Annie Maria Libby and Ira C. Foss were married August 21, 1876. She died August 22, 1876.

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daughter, Annie Marie, who, at 22, would have been old enough to take title, because, on December 28, 1876, Ira's widowed mother, Tryphena B. Foss, took ownership for her minor son and gave back a \$2,000 mortgage.

Ira FOSS Collection of Peter Foss

Silas had another child, 33-year old Hannah Louise. She later married Alonzo Googins. It was they who were planning to erect a hotel on a pre-existing foundation when they were convinced by the Homer family to sell the land and build the "Ark." One wonders if the foundation was constructed in 1876 by Silas in a vain attempt to provide the possibility of a summer house and residence for Hannah Louise, as he had for his other two children.

Up to this point, all land transfers had a family connection. But in 1878, that changed. Minerva, who had received six acres at the entrance to the "Neck" decided to sell. That parcel was not connected to her home and summer business.

On August 13, 1878 James Pennell and Frank B. Libby purchased the southeast portion of Minerva's 6 acre lot. Pennell lived in Westbrook. In the 1850 census he is noted as a manufacturer of harness. Fifty years later, he's a bank director. Frank B. Libby (a distant relation to the Libbys of Prout's Neck) was a deputy sheriff in Portland. He was also James Pennell's son-in law.⁹

Exactly what James Pennell's and Frank B. Libby's entrée to Prout's Neck was is not clear. However, on January 18, 1877, Frank B. Libby took a mortgage from Margaret and Eben Seavey, which Minerva guaranteed.

On October 17, 1878, Pennell and Libby sold a lot of a tenth of an acre to Amy D. Beach of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The first summer visitor to buy land had come forward. Amy Beach was widowed and working as a nurse. Her husband had been an insurance agent.¹⁰ The next summer, on June 10, 1879, Pennell and Libby sell another 40' x 108' lot to Alonzo Libby and George F. Springer of Westbrook and Bryce M. Edwards and Frederick Walker of Portland. Later that year, Minerva Libby conveyed an adjoining ¾ of an acre to Pennell and Libby. In time, they built the *Jocelyn House* on this parcel, which Frank B. Libby, who had been earlier

⁹ Charles T. Libby, pp. 405 and 188; Francis Beverly Libby married Mary E. Pennell Howe and Anna S. Pennell; he was a fourth cousin once removed of Minerva Libby.

¹⁰ The 1870 census for Pawtucket shows Horace and Amy Beach with two teens. Webb's Pawtucket 1872 directory only lists her working as a dressmaker. Subsequent directories give her occupation as a nurse.

widowed, operated with his second wife, Anna Susan, also a daughter of James Pennell.

Benaiah Libby died on January 1, 1878. His heirs were two daughters, Ella O. and Mary E., who was a minor. On November 1, 1878, Silas Libby died. Less than eight years after the death of Thomas Libby Jr., three of the four children to whom he left his property at Prout's Neck had died. The last, Minerva, had TB¹¹, and her life would be over the day after Christmas 1879. The lands that had been owned in common by the brothers and sisters had to be subdivided. This was accomplished in August 1879, when the *Plan of Libby's Neck with Division for Heirs of Thos. Libby* was prepared by S. L. Stephenson. Filed in the county registrar's office October 22, 1879, this map became the blue print for the development of the summer colony.

While the interest in the sons' lands devolved upon their children, Minerva had no children, and she determined by will who would benefit from her holdings.

Written between the deaths of Sophrona and Benaiah, Minerva's will bequeathed \$5 to her siblings Silas, Benaiah, Elizabeth Coolbroth, Margaret Seavey, and Clara J. Libby, as well as to her niece Elmira Kaler. She then split her estate, including the Prout's Neck land, between her niece Hannah Louise Libby, and George Henry Milliken. Not wishing to take sole responsibility for the result, she added that this division of property was as wished by her deceased father and late sister, Sophrona Ellen.¹²

George Milliken was not a family member, but lived in the Thomas Libby household for years, appearing in the 1860 census. He must have had a major role tending to the farm and summer trade. Even though Hannah was Silas's daughter, she lived in her grandfather's household since childhood, showing up there in the 1850, '60, and '70 censuses.

Hannah Louise Libby Googins, thus, ended up with a third interest in the Lots; George Milliken, Benaiah's daughters, Ella O. and Mary E., and Thomas J. Libby each have a sixth interest. Eventually, George became proprietor of the *West Point*

¹¹ The 1880 census details deaths of those who died in the most recent 12 months.

¹² Although she names Milliken, Hannah Libby and her attorney, Augustus Moulton as her executors, the former two decline allowing the attorney sole responsibility and benefits.

House, which had been Thomas J. Libby's. *The Prout's Neck House*, where Minerva had lived, came into the hands of her brother-in-law, Eben Seavey.¹³

Within a month of Stephenson's Plan, the Libby family passed cross-deeds confirming its division, including a split between Thomas J. and Hannah Louise of their father's portion. The deeds were filed with the map on October 22, 1879.

¹³ Stuart's Atlas of the State of Maine, 1894-95 lists the proprietors of the various summer houses: Southgate House - J Kaler; Willows - Ira C Foss; Prouts Neck House - E. Seavey; Cammock House - Mrs. P. Libby; West Point House - Geo. H. Milliken; Checkley House - Ira C. Foss; Jocelyn House - F. B. Libby.