

## ARTIST AND LANDSCAPE

As mentioned earlier, Charles S. Homer Jr. had acquired 12 lots south of G Street and between F and H Streets on July 7, 1888 from Seth Larrabee.<sup>1</sup> Then, in September, 1889, he purchased from Proctor all the land south of his Larrabee purchase to D Street, between H and I Streets and E Street. The purchase from Proctor abutted the Homer property that faced Shell Cove.

That most of this land was swampy and unbuildable was not, at the time, important to the Homers. It wouldn't be for another 10 years, until the Homer brothers divided the lands among themselves with the idea of selling lots.

Two months later, on November 26, 1889, Proctor sells the rest of his wetlands to Winslow Homer. This purchase, between E and C Streets, connected all the Homer properties. The Winslow's purchase may have been delayed because he had been at the North Woods Club in the Adirondacks from October 1 to November 24.<sup>2</sup>

By late 1889, Homer had some cash. His 1886 masterpiece, "The Undertow" had sold, from which he realized \$1,920.<sup>3</sup> Money was coming in from his series of Civil War drawings for the *Century Magazine*.<sup>4</sup>

In February, 1890, he had a very successful show of his Adirondack paintings, which brought in more liquidity.<sup>5</sup> With this money, Winslow purchased two more properties and possibly paid for a painting room addition to his studio.<sup>6</sup>

The two purchases were within a week of each other and connected with his work as an artist. The first, on April 30, 1890, were lots of Asa M. Sylvester adjacent to those he bought of Edward E. Proctor. (The more northerly lots of these two purchases were at the head of Prout's Neck's swamp, which drained southeasterly to Eastern Point.) The second, on May 7, 1890, was a

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<sup>1</sup> These lots had been allotted to Hannah Louise Libby from those awarded to her father. The father's other twelve lots, between F and C Streets, went to Thomas J Libby and were sold to Asa M. Sylvester.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Brock, *Chronology* p.398.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Beam, *Winslow Homer at Prout's Neck*, 1966, p.80.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Works of Winslow Homer*, 1979 pp.191 & 192.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Brock, *Chronology* p.398.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Johns, *Winslow Homer The Nature of Observation*, p.132.

parcel from the Ethan Wiggin's Place from Charles C. and Mary A. Wiggin of Freeport, ME, situated near what is now the Town Beach at Ferry Rock.

When the Libbys farmed Prout's Neck, the land comprising more than the southern half of the "Neck" was used for pasture. Cattle need a source of drinking water, and the most logical place for a cow pond is at the head of a swamp, where the opportunity for cattle to foul their water is minimized.

Over time, swamps reclaim man-made pools. But, the Homer purchases were only a decade away from cow pasture. It is likely Winslow, rather than Charles Jr., bought the lands between E and C Streets because he wanted to secure the property as an outdoor studio with his own money, not his brother's.

It has been noted that he used Prout's Neck personages as models for his Adirondack scenes.<sup>7</sup> For water scenes, he needed a backdrop. A wooded cow pond would suffice.

The purchase from Wiggin included what had been a fishing shack, which Homer used for painting.<sup>8</sup> Wiggin obtained the place by devise from his father, Ethan Wiggin.<sup>9</sup> Based on the deed of the farm from Wiggin to Phineas Sprague on November, 28, 1906, Wiggin made a practice of renting out the land. It is likely Homer rented the shack before he was able to purchase it. Otherwise, he would have had to bring his models and subjects to his home and studio, which was generally "off limits." By purchasing the property, he was able to secure its future use for himself.

Thus, in 1890, Winslow Homer completed his "four-part studio": 1) his enlarged home, in which "[e]ven in the daytime the light was so unsatisfactory in his studio that whenever the weather allowed he painted outside";<sup>10</sup> 2) the Marginal Way, which by deed language, was open to all Prout's Neck residents and offered dramatic ocean views; 3) the wooded low lands of the swamp; and 4) the shack with its view of the mouth of the Scarborough River, beach, and surrounding flat, sweeping terrain.

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<sup>7</sup> Beam pp. 102 and 103 for a discussion of Homer's selection of Prout's Neck models for Adirondack scenes and the high probability that *Adirondack Guide* (exhibiting a pond) was completed at "Prout's."

<sup>8</sup> Beam p.33.

<sup>9</sup> Cumberland Co. Registry Bk. 578 p. 213.

<sup>10</sup> Beam p.89.

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## CONCLUSION

Winslow Homer is Prout's Neck most recognized figure, and Philip C. Beam reported, "Winslow's nephew, Charles, insisted his uncle never would have stayed there if he had been surrounded by any typical arty group."<sup>11</sup>

In its first quarter century of development, the summer colony was far from "arty." While residents came from as wide a range as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Galveston, most all of them had connections to Maine and Eastern Massachusetts.

It seems the Libbys of Prout's Neck depended more on word of mouth than lavish advertising. As a result, people were not drawn to Prout's Neck as they were to Newport, Cape Cod, or Bar Harbor. Given the poor, shallow soils, this was a good thing.

Rather, the colony's development was taken on by two distinct groups who looked upon "Prout's" as a summer place for their family and friends: local, well off business people (many connected to the grocery business) and a few wealthy families, who could have placed their summer "roots" anywhere.

Still, the development of the summer colony was painfully slow. Lots were on the market for years and could have been purchased by any number of people. They weren't; instead, current land owners eventually bought most of the property.

In a word, Prout's Neck was a well kept secret; perhaps, purposely so. For some reason, the many guests of the *Checkley*, *Jocelyn*, the hotels on Scarborough Beach, and the Libby family summer houses did not or could not buy lots and build cottages.

The Libbys, Pennells, Cloudmans, Valentines, Asa Sylvester, Smalls, Nevinses, Merricks, and Homers set the stage for the next 25 years, during which Prout's Neck evolved into the status it enjoys today.

Ira Foss' water system was a must. By 1895, a wealthy population was not willing to be without indoor plumbing and hot and cold running water.

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<sup>11</sup> Beam p.33.

Perhaps more important was the influence of Phineas Sprague and the Sprague Corporation, who consolidated properties, purchased land for the country club, promoted the land owners' association, and managed summer hotels. That's a story for others to tell.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A description of life in the summer colony's second quarter century may be found in Rupert Sargent Holland, The Story of Prouts Neck, Prouts Neck Association, 1924; available on line from Harvard Library.