

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF PROUT'S NECK



*Compliments of the
author
F. J. Mass*



THE object in writing the following notes, is, to bridge over the interval between Mr. Moulton's history of Prout's Neck and the present, as during that interval (1886 to 1912) many of the landmarks have changed, and dear and valued friends have been called to a better world, while their many good deeds, though thoroughly appreciated, unless recorded may soon be forgotten.

The first introduction to Prout's Neck was 1886, twenty-six years ago. We had heard glowing accounts from our friends (among whom was Mr. Charles Thomas) " that it was a charming place, beautifully situated, and in every way calculated to satisfy the artist's eye." So in the summer of that year we determined to make the venture, and in no way were disappointed.

At that time the Neck was quite primitive, the Checkley was very limited in comparison with what it is at present, and there were only a few cottages to grace the place. The hotels were the Checkley, Cammack, West Point, Willows, Southgate, and the Prout's Neck or Middle House, the latter a fine old relic, one of its picturesque features being a moss-covered roof. The interior was also quaint and interesting, the beams, showing through the ceilings, being of huge, rough, solid timber browned by age. A long flight of steps from the edge of the embankment (facing the house) led to a wharf, which served as a means of embarking on rowing, sailing and fishing excursions—in fact, that was the only port, as we had no boat-house in those days. The hotel and

wharf were owned by Capt. Eben Seavey, to whom we owed an everlasting debt of gratitude for his kindness and generosity.

The channel was dotted with punts and dories, mostly supplied by Capt. John Wiggins, whose "hotel," as he called his shanty, was a three-roomed, one-story building, on a triangle at the edge of the road facing the Lee House, where he sold fish, candies, lobsters, cookies, in fact, anything from a post stamp to a bathing suit. He was striking in appearance, as he delighted in wearing a one-tailed dress coat, red flannel shirt, high topped boots with the trousers tucked in, and the whole topped off with a high, grey felt hat. He was also useful in supplying us with bread, eggs, etc., as the nearest shop in those days was the "two-mile store," located on the top of the hill where the main road joins the Higgins Beach road.

Neither had we a post office, but depended for mail and transport on Harris Seavey, who also carried us to and from the station in his barge. Altogether the life and customs were very quaint and primitive.

In that year there were only about five or six cottages on the Neck. Ours was almost opposite to Mr. Charles Thomas', now the Charles Thomas Memorial Library, who showed his love and appreciation of the happy days he enjoyed at Prout's Neck by leaving his property to trustees, devising that it should be used in perpetuity as a library. We, the few who survive him and who knew his many excellent qualities, thoroughly appreciate the value of the gift, as it is not only a source of pleasure to the summer visitors, but is also used by the natives who as residents have the privileges of the library during the long and trying winter months.

One of the great pleasures was bathing in the ocean, and though the beach had a very gradual incline and the undertow

scarcely perceptible, there was always facing us the danger of some one drowning, especially as we lacked the usual protection which is at all well regulated seashore resorts, viz., a lifeboat.

Mr. Ira C. Foss was first consulted, who considered seriously the question and advised immediate action. A list was made and a canvass up the road as far as the "two-mile store" was successful in interesting the various residents, who agreed to meet at an early date for discussing ways and means with the summer visitors. This was in the year 1887. The first meeting was held at the Prout's Neck House.

Among those present were Messrs. J. V. and T. B. Merrick, Colbruth, J. M. Kaler, Pennel, Small, Eben Seavey, Ai Seavey, Fairbanks, Moss, C. Hinckley and A. Homer.

There was but one opinion,—that we should have a lifeboat as soon as possible, and as each one agreed to subscribe ten dollars we were enabled to establish the beach service, by buying a lifeboat, building a boathouse, and maintaining a boatman.

This was the origin of the Prout's Neck Association.

At that memorable meeting, Mr. J. V. Merrick was elected President, Mr. T. B. Merrick Treasurer, and F. Moss Secretary and Beach Committee.

As the Neck became more and more populated, so in proportion did the scope of the Association broaden.

A surveyor was employed to mark the roads and boundaries for which purpose granite posts were placed at corners and intersections (some of which still remain) showing where one could build without encroaching on either roads or land. At that time this action was very important, and the result was a perfect understanding as to localities.

It may be well to mention that the roads are private roads, repaired when necessary from the funds of the Association or by private enterprise. The town road commences at the

Checkley Hotel and skirts the edge of the bay to Scarborough station and so on to Portland.

Later on, the stone pier, board walks, bridges, and bath houses were added, besides a fresh-water well was sunk at the bathing beach, as we had no supply of running water in those days.

The Association was useful in other ways. one of which was to bring the summer residents in touch with the authorities of the town. For that purpose we hired the old Odd Fellows Hall, having chosen the point of assembly as central as possible in order that every one could participate. One important meeting was held at the town hall, Mr. F. M. Newcomb as Moderator or Chairman. The discussion was in relation to sanitation, and the necessity of having proper drainage. For that purpose the town agreed to give \$250 towards the project if we would furnish a like sum, which we did. We then employed a Boston expert, who, after a week's work running lines, etc., advised our building a stone reservoir in the sand, as far away as possible, but as his lowest estimate for same was \$13,000 we had to abandon that method and avail ourselves of the present service, which answers our purpose without such huge expenditure.

A most useful and beneficial auxiliary was inaugurated about 1904 or 1905. The Ladies' Prout's Neck Association, which has been of great service in many ways, marking out and making paths, eradicating noxious weeds, instituting a system for keeping the roads and paths free from paper and refuse, employment of government and state experts on trees, and last but not least suggesting to the parent association certain necessary improvements, for which it generously furnished funds.

As the number of visitors increased every year, there was a necessity for providing them with the usual outdoor amusements,—golf, tennis, and good boating facilities.

Through the kindness of Mr. Ira C. Foss, many enjoyed the benefit of his tennis courts, but as they were inadequate to supply the demand a syndicate was formed to supply not only good tennis courts but also a substantial boathouse, large enough for the storage of boats and canoes, and boatmen to care for same.

The establishing of courts and boathouse was in 1902. For this purpose there had to be provided caretakers, nets, appurtenances for the courts, as well as boats, canoes, oars, paddles, anchors, etc.

It may be well to mention that though the syndicate undertook the above work, the main idea was to manage it temporarily, as frequent efforts were made by its members to form a tea or clubhouse, in order by such combination to have it a public and not a private institution. In fact, for the benefit of all, it was found necessary to take immediate steps, for the following reasons:

First — The inaccessibility of the golf course, which at that time was adjacent to the burial ground, near the Scarborough station.

Second — The want of a tea or clubhouse near our dwellings.

Third — The imperative necessity of our acquiring the tract known as the "Wiggins Land," especially as there was a possibility of its becoming a terminal for a trolley line.

For the purpose of combining to unite the various social and athletic interests, the important question was how to secure the Wiggins tract, as everything hinged on that. It was a difficult job, but finally Messrs. George S. Motley of Lowell and P. W. Sprague of Boston were interested sufficiently to promise to furnish the funds to back the project should there be a number of subscribers sufficient to authorize the venture. This took place in the month of September, 1906. The understanding was that a meeting should be

called, at which, if a sufficient sum were subscribed, means would be supplied for the purchase of the land for the building of a clubhouse, tennis courts, golf links, etc. There had to be rush for this as many people were leaving for their homes on account of the lateness of the season.

A meeting was called at the cottage of Mr. Charles E. Morgan, who kindly loaned his house for the place of rendezvous. It is needless to say that those present, on hearing the plan proposed for furthering the welfare of Prout's Neck, were most enthusiastic and pledged themselves to subscribe the necessary sum.

Messrs. Sprague and Motley succeeded in purchasing the land, November 31st, 1906. Later on Mr. Sprague sent to the manager the following telegram: "Deeds have been signed. Go to work on building and improvements."

Previous to the receipt of the telegram, a site had been marked out for both house and tennis courts, and the trees blazed where it was necessary to cut through the woods for a golf course, the latter under the supervision of Mr. Fenn, the expert and professional of the Poland Spring golf course.

Estimates had been received and accepted for the building, as well as for the construction of tennis courts and golf links. Mr. Pease, the able architect of Portland, was allotted the plans of the house, but it is well to mention that first they had been carefully drawn "to scale" by Mr. Howard Hinckley of Washington, D. C., who also gave much of his time and thought to the development of the grounds.

As there were snow and ice on the ground when Mr. A. L. Googins, the builder and contractor, commenced operations, the prospect of having the "plant" finished in reasonable time looked very slim. But irrespective of weather and drawbacks the work was pushed to completion, and delivered to the members at the promised time. It was an arduous undertaking for those who had to manage the

financiering, as well as the correspondence, especially as the subscribers were in England, France, North, South, East and West. To one man during that winter over seventy letters were written.

In connection with the above, great credit should be given to Mr. Sprague, who, when there was an emergency from lack of funds, always generously responded to the call by furnishing the money to continue the work.

Also to Mr. Charles S. Homer, for his gift (in perpetuity) to the Prouts Neck Corporation, as trustees, the tract of woods leading to "the Sanctuary," which as a public benefit will ever remain as a monument of his generosity.

Also to Mr. Winslow Homer, who deeded to the same corporation the land adjoining the bathing beach, a gift which has been of inestimable benefit to the residents.

To Mr. Ira C. Foss we owe an everlasting debt of gratitude for installing the water works. His excellent system for supplying that need enabled us to have modern plumbing and effective drainage.

In conclusion, it would be well to mention the arduous endeavors of officers of the Prout's Neck Association effectually to carry on their work of repairing roads, maintenance of bathing facilities, library, paths, sanitation, fire department, etc., and to state that with limited means it reflects great credit on those who have in the past as well as present voluntarily given their services.