

SELLING BEGINS

Wasting no time, on the same day as the other documents were recorded with the Registrar, Thomas J. sells 9 lots straddling A Street (Sanctuary Lane), adjacent to the *Checkley*. The buyers are John Cloudman (Eliza H.) and Amanda S. Allen (John M.) of Westbrook, ME and Mary L. Small (Charles F.) of Malden, MA. About a year later, Thomas J. sells 5 lots on the north side of A Street, extending east from his other sale, to Benjamin E. Cotting of Boston.

These two were the only sales of the subdivided lots until the summer of 1882, although Thomas J. and Hannah Louise mortgaged their lands to the Gorham Savings Bank.¹ Libby family members, through lack of opportunity or inclination, did not act to market their property for cottage lots. With various exceptions, large tracts of the subdivision were sold to others.

The Libbys needed capital to expand their summer establishments, and they may well have expected the sale of lots to proceed slowly. After all, they, unlike their purchasers, were well aware of the “Neck’s” limitations. Additionally, the country in 1880 experienced a shaky recovery from a five-year recession. Things didn’t level out to a point where people would feel comfortable to spend money on vacation homes until 1881. (By 1884, the economy was tanking again.)²

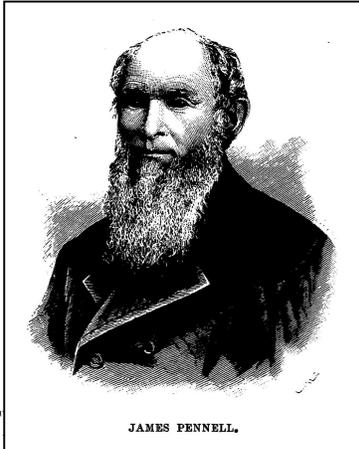
1882 saw activity in Prout’s Neck land sales on several fronts. Cloudman, Allen, and Small sold land to Benjamin Cotting of Boston and Henry Fairbanks of St. Johnsbury, VT. Thomas J. Libby sold two lots each to Alice P. Homer and John A. Waterman. Hannah Louise contracted to sell much of the land from her father to Charles S. Homer, Sr. George Milliken, who ended up with the northern half of Minerva Libby’s eastern shore land sold it to James Pennell, George Quinby, Leander Valentine, and John Cloudman, of Westbrook and Frederic D. Ellis of Portland. (The five partners shortly become three when Quinby and Ellis are bought out by the others.)

Pennell, Valentine, and Cloudman were prosperous community leaders and friends from nearby Westbrook. Each had served as a selectman of the town. Valentine is

¹ George Milliken did sell a ½ acre of Minerva Libby’s separate property in 1881 to William H. Koling of Portland.

² See Ayers.

noted as the first mayor of the City of Westbrook, when it was established in 1889.³

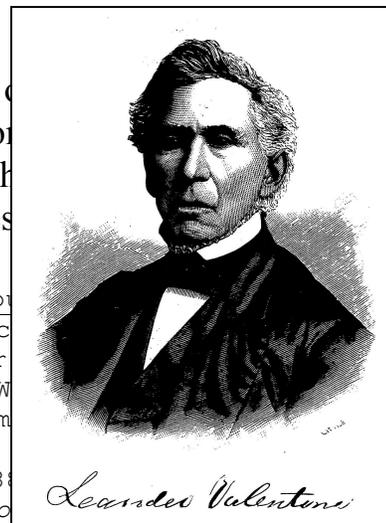


They each had a varied collection of careers. Pennell had been a shoemaker, brick maker, sales rep, manufacturer of loom harnesses, owned a wire mill, and sold stoves and hardware. Valentine was a farmer, school teacher, grocer, state senator, and customs house appraiser. Cloudman went from farming, to trading, to wholesaling flour with his brother-in-law, to retailer, to building houses.⁴

Two of these gentlemen served them well in the wild and woolly economic times of the 19th century. It was probably this flexibility that landed them on Prout's Neck. Even though they bought land from George Milliken in 1884 in the northeast quadrant of Prout's Neck, it wasn't until January 5, 1888 that they made their first sale:⁵ eight lots off Pulpit Rock to Francis Small of Boston. After Francis Small's death in 1893, his family conveyed their cottage to Phineas Sprague of Malden, MA, bringing to Prout's Neck a powerhouse of enthusiasm who consolidated lands and did much to give identity to the summer colony.⁶

1888 saw three other lot sales: to Elizabeth G. May of Leicester, MA; Louisa E. Nevins of NYC, and J. Vaughn Merrick of Philadelphia. This was the first of Merrick's many purchases.

However, on April 16, 1889, the Town of Scarborough took title to the trio's lots from Homer's land on the South, Marginal Way on the east, M Street on the north and I street on the west.



³ Clayton, W. Woodford, History of Cumberland County and Manning's 1950 Directory for Westbrook, Maine, c

⁴ Clayton, History and Biographical Sketches for censuses of 1850 for Gorham, 1860, 70 & 80 for W City Directory pp.67 & 230; Ancestry.com William family tree.

⁵ In actuality, they made two sales prior to 1888: lots 289-299 [behind *Southgate House* or *Black Point*] which were sold to two people, Elizabeth A. Gilbert of Brooklyn in December 1884 and 1887 and William Grever of Portland in 1887. Frank B. Libby joined the trio in this purchase from George Milliken.

⁶ Cumberland Co. Registry Bk 600 p360 and over 50 other transactions; Patricia Junker, Winslow Homer in the 1890s: Prout's Neck Observed, 1990 p.52.

due to non-payment of \$16.80 for taxes in 1887. The parcel was evaluated at \$1,200. Because it was for a tax year before the above-mentioned four purchases, the new owners technically lost their title when the town filed the deed.

It must be kept in mind that the economy did poorly in 1884 and did not come out of recession until mid 1886. The recovery was unsteady, and it dipped back into a short recession in the spring of 1887. By 1888, things were looking up, and the economy took off in 1890.

Yet, it shouldn't have been difficult for three successful businessmen to come up with \$16. It is possible they had come to the conclusion that their investment in Prout's Neck had bombed, and they were going to walk away from it. But, they changed their mind once sales opportunities appeared. There is no indication of partnership problems.

The trio, all in their seventies, probably to simplify their estates, exchanged lots among themselves; conveyed several to Cloudman's adopted daughter, Alice M., and her husband, John W. Adams, of Boston; and sold four lots in 1893 to Howard A. Carson of Malden, MA.

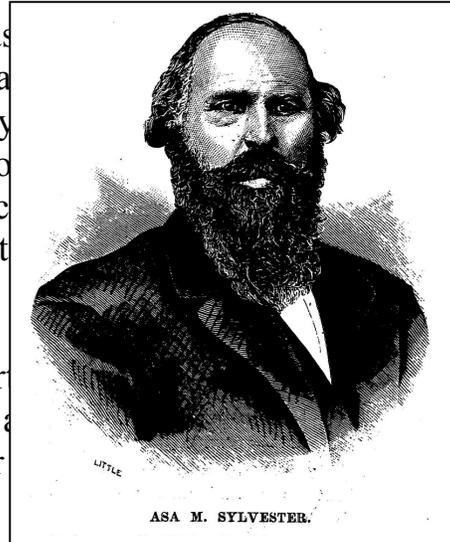
By the end of 1894, both John Cloudman and his wife, Eliza, were dead. A few months later, on July 23, 1895, Leander Valentine died. James Pennell continued along, conveying lots to his family, and died January 25, 1903, aged 84½. It is difficult to tell whether their investment in Prout's Neck made money or not. Title to a large number of lots remained in their individual estates.

ASA M. SYLVESTER

At the same time George Milliken was turning his land into cash, so was Thomas J. Libby. After selling four lots to Alice P. Homer of New York City and John A. Waterman of Gorham, ME in 1882, Thomas J. sold the rest of his sub-divided lots in January of 1883 to Asa M. Sylvester of nearby Scarborough Station. In June of 1884, Sylvester purchased the last of the parcels George Milliken received from Minerva Libby, a large triangle at the fork of the Marginal Way and Black Point Road. The latter, Sylvester never developed, but sold in 1894 to John Kaler, proprietor of the adjacent *Southgate* or *Black Point Inn*.

Like the other locals who bought into Prout's Neck, Asa Sylvester had become prosperous through his own efforts. Like Pennell and Valentine, he had sufficient funds to pay for a likeness and biographical sketch in Clayton's 1880 History of Cumberland County.

Born in Penobscot County and trained as a millwright, farmer, and seaman, Sylvester came to Scarborough in 1864 at age 44, most likely to help set up the rolling mills at Ligonier. Thereafter, he established a long-lasting grocery business. He also received an appointment as postmaster. He never married.⁷



Sylvester made a good effort to sell his property between A and B Streets (Sanctuary Lane and Winslow Homer Road). Five months after he purchased the plot, his first sale was lot 82 to John Cloudman and JOHN W. ALLEN, a grocer from Westbrook⁸. Less than three months later, the two flipped it to Henry Fairbanks so he could expand his existing plot.

On August 16, 1883, Sylvester sells to his first summer visitor, Mrs. Mary B. C. Lovering, of Germantown, PA. In January 1884 he sells two half lots to Fairbanks and in November a lot and a half to John and Amanda Allen's son-in-law, Adelbert R. Harmon.

On July 3, 1885, Asa Sylvester donated two lots to Henry Neely, as Episcopal Bishop of Portland, with the restriction, "for the creation of buildings to be used for the public worship of Almighty God according to the rites and usages of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America and for the support and maintenance of the same as Bishops determine." The deed goes on to state it is the same place where is now standing a church erected for public worship. On March 6, 1888, the Bishop conveyed one of the lots back to Sylvester, who conveyed it the next day to Ellen Burditt of Boston.

Sylvester is to be given credit for the establishment of St. James Episcopal Chapel.⁹ J. Vaughn Merrick and C. Emma Cheney (Bishop Charles E. Cheney's

⁷ Clayton, History of Cumberland County, p.368.

⁸ 1880 Census of Westbrook, ME.

wife) didn't purchase on Prout's Neck until three years later. (J. Vaughan's brother, Thomas B., bought about an acre of land behind the *Prout's Neck House* in the fall of 1885 from Eben Seavey.) Presumably, Asa Sylvester favored the Anglican Rite, but it was also an excellent promotional move as the Episcopal Church of the time was conspicuous in its service to the spiritual needs of the upper classes.

The existence of the chapel may have encouraged the Merricks, Cheneys, and others to choose "Prout's" for their summer homes.

Over a period of 14 years, Sylvester sold all of his lots between A and B Streets and on the north side of A Street, except seven he kept for himself. Not counting Fairbanks and Harmon, who had already invested in Prout's Neck, Sylvester sold to only six summer families.

In 1895 he sold five lots to house builder Alonzo Googins, Hannah Louise Libby's husband. Of those lots, the one north of A Street, Lot 103, Googins sold May 29, 1896 to Ira Foss, who built a water tower there and changed Prout's Neck forever.

⁹ On its website, The Episcopal Diocese of Portland credits Bishop Neely and the Merrick family with founding the summer chapel. Other sources give Charles Homer Sr. a major role.