

The Seduction of Historic Homes

First I would like to thank Ann Israel for inspiring our stories with tonight's topic. We all have had fun and learned a lot in pulling our stories together. I also thank the many friends here tonight whose wonderful hospitality over many years lured my husband and me to the magnificent Hudson Valley and their brilliant suggestion that we find our own house!

The pictures I've chosen to depict place are random so don't despair when the image doesn't match the commentary.

In 2001 my husband Jim and I after arduous negotiating for two years finally succeeded in acquiring an amazing property that we named Catwalk. After many years of weekending with friends and my art pilgrimages

throughout the Valley with the Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar, we knew the Hudson Valley and were overjoyed at landing in this place where history and legend are one.

We live in the fabled town of Catskill, New York on the western bank of the Hudson River across from Frederick Church's Olana and just north of Cedar Grove, the home of the founder of the Hudson River School of painting Thomas Cole. In fact it was the aura of Thomas Cole that drew both Church and Charles Herbert Moore, our legendary predecessor, to establish homes in Cole's viewshed of the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains. This is the land of Rip Van Winkle who still lounges on the ridge of the Catskill Mountains that shimmer in the changing light of day and season which continues to inspire artistic fascination.

Coming from Chicago we were very curious about the origins of other Greene County residents who when asked how long they had lived here, quite earnestly advised they have been here 350++ years. So though trains and boats suggest passage to elsewhere, many families continue to be pridefully rooted to their legacy in this area that Russell Shorto explored so beautifully in his book *Island at the Center of the World*. And so it is now for us too....seduced by what we've discovered about the charmed place that's now ours and the ghosts we've been meeting which we too may become.

As the current trustees of a historic property, we have been able to put together an unbroken and completely documented time line back to 1684 when **GYSBERT ut**

den Bogert traded hides and beads with the Leni Lenape indians, a Delaware tribe, to win our land.

The property is significantly mentioned as an important 18th c marking of the Lindsey Patent 100 years before the village of Catskill was formed in the early 19th century. **It has been as exciting as mining for lost treasure to dig through records of the Greene County Historical Society and make extraordinary finds of documentation that reinforce the importance of Catskill and Greene County in the footings of the young United States.**

Our house, originally called the Lodge, was a cottage built in 1867 by Charles Herbert Moore, a very successful Hudson River school painter in his early years, who had moved to Catskill from New York City in 1861. Moore's

cottage is an important early example of the revival of Dutch Colonial architecture expressed in the fieldstone walls, low proportions and the gambrel roof of early Dutch farmhouses. It still stands as now part of a larger structure and is the only house that has occupied this perch, which it will never relinquish as the sighting by Moore for eastern and western views is quite as brilliant as that of Olana by Church.

In his early 20's Charles Herbert Moore fell under the spell of the writings of John Ruskin. With great enthusiasm encouraged by Charles Farrer, William Trost Richards and eight other artists, Moore helped found the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art in 1863. This movement embraced Ruskin's philosophy and became the foundation of the American Pre-Raphaelites. For Moore this began his

slow transition from painter to scholar as his work moved to meticulous focus on the details of nature. This shift significantly limited his production of art causing great financial hardship for Moore and his young family.

Therefore, when Charles Elliott Norton from Harvard came calling in 1872 and offered Moore the opportunity to establish the art studio curriculum at Harvard, he had no choice but to accept the position and leave his much loved property in Catskill. Moore did spend two years with Ruskin in Venice often painting side by side architecture and art that became part of Harvard's core collection.

Returning to Harvard in 1878 Moore went on to become the first director of the Fogg Museum where much of his work is currently held.

Over time the property grew from 23 acres to 60 and the house from Moore's cottage to the family of Benjamin Howland's mansion for 85 years. Under the Howlands an elaborate expansion was carried out in 1900 by K.C. Budd, who we now discover was Katharine C. Budd (the first woman member of the NY association of architects and fifth woman architect registered in the United States). Most likely because women weren't welcome, Budd studied privately under William R. Ware, founder of the Columbia School of Architecture in 1881. In her plan for Catwalk, which was called The Chimneys at the time, she assimilated the cottage vocabulary of Moore into a very grand scale aesthetic style home. In 1920 Budd, a contemporary collaborator of Julia Morgan of Hearst Castle fame, returned to design a fabulous sculpture studio, now our bedroom, for Edith Howland, who studied sculpture

under Augustus St. Gaudens and whose work was on view for years at the Metropolitan and Brooklyn Museums and who exhibited in France at the Salon des Artistes in 1913. Interestingly both Edith and Katharine studied at the Arts Students League in its early years and both spent many years in Paris, where they perhaps met. The ghosts of Howland are exceptional as we have found from their archives at the Vedder Research Library where we have uncovered much of this history.

The property has completely seduced us as it did our predecessors. It was clear to us (me especially) from first sight that the property was too special not to share.

Continuing the arts legacy of past owners, this year is 7th year of the CATWALK Art Residency, a 6 month program which Jim and I began in 2003 for faculty and MFA alumni

from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The program was expanded last year to include Columbia University and Vassar College (where Moore's works bought by Mathew Vassar still hang and which Edith Howland and I both attended albeit 80 years apart. We have had well over 100 resident painters, poets, writers, performance and installation artists and film makers whose varied creativity in individual projects and group collaboration now define CATWALK in publication, exhibition and festivals throughout the world. CATWALK has become the center of our universe and through our recently launched website catwalkartresidency.com we expect the story will continue to unfold.

We feel very fortunate to find ourselves in this truly special place where discoveries of history and development of personal interests have stimulated us with challenge and

purpose as well as endless fun. We regularly share our home with museum groups and curators. Perhaps someday you all will come.