

## **The Importance of Catskill's Economic and Cultural Past**

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 weekends with friends and my art pilgrimage 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.

The property is significantly mentioned as an important 18<sup>th</sup> century marking of the Lindsey Patent. 100 years before the village of Catskill was formed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

Moore's cottage is an important early example of the revival of Dutch colonial architecture expressed in the fieldstone walls, low proportions and 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 20s 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. Moore did spend two years with Ruskin in Venice, often painting architecture and art side by side. 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 the 1900s by K.C Budd, who we now discover was Katharine C. Budd (the first woman member of the NY chapter of the American

Institute 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 Columbia School of Architecture in 1881. In her plan for Catwalk, which was called The Chimneys at the time, she assimilated Moore's cottage vocabulary 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, Jim and I began the CATWALK Art Residency in 2003 for faculty and MFA alumni from the school of the Art Institute of Chicago. The program has expanded to include Columbia University, NYU 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 1,000 resident painters, poets, writers, filmmakers, and performance and installation artists 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 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 interest 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 will come to stay.

Purcell Palmer  
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