

# Sweet Auburn

*The Newsletter of the Friends of Mount Auburn*

Winter 1990

## Winslow Homer – Marine Painter

**A**s an artist writing about Winslow Homer it seemed most important for me to first visit his studio; to stand at his easel; to view the Atlantic waves from his shore.

The mail brought a kind invitation to visit Homer's studio at Prout's Neck, Maine. A day in Maine's thick fog preceded my arrival at the Prout's Neck Studio. Slowly the September sun burned through the pea soup, revealing a clear blue sky.

Homer's studio has been kept intact as a memorial to the great artist. We can imagine what the studio meant to him from reading a letter to his brother Charles. Homer wrote: "The life that I have chosen gives me my full hours of enjoyment...The sun will not rise, or set, without my notice, and thanks."

I stood at his easel of 78 years ago. With excitement I walked the studio's sea-side path to Cannon Rock depicted in Homer's oil *Cannon Rock*. Today's surf was flat, yet it was easy to picture the strong, surging surf portrayed in the painting.

Winslow Homer was born on February 24, 1836 at 25 Friend Street, near Faneuil Hall, Boston. His earliest years were spent a stone's throw from the bustling Boston wharfs and growing maritime trade.

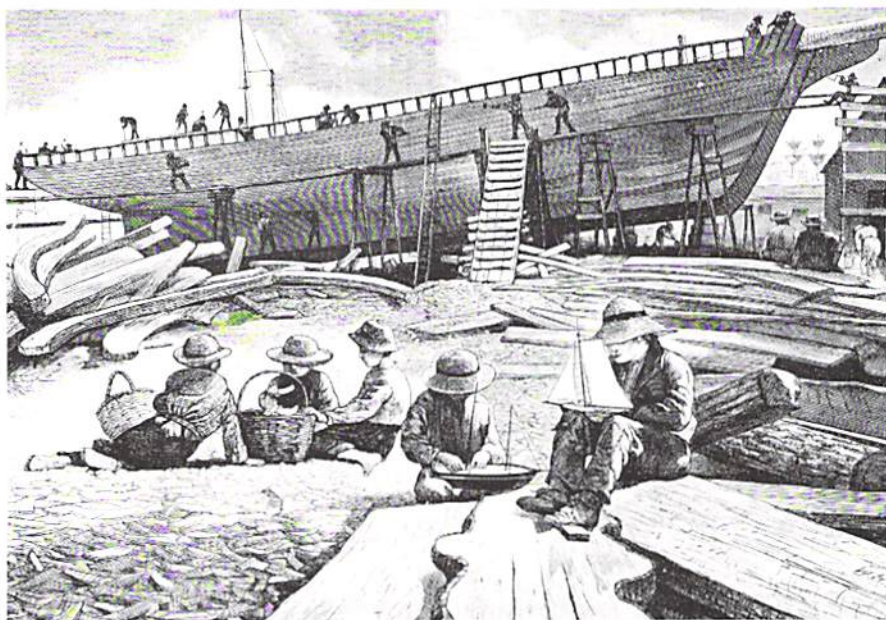
When he was six, Homer and his family—father, mother and two brothers—moved to Cambridge near Harvard Square. At age 19 Winslow Homer entered into an artist's apprenticeship with J.H. Bufford's of 260 Washington Street, Boston. Here, at this stone lithographic print shop, Homer learned to draw. He developed his unique skills in seeing and capturing the details that would communicate an event.

At Bufford's Homer met the French wood engraver Charles F. Damoreau. Damoreau taught him the tricks of the trade about how to draw for the wood engraving process.



*Winslow Homer's Studio,  
Prout's Neck, Maine  
Photograph by J. F. Weiler, 1988*

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Ship-Building, Gloucester Harbor. Wood engraving, *Harper's Weekly*, 1873

In Homer's time, popular magazines such as *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* were illustrated with wood engravings. An artist would provide drawings which the magazine staff engravers would hand engrave on end grain boxwood. The blocks of hard, smooth boxwood came from trees grown in Turkey and Venezuela.

The engraved blocks were type high, 0.918 inches. Thus, they could be printed simultaneously with the foundry type. This relief printing process is known as letterpress printing. The hand-cut wood engravings of the artist's drawings, printed with an intense black ink, had a unique beauty that is hard to match even with today's high-tech capabilities. Artists' drawings of events, reproduced by relief wood engravings, were the sole means of illustrating the popular press until the 1890's when the perfection of the halftone screen allowed the printing of photographs.

On Homer's 21st birthday his Bufford apprenticeship ended. He promised himself that he would never again work for another man. Doing another's bidding disrupted the development of his artist's vision. Winslow Homer was able to keep this promise to himself and followed his own path to become one of America's greatest 19th-century Romantic-Realist artists.

Starting in 1857, Winslow Homer worked as a freelance artist-correspondent for *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*. His first assignments were to cover the Civil War. Homer joined General McClellan's troops and did many field sketches. The Smithsonian has

a superb collection of over 300 of these sketches. Many of Homer's drawings were reproduced in *Harper's Weekly*. These wood engravings, unique in their authentic details, provide valuable documentation of the conflict between the North and the South.

Homer's oil painting *Prisoners from the Front* was exhibited in the 1867 Paris Universal Exposition. The painting depicts three captured Confederate soldiers with Union Major General Francis C. Barlow, a distant relative of the artist.

Homer sailed to Paris to see the exhibit and partake of the Parisian artistic community. He spent 12 months in Paris, sharing a Montmartre studio with a friend from Belmont, Albert Kelsey. *Harper's Weekly* published several of Homer's Paris drawings depicting art students at the Louvre and Parisian

dancers at the casino.

Homer returned to New York City where he continued to work as a freelance artist-correspondent for *Harper's Weekly*. He traveled widely throughout New England gathering material for his drawings and paintings. Sometimes an oil painting would serve as a study for a wood engraving. Initially, Homer was paid \$60 for each drawing that *Harper's* published. He was a prolific artist; between 1857 and 1875, 220 of Winslow Homer's drawings were published as wood engravings. Thus, we have a comprehensive record of the development of the artist's skills and the evolution of his vision.

In 1871 Winslow Homer visited Gloucester, Massachusetts, America's busiest fishing port. He painted *Ship-*

A detail from *A Parisian Ball - Dancing at the Casino*.  
Wood engraving, *Harper's Weekly*, 1867



building, *Gloucester* in 1871. The 13 x 19 inch oil on canvas is now in the collection of the Smith College Museum of Art. The oil shows the building of a Gloucester fishing schooner. In 1873 Homer used this oil as the study for his wood engraving titled *Ship-Building, Gloucester Harbor*. The images of both pieces are almost identical except that the wood engraving includes a group of children playing with model boats in the foreground.

Between 1871 and 1880 Winslow Homer was to visit Gloucester a number of times. He stayed in the artist's community on Rocky Neck, East Gloucester, and spent the summer of 1880 on Ten Pound Island, boarding with Lighthouse Keeper Merrill.

Gloucester played an important role in Homer's career by providing the setting in which he began his watercolor work in earnest. Homer exhibited his Gloucester watercolors at the New York City American Society of Painters in Watercolor. In time, the success of these watercolor sales allowed him to stop working as a freelance artist for publishers.

Equally important to Homer's development as an artist was the influence of the Gloucester fishing community on his selection of subject and themes. Gloucester provided an active scene of man's struggle earning a living from the sea. In 1879 alone, 29 ships and 249 fishermen were lost at sea. Homer's exposure to this human tragedy was to furnish him with the stronger subject matter to which he devoted his paintings.

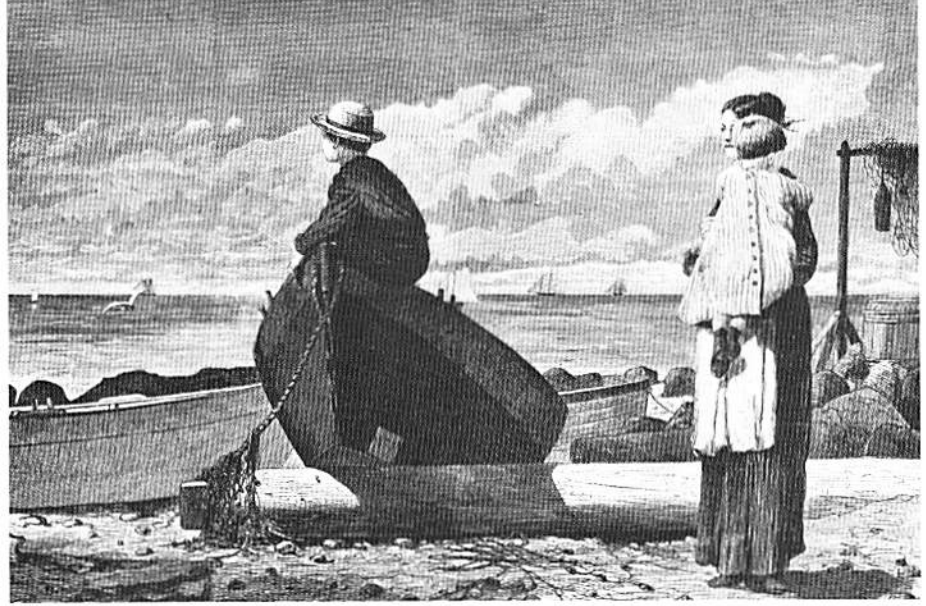
On March 15, 1881, Homer sailed to England where he spent 20 months at Cullercoats, a small fishing village on the North Sea. Cullercoats provided the separation from home necessary for Homer's evolution as an artist. Here he explored further the serious drama of the sea which he had begun to portray in Gloucester, Massachusetts. In Cullercoats he painted fishing boats and the wild North Sea, as well as fishermen's wives looking out to sea awaiting their husbands' return.

In 1882 Homer returned to America. He no longer did drawings for publication and was able to devote himself full time to portraying the ocean in her many moods. Homer arranged to move to Prout's Neck in 1883 where he set up his painting studio at the edge of the mighty Atlantic.

In 1884 Homer's mother Henrietta Benson Homer died. She was an accomplished watercolorist, and we can assume that Homer inherited much of his artistic sensitivity from her.

In a 1908 letter to his brother's wife, Homer wrote, "All is lovely outside my house and inside of my house and myself." He continued painting, each oil becoming stronger in theme and more skillful in style.

Winslow Homer met with success and admiration in his lifetime and is recognized today as a major marine painter. He died on September 29, 1910, at his Prout's Neck studio.



"Dad's Coming!". Wood engraving, 1873

Winslow Homer is interred with his parents at Mount Auburn on Lily Path, D5 #28, on the map.

Joseph Flack Weiler is a master printer, photographer, and an avid fan of Winslow Homer. Mr. Weiler's art gallery *Gallery Seven: Gloucester* is located at the site of many of Winslow Homer's paintings at Rocky Neck, Gloucester.

The Army of the Potomac – A Sharpshooter on Picket Duty. Wood engraving, *Harper's Weekly*, 1862.



Graphics for this article are courtesy of  
The Flack Studio Collection, Watertown, Massachusetts.

## Retirement of Superintendent Duncan W. Munro

*In September, 1989, Duncan W. Munro, Superintendent of Mount Auburn Cemetery from 1967 to 1989, retired. He had been employed with the Cemetery since 1966. Former Mount Auburn Cemetery President Alan D. Chesney has written the following article in appreciation of Duncan's dedication and accomplishments.*

Having worked closely with Duncan for twenty years and having been one of the few people to have read the minutes of every Trustee meeting and every annual report since Mount Auburn's founding in 1831, I feel safe in stating that Duncan W. Munro accomplished more and had a more beneficial influence on Mount Auburn Cemetery than any of the previous superintendents. By every statistical measure, Duncan's tenure saw the greatest growth and improvement in the operation of this venerable and honored institution. More rough land was converted to beautifully designed burial landscape, more families were helped through difficult emotional times and more sensible improvements were made under his guidance than in any other twenty-five year period.

The list of his accomplishments is a long one, too long to cover in a brief article. However, they start with his supervision of a new well and water pressure system. Early on he laid out new land contours and new roadways for the old "bird sanctuary" in the Willow Pond area. His projects included: rebuilding the wall and stained glass window behind the altar in Story Chapel; designing and overseeing the construction of the new crematory at Bigelow Chapel; planning the major expansion of the Meadow Area; and constructing the new, more efficient greenhouses which are so important to the horticultural tradition of the Cemetery. (It is a particularly fitting tribute that the Trustees named the greenhouses for him upon his retirement.)

He foresaw the need for garden crypts, developed the concept and supervised the construction of Auburn Court and the newer Willow and Birch Courts. He planned and oversaw the addition to the Story Chapel columbarium and guided the modernization of the office, from new wiring panels to an improved telephone system to a revised heating plant.



Duncan constantly sought out new methods and techniques for carrying out the myriad tasks required to operate this historic cemetery in an up-to-date, efficient manner. He was quick to experiment with improved machinery that eliminated drudgery and time-consuming manual chores. One good example of his ability to manage, and manage well, was his reduction of the work force by fifty percent and the number of man-hours by nearly one-third. This he accomplished while bringing some twenty acres of new burial land under intensive cultivation.

Of course, he could not do all of this by himself. Perhaps Duncan's greatest strength was his ability to build a fine staff and develop a good working relationship with all employees. He chose good people, then showed them what needed to be done and encouraged them to do their best. He made people see their jobs as important jobs and treated them fairly. His personal work style was one of self-discipline and hard work, of careful thought, attention to detail, and leadership by example. He earned the respect of the employees, his peers and all the people with whom he did business.

Duncan was particularly sensitive to the role that a cemetery should fulfill in providing for the living as well as for the dead. He recognized the great cultural heritage that this institution represents and enhanced Mount Auburn's historic standing as an example for other cemeteries to follow. Through his outstanding work on state and national cemetery associations, he sought to strengthen the ethical standards of those who must deal with bereaved families and friends.

In addition, Duncan was instrumental in organizing the first international cemetery conference held in Amsterdam in 1975. His election as President of the American Cemetery Association in 1976 and 1977 is another fine example of the respect he gained among cemeterians.

A man of great ability, of steadfast principles, an excellent manager and a fine leader, Duncan W. Munro's beneficial influence on Mount Auburn Cemetery will be felt for many decades. His many friends will wish him well in future endeavors.

— Alan D. Chesney

*Photo by Peter Southwick*

## Changes in Management Structure

Last year, with Duncan Munro's retirement in mind and recognizing that the senior management needs of Mount Auburn had changed over the years, I proposed to the Trustees that our management structure be altered. The Trustees agreed that, again, we should have a separate President and Treasurer, since the financial responsibilities of Treasurer took up too much of my time as President. In addition, I suggested that the Treasurer should assist the President with long-range planning and supervise the administrative and Friends staff as well as all financial and data processing operations. Therefore, two new positions were created in September: the Director of Cemetery Operations and the Director of Finance & Planning/Treasurer. The duties of the former are to supervise the outside staff and be responsible for all aspects of running the cemetery services of Mount Auburn.

To fill the position of Director of Cemetery Operations, we already had a strong candidate in Roger S. Kindred, who has served as Assistant Superintendent since 1968. He is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts and had extensive experience in the landscaping business prior to coming to Mount Auburn.

To fill the other position, we interviewed a large number of candidates and were very fortunate to hire Virginia Merlier.

Most recently she had served as Associate Dean for Finance & Administration in the Division of Continuing Education at Harvard University. There she managed an annual budget of \$17 million and had extensive experience with computer systems, financial planning and personnel issues. Prior to that she was Assistant Dean for Development & Administrative Services in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences at Harvard, and she also has had experience with the Bank of Boston and Citibank. She is a graduate of Smith College, has a PhD in Romance languages from the University of Pennsylvania and has an MBA from Harvard.

At the same time, two other long-time employees of Mount Auburn were promoted to new positions of increased responsibility. Robert G. Keller became Assistant Director for Sales & Operations and Philip H. Sands became Assistant Director for Grounds. I'm very pleased with the new structure and am confident that we now have the talent in place to continue Mount Auburn's tradition of excellence and innovation.

—William C. Clendaniel, President

## Thank You Volunteers

Mount Auburn would like to thank volunteers Mrs. Francis McDermott (Roberta) and Mrs. Gerald Kalenderian (Jean) for contributing their mornings, afternoons and evenings, February through December 1989, to host many programs sponsored by the Friends. Their friendly welcome to members and guests has been a wonderful part of our events, and we are most grateful to both women.

An Invitation to Join  
The Friends of Mount Auburn

**Please enroll me as a member of the Friends of Mount Auburn.**

- Senior Citizens/Students \$10
- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Contributor \$50

In addition to my membership dues, I would also like to contribute \$\_\_\_\_\_ to help defray the costs of the Friends.

Contributions over membership dues are deductible from income taxes to the extent provided by law.

Enclosed is my check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ payable to *Mount Auburn Cemetery*.

M  
Names(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like this to be a gift membership, please enclose your name and address so that we may notify the recipient.

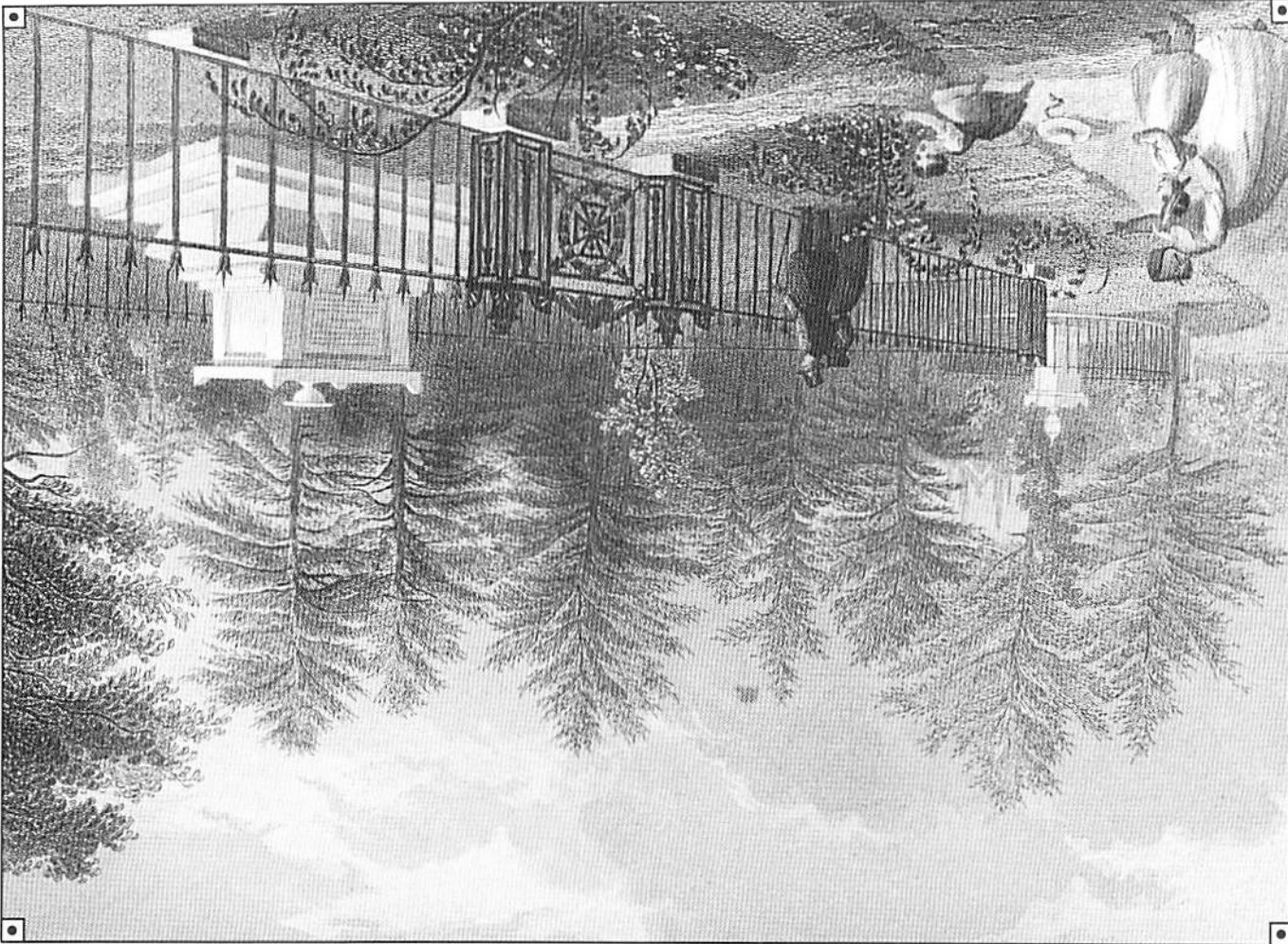
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## New Book About Mount Auburn Cemetery

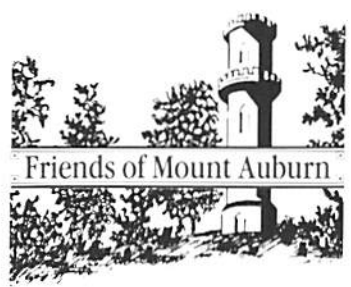
Historian Blanche Linden-Ward's long awaited book, *Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery*, is now available at the Cemetery office. The book traces Mount Auburn's inception, development and influence on the rural cemetery, urban cemetery and landscape movements. It is a detailed history of the social, religious and philosophical context from which Mount Auburn and other cemeteries were established. This handsome volume contains invaluable copies of historic images and photographs by Alan Ward, Dr. Linden-Ward's landscape architect/husband. Members of the Friends will receive a 20% discount on the book if purchased at the Cemetery office; the price is \$51.98 and the member's price is \$41.58.



Engraving by James Smillie, 1847



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