

“Rock Ledge” – Thomas Nelson Page – York Harbor, ME



The story of “Rock Ledge” a large shingle style cottage in York Harbor, Maine is both an interesting and complicated story to tell. From our research we believe that the cottage was built about 1891-92 and burned in 1944 (53 years), but parts of the original estate continue to live on today (2012).

The Beginning

The story starts with Henry Field and Brian Lathrop who were very successful businessmen from Chicago. Henry was the brother of Marshall Fields (the retailer in Chicago) and an active junior partner in the business. Brian was a successful Chicago real estate investor. Bryan Lathrop came to Chicago shortly after the Civil War to join the real estate firm of his uncle, Thomas Barbour Bryan.

Through their friendship, Henry Field met and married Brian’s sister, Florence Lathrop in 1879. Together they had two daughters Minna and Florence Field.

About 10 years after Henry and Florence were married - on August 28, 1889 Brian Lathrop and Henry Field bought a large parcel of land on the ocean from Samuel S. Allen in York Harbor, which was becoming a very fashionable summer colony. Henry Field took a 5/8th interest in the property and Brian Lathrop had the remaining 3/8th interest. This land was in the area of Aldis Lane and Pinefield Roads. Over time their combined land area was over 10 acres of prime ocean front real estate.

Two years later in 1890 Brian and Henry began their plans to build two large cottages side-by-side on the ocean. An early local newspaper article (see appendix) would indicate that they engaged William Ralph Emerson the prominent architect in Boston to design these cottages to be constructed by the 1891 season. The two cottages have distinctive features of Emerson’s work. During the design process in December of 1890, Henry Field died. The plans continue for the cottages and it would appear that the local contractor, A. O. Mouton built the cottages either in 1891 as planned or early in 1892.



On June 6, 1893 Henry’s widowed wife, Florence remarried to Thomas Nelson Page. Thomas was born to a founding family of Virginia which became impoverished after the Civil War. He practiced law in Richmond between 1876 and 1893, but left the law to become an author. He was originally married to Anne Seddon Bruce in 1886, but she died in 1888. Thomas and his new wife Florence (and her children from Henry Field) moved to Washington, D.C., where he wrote eighteen volumes, compiled and published in 1912. The fact that Thomas left the practice of law in 1893 to become a writer was not a coincidence since he now had the financial resources from his wealthy wife, Florence. For a detailed look at Florence we would suggest reading “Florence Lathrop Page: a biography” by Philip J. Funigiello – 1994.

Description of the Rock Ledge

Rock Ledge was more than just a cottage – it was an entire compound. It contained the main cottage that has been estimated to be between 12,000 and 15,000 square feet with more than 10 bedrooms. (For a more detailed description of the cottage refer to Chapter 4 of *Florence Lathrop Page: a biography*” by Philip J. Funigiello – 1994).

In addition to the main cottage, there were stables (built in 1896), a laundry building (with maids quarters), a two bay, two bedroom (for the chauffeur) garage for their 1907 Cadillac limousine, a separate cottage for their butler, Alfred Barrett, a boiler building, and multiple greenhouse and smaller out buildings. The Aldis cottage also had greenhouses, and a studio at the top of the hill on Aldis Lane. Brian Lathrop engaged Ossian Simonds (see appendix), the landscape architect from Chicago to landscape their property, and it’s a good assumption that he also did the landscaping at Rock Ledge.

Pinefield Road was a private road owned by the Pages that allowed accesses to the stables and garages (the working part of the compound). There was another private road that led from the stables and garage across to Aldis Lane, and down to the main cottage. The chauffeur would bring the car down the private access road, pick up the Pages and then return the car to the garage by driving down Pinefield Road (in a large circular path).

Assuming that Rock Ledge was built about 1892, we found the following reference in a Biddeford newspaper dated March 27, 1896, 4 years after the main cottage was constructed: “Allen G. Moulton is building a large stable for Thomas Nelson Page, and improving his cottage. He is also working on Mrs. Aldis cottage. Plans for the stables are provided by Mr. F. Wakefield of Boston.”

(Note: Brian Lathrop’s wife was Helen Aldis Lathrop, and they referred to the cottage as Aldis Cottage)

Frank Manton Wakefield graduated from the MIT School of Architecture and worked under the famous architectural firm of McKim, Meade & White in New York. He left to start his own firm in Boston and was successful in designing private house in Bar Harbor, Boston, and Schenectady, NY. Both the Lathrop and Page families use the architectural firm of McKim, Meade & White to design their houses in Chicago and Washington, DC. Most likely the Lathrops and Pages met Frank Wakefield as part of that firm, and engaged him later when he was an independent architect.

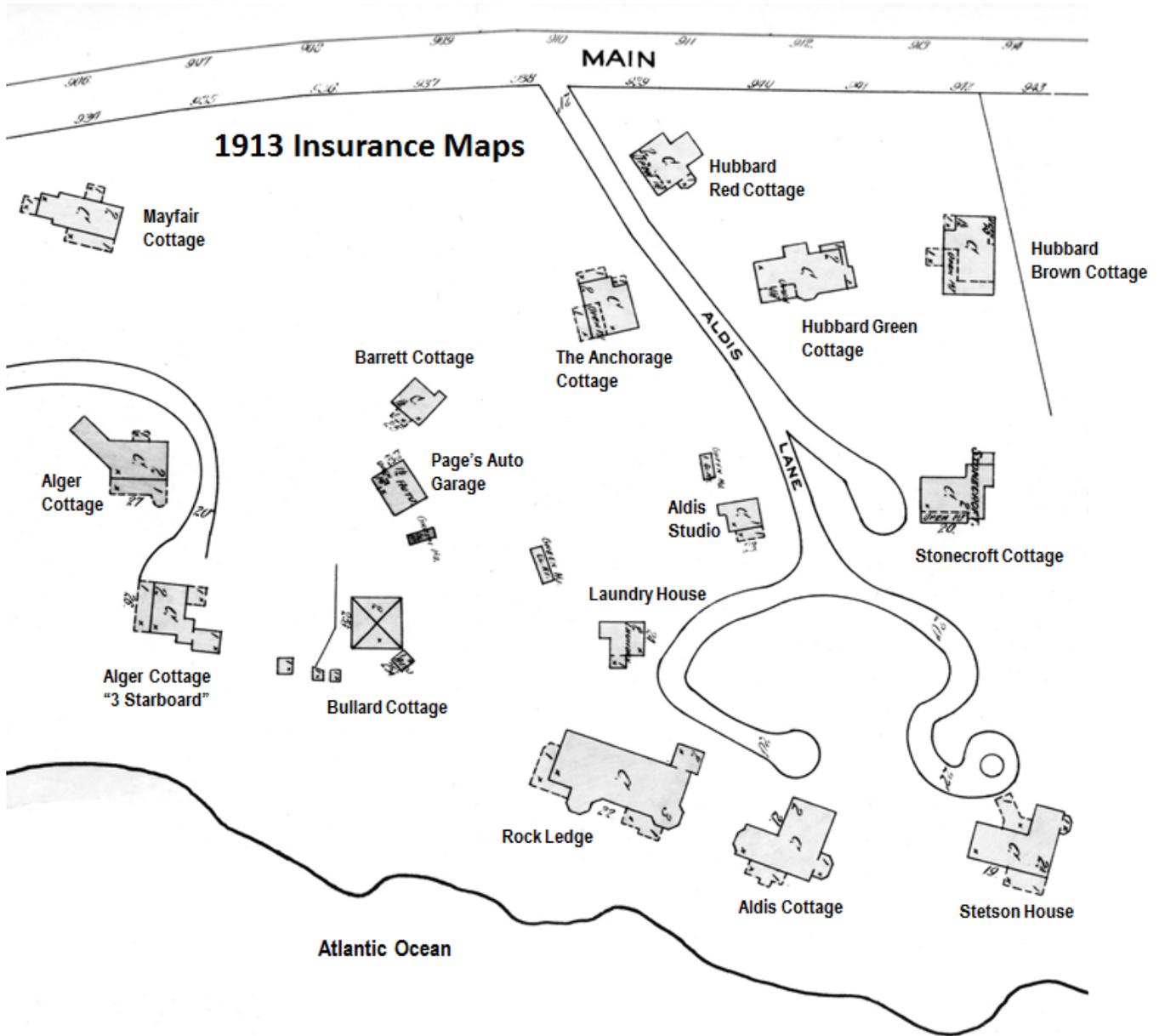
Living in Rock Ledge

By the summer of 1893, Rockledge and the Aldis Cottage had been constructed, and Brian Lathrop and Thomas Nelson Page were in place in the York Harbor social scene. Thomas Nelson Page was part of the York Harbor Reading Room, on the founder’s committee for the York Country Club, the building committee for the Trinity Church, and a founding member of the York Improvement Society.

Florence and Thomas continued to spend their summers in Rockledge from 1893 to 1922. During WWI, Thomas Nelson Page was the Ambassador to Italy, and the Pages spent more time between Washington DC and Europe – specifically a six-year hiatus from York Harbor between 1914 and 1919. In 1921, Florence Lathrop Page died, and then about 1 year later, Thomas Nelson Page passed away in 1922. According to Florence’s last will, Rock Ledge became the inheritance of Florence’s two daughters Minna and Florence (from Henry Field marriage).

Although Florence remarried to Thomas Nelson Page, the real estate was held in the ‘Henry Field Trust’. Interestingly, additional land for the estate was purchased after Henry died, and although Thomas was married to

Florence, the land was owned by the Field Trust and managed by Florence’s brother Brian Lathrop. This was one of the facts that ‘hid’ the property from our research. We assumed that documents and plans would be listed under “Thomas Nelson Page”, when in fact they were listed under the “Henry Field Trust”. Even in 1923, when the daughters were dividing the property, the ownership was the trust.



Dividing up The Rock Ledge Estate in 1923



Bullard Cottage - After their mother Florence died and their stepfather (Thomas Nelson Page) passed away, the daughters began to disassemble the Rock Ledge compound. They carved off a portion of the land and building that was the old stables (access by Pinefield Road – a private road to Rock Ledge) and sold it in 1923 Roger H. Bullard (B. 1884 – D. 1935) an architect. Bullard bought the stables, and converted it to a residence. He was an

architect of Long Island summer houses, mansions, and country homes for the New York financial elite. His career as an architect was cut short by his premature death from pneumonia in 1935. He owned the property (which is now owned by the Wheelwrights) from 1922 to 1932. It is said that Roger was in financial difficulties because of the great depression of 1929, and sold the property to the Chalfant's (who now owned Rock Ledge in 1929). In the 1930 York Harbor Cottage booklet, this cottage is listed as the "Bullard Cottage".

Chalfant Family Ownership of Rock Ledge in 1925

Henry and Harriett Chalfant purchased Rockledge from the (Henry) Field estate on December 16, 1925, which included 3.4 acres, the main cottage, the laundry, and the auto garage (on Pinefield Road). This was a sub-set of the original 7.5 acre estate. Roger Bullard has already purchased the stables in 1923 from the Field estate (see above).

Henry (Sr.), a graduate of Harvard in 1899 succeeded his father in the firm of Spang, Chalfant & Co. Sprang & Co. was recognized as one of the strongest and most profitable 'small' steel producers and one of the nation's leaders in the production of pipe. Ultimately the firm became ARMCO Steel Corporation in 1958.

The cottage lists of York Harbor show that the Chalfant's occupied Rockledge from 1925 to 1937 (12 years), with no reference made after 1937 to Rockledge. Henry (Sr.) died in 1928, and Harriett died in 1937. They had (3) children: Eleanor, Martha and Henry Jr. who inherited the estate. In 1938 (after his mother died in 1937), Henry Chalfant Jr. transferred ownership of 2/3's interest in 2 parcels of land to M.C. Wheelwright. The main cottage was said to have burned down in 1944 during World War II.

The Wheelwrights ultimate bought the Bullard Cottage (see above) back from Roger Bullard around 1933 – after it had been renovated from a stable to a summer cottage. Their son, Henry Wheelwright owns this cottage today (2012).

Page's Auto Garage – Probably built around 1907 when the Pages purchased their first automobile. The



structure is a two bay garage with two bedrooms on the second floor for the chauffeur. Architecturally this structure is very similar to the old post office in York Beach which is now a toy store beside the Goldenrod. Most likely the auto garage was copied from this York Beach building.



Page's Laundry House – located directly behind the main cottage on Aldis Road – this structure still stands today although significantly modified from its original design. Most likely this building served as the laundry facility for the cottage, and had living quarters for the house maids upstairs.



Barrett Cottage - There is another cottage on the grounds near the stables, and the chauffer's auto garage on Pinefield Road which is a small (1400 sq. ft.) Arts & Crafts style house that was for the Page's long time head butler – Albert Barrett. Records would indicate that this cottage was built about 1913 or earlier.

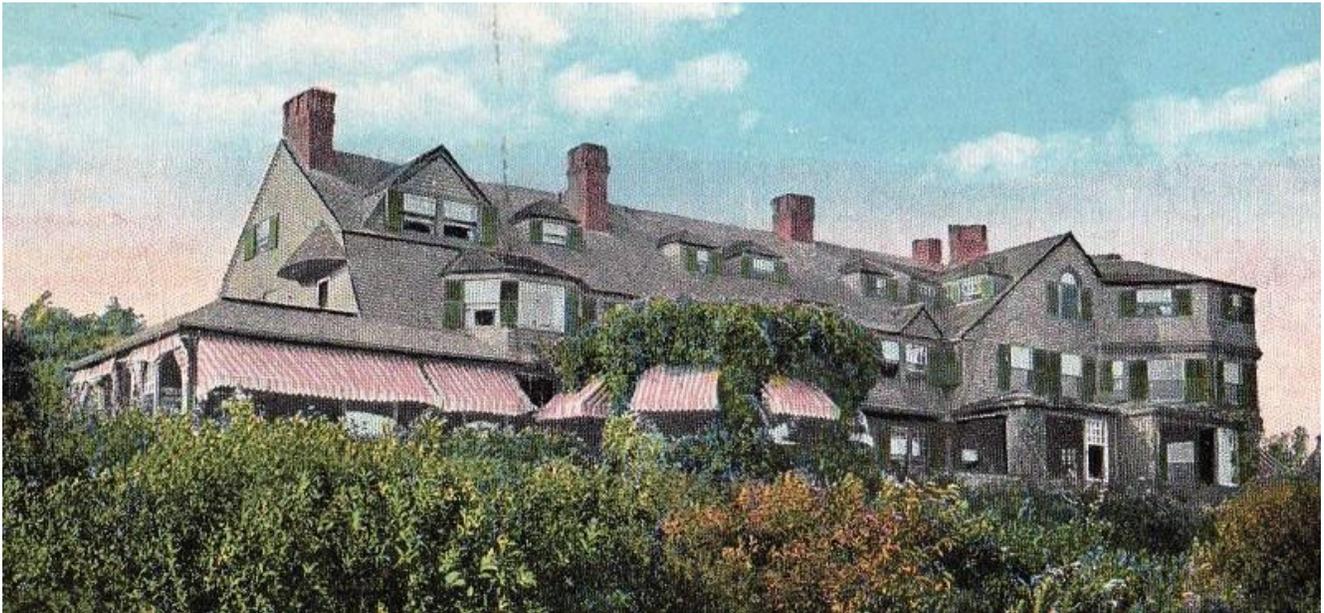
When Florence Page passed away in 1921, she left \$15,000 in her will for Alfred Barrett – a significant sum of money at the time and an indication of his

importance and loyalty over many years of service.

With Thomas Nelson Page passing in 1922, Alfred Barrett was 'out of a job' and in retirement. Although legal ownership was not formally transferred to him it would appear that two daughters, Minna and Florence allowed him to stay in the cottage for the remaining years of his life. He passed away in York Harbor in 1939, and eventually the cottage and remaining land on Pinefield Road was sold to the Martins in 1948. In the 1930 York Harbor Cottage booklet, this cottage is listed as the "Barrett Cottage".

<i>Date:</i>	<i>Event:</i>
1879	Henry Field marries Florence Lathrop
1889	Henry Field & Bryan Lathrop buys land in York Harbor
1890	Henry Field dies
1892	Rock Ledge cottage built
1893	Florence Lathrop Field marries Thomas Nelson Page
1892 to 1922	Florence & Thomas summered in "Rock Ledge" in York Harbor, ME
1922	Florence dies in 1921, and Thomas dies in 1922. Leaves entire estate to two daughters: Minna (Field) Gibson Burnaby and Florence Field Lindsay.
1922 to 1933	Roger Bullard (Architect) buys stables from estate (2 daughters) of Florence & Thomas Page, and renovates the structure into a private residence called the "Bullard Cottage". In 1933 Bullard in financial difficulty due to the great depression sells renovated cottage to the Chalfant family, who now own the original Page Cottage – Rock Ledge.
1925 to 1944	Henry Chalfant buys Rockledge from the two Page (Field) daughters in 1925 but dies in 1928. House burns down during by 1944 during WWII.
1948 to 1962	Howard & Virginia Martin buy 3+ acres of land on Pinefield Road from the Field daughters along with the Barrett Cottage.

Additional Photos and Detail on Rock Ledge



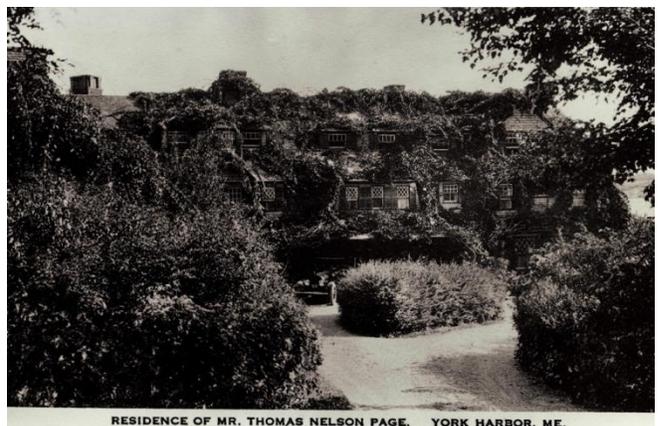
Ocean Side View – “Rockledge”



Aldis Lane (back) Side View – “Rockledge”



THOS. NELSON PAGE RESIDENCE, YORK HARBOR, ME.



RESIDENCE OF MR. THOMAS NELSON PAGE. YORK HARBOR, ME.

Appendix

BOSTON EVENING TRANSCRIPT, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1890 - - - TEN PAGES.

The attractions of York Harbor, Maine, as a shore resort have not only drawn the attention of eastern people, but Canada and the great West yearly send their contingent of summer sojourners. These people not only come for one hot season, but one experience leads to more, and now they build. Washington, Philadelphia, New York and Chicago furnish the latest permanent acquisitions. Mr. William Ralph Emerson, the Boston architect, having in hand the designs and the plans, for completion before next summer, of cottages for Judge Aldis of Washington, D. C., Judge Henry Field of Chicago, Mr. Alexander Bliss of Washington, and Mr. M. W. Walker of New York. These are to be of wood in picturesque lines and finish. That of Judges Field and Aldis will be set upon the rocks facing the ocean, with a southern exposure. A low gambrel roof overhangs the front loggia. The underpinning is to be of stone, which, on the front, becomes a high wall. On the first floor are a living room and dining room connected, the entire length of the house toward the sea. Leading from the hall is also a den, or library, treated for seclusion. These rooms open on to a broad, covered veranda, treated as an outdoor room. This is fronted by a large, uncovered platform allowing for sunlight in the interior. The chambers are in the second story, the principal opening out to a balcony overlooking the ocean. Judge Aldis's cottage will have a like situation and the same accommodations, but the exterior as well as interior will be treated quite differently. Mr. Bliss's cottage will have a high overlook of York River, gazing up its course, and also a view of the sea. There will be a low gable roof and a long, low kitchen wing will be extended from the main house. A square staircase hall with an open fireplace will lead to the living and dining-rooms and the chambers above. In this as in the other cottages the old colonial will prevail in the interior finish. Mr. Walker builds three cottages to be rented. They will have nine

rooms each, and will have every appliance, as do the others, for the comfort of dwellers. Fine views are to be obtained from the entire territory, which is high over the sea surface.

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Appendix



Bryan Lathrop chose Charles McKim of New York's McKim, Mead & White in 1892 to build their residence in Chicago. Lathrop had met McKim while the New Yorker was in town working on plans for the World's Fair. McKim, Mead & White were a top-drawer, socially-pedigreed-firm of the highest order, and while Holabird & Roche were well known for their highly regarded commercial work, their residential work was considered average. Then when McKim's Georgian Revival design appeared on Bellevue Place, it looked like nothing else in the surrounding Gold Coast neighborhood. French chateau, Richardsonian Romanesque, and heavy rusticated stone was all the rage, so the clean elegant lines of McKim's understated work stood-out from the crowd. The Lathrop house set a new

standard for Chicago mansion-house construction and raised the bar a level or two.

Ossian Simonds – Landscape Architect.



A founding member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Simonds was educated as an architect and civil engineer, and preferred to call himself a landscape gardener. His early design work in Chicago led to his appointment as superintendent of Graceland Cemetery, a project which cultivated his strong conviction that the best landscape design is inspired by nature, informed by local landforms, and constructed using indigenous plant materials. His design accomplishments are many, throughout the U.S. and particularly in the Midwest. They cover a breadth of landscape types, from residential design, estates, and boulevards to college campuses, parks, and cemeteries. Simonds' treatise, *Landscape Gardening*, published in 1920, is the best record of his design philosophy and his self-appointed role as defender of the native American landscape. (Source: Barbara Geiger, March 2, 2012)