



Payson Place

This impressive **Cumberland Foreside** estate, once owned by the **Paysons**, has a complicated trajectory.

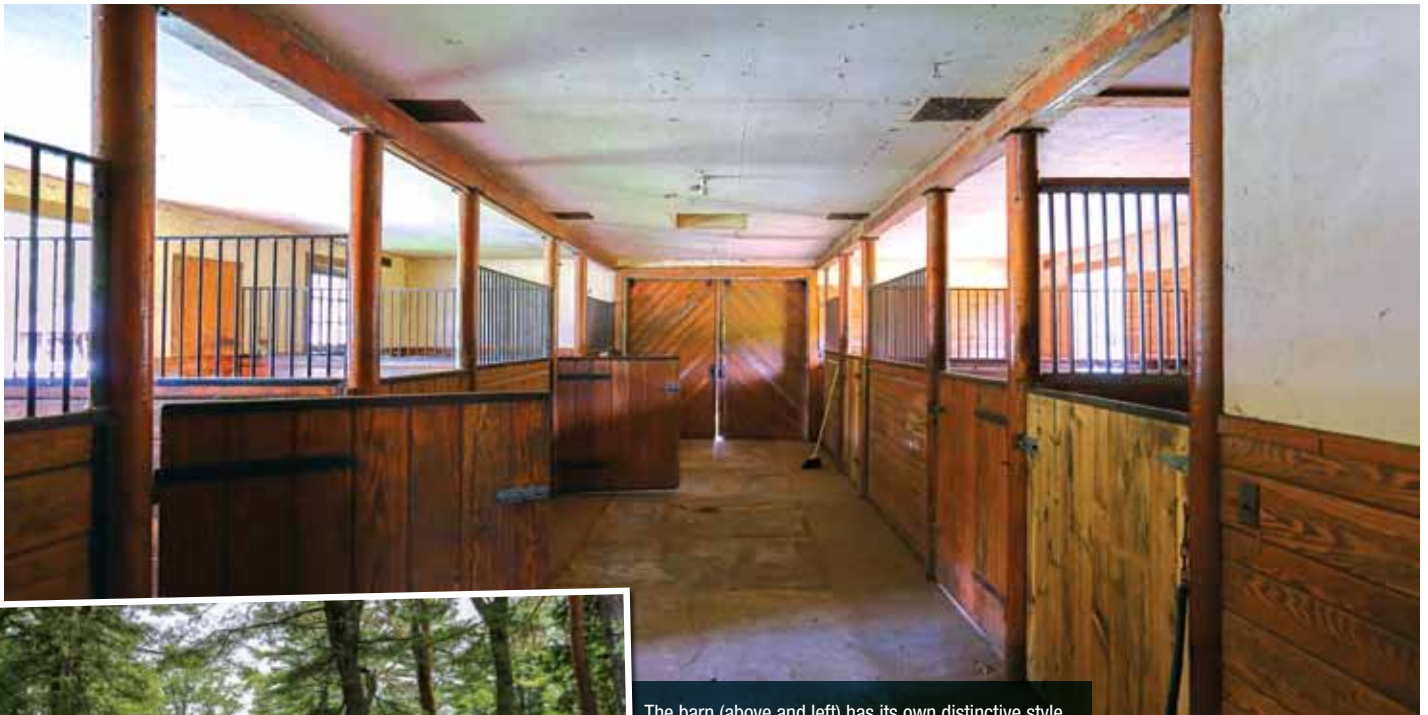
When Marion Payson (1896-1999) looked out the windows of her Cumberland Foreside estate to see the new Central Maine Power station on Cousin's Island across Broad Cove, she called up CMP and sent paint to the plant at her expense so they could brush the bottom half like the island and the top half like the sunset. Or at least that's how another Payson story goes.

It is a miracle of elevated perspective if she thought she could do this, and an even deeper miracle that CMP complied.

If you live on Route 88 and are a Payson, you get to do things like this, mixing roaring plenitude with intimate gesture.

Both of which come together in her house at 179 Foreside Road, for sale for \$2.450M with 9.5 oceanfront acres.

Designed by society architects Perry, Shaw & Hepburn (with A. E. Hodson the builder) and completed in 1938 with grass tennis court and equestrian sta-



The barn (above and left) has its own distinctive style elements. Extensive, mature landscaping and gardens, and pickled paneling in the library are only two of the Payson mansion's old-school enchantments.

bles, this is one of those Georgian Colonial Revivals most travelers suspect exists along Route 88 but haven't dared to sneak a peek at. The name Perry, Shaw & Hepburn rings a carillon of bells. John D. Rockefeller used them to envision, restore, and design all of Colonial Williamsburg. They designed the Jordan Marsh store in Boston.

The extended Payson family along Fore-side Road and Cumberland, some of whom owned the New York Mets, worked with nothing but the best.

If Bette Davis and Gary Merrill had had a shot at buying this place instead of Witch Way in Cape Elizabeth, they'd have snapped it up no matter how bumpy the ride, because inside and out it looks like a movie set of the iconic gracious 'country home' that haunted souls in Manhattan dreamed of owning. Walking through the interiors of this house makes you feel as if you're in a movie like *Home For The Holidays* or *Holiday Inn*.

But this house wasn't available. Marion and her husband, Phillips Payson, were perfectly happy with their winters on 188 Pine





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Street in Portland (close to Waynflete) and summers here on the Foreside. Besides, they had to oversee the starry equestrian career of their daughter Merrill, who competed in jumping contests on her chestnut stallion Skyrocket (16.5 hands tall) between classes at Waynflete and Smith College. Merrill's older brother Eliot took to the air, too. He went to St. Paul's School and Williams College. In World War II, he flew P-51 Mustang fighters in combat. A career executive at S.D. Warren—some of it in the ad game—Eliot Brown Payson died in Falmouth at age 90 on September 2, 2012.

Merrill Payson Robbins died here in Cumberland on April 22, 2012 after having been predeceased by her husband, Dr. Peter

Robbins, who himself was on the faculty of Harvard Medical School after winning the Bronze Star for bravery under fire as a Navy surgeon assigned to a Marine Corps battalion during the Korean War. Masters of the Universe, Maine-style.

Merrill and Peter's son, Peter E. Robbins, was first casually described to me by a Falmouth resident as "an accountant." That's strictly correct. Harvard grad (Economics) Peter E. Robbins, CFA, is the CEO and Chief Investment Officer of H.M. Payson. He's also co-manager of the Payson Total Return Fund.

We've touched on the "Who," but there's plenty of "What" about 179 Foreside Road. It's very much in the news. When the Pay-

sons' heirs sold the entire larger parcel that includes this house in 2014—over 104 acres, including a stunning sand beach and dock—to developer David Bateman (who envisioned, restored, and marketed Fort McKinley and Diamond Cove on Great Diamond Island); his son, Nathan Bateman; and Yarmouth designer/developer Peter Anastos, the trio of investors established 179 Foreside LLC and quickly negotiated with the Town of Cumberland to create a lofty new development above the mansion close to Foreside Road called "Spears Hill." Driving along Route 88, you can see the sign.

What's in it for us? the Town asked.

To secure the Town's permission for this development, which involves selling 10 lux-



ury lots (at press time, five are sold) and building luxury homes worthy of their elegant views of the ocean and cove, “[The investment trio has] sold the beach to the Town, along with the long strip of ocean-front land fronting the house below the lowest stone wall, and is donating \$150,000 to improve the original dock, a figure that will

be matched by the Town, in order to allow association members to have a level of access beyond the public [a private float off the dock] where they can tie up their dinghies,” says Teddy Piper of the David M. Banks Real Estate Team of Re/Max By The Bay, who makes it clear that the real-estate firm represents the developer in the sale of this

mansion. The pristine sweep of sand is “contiguous with Wildwood Beach,” Piper says.

The beach’s status as public property creates a stunning new public attraction for Cumberland. Presently, visitors can’t park cars at sand’s edge, but you can unload your friends and coolers and then jog back after parking on Route 88. Which is John Q. wonderful but not a situation necessarily anticipated by the Payson heirs.

Nonplussed, members of the heirs filed lawsuits, with the *Portland Press Herald* in hot pursuit of the details:

“Cumberland now owns what is supposed to be its first public beach, but the for-



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mer owners are trying to block the town's controversial, voter-approved plan in court. A development company, 179 Foreside LLC, bought 104 acres of the Payson estate in Cumberland Foreside on Friday, then immediately sold 25 acres of prime woodland and Casco Bay waterfront to the town. Voters decided in November to borrow \$3 million to finance the deal. Following contentious local campaigns, the vote was 2,372 to 2,126, or 53 percent in favor. Town officials hope to allow limited public access as early as Memorial Day [2014], though the heirs of Marion Payson filed a lawsuit Thursday seeking to block public access to the beach."

Long story longer, the Payson heirs didn't win that aspect of the contest, though there are follow-up court disputes. None of which reduces the beauty of the mansion at 179 Foreside Road as a dream structure itself. In a sense, the process unveils it. I lived for several years in Falmouth Foreside, and I'd never seen it before. But the longer you look at it, the more unforgettable it is.

Enough pre-tour whispers. Let's go inside.

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A Colorful History

Bill Robbins and his sister, Jen, loved visiting their grandparents' house. Among the guests who'd come here to see Marion and Phillips Payson was "Amelia Earhart," Bill says.

Earhart was friends with fellow aviation legend Phillips Payson, a World War I aviator who founded Portland Airport. "There's a photograph of my grandfather standing with Charles Lindbergh" when he visited the airport.



"My grandfather flew a two-seater De Havilland DH4 bomber, a biplane with an observer in back, in World War I. He flew for the 166th Aero Squadron."

A De Havilland DH4 is on display at the National Air & Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution.

Years afterward, here in Maine, "my grandfather kept a Stearman biplane in the cove below the house. He gave it to the Navy during World War II. That Stearman was used quite a bit when the North Atlantic Fleet anchored in Long Island Sound," before the fleet headed across the Atlantic for D-Day.

Before this house was built, during Prohibition, "there was a Bootlegger's Path to Broad Cove," Bill says. "Once, some officials floated over to the grassy fields to check the site, and they approached young Eliot," Phillips's son. "Do you know where your father is?" they asked. "Yes," Eliot said. "He's out in the field with some men shoving bottles into haystacks."

Walking through lush gardens to the front door from the newly created road to the beach, the house and its symmetry start things off right. Inside—and it's a mark of any truly great house in the Foreside—visitors can see blue water sparkling through the windows of the entire house. With 16 rooms and nine bedrooms tucked within 7,888 square feet of unmatched charm, this house on Spears Hill is a decorator's paradise.

For those who are disappointed with a single floating spiral staircase, there are two. The entertaining rooms, including entry and salon, are high formal Georgian in dreamy, creamy paint. After the stunning center hallway, there's a completely paneled, pickled library with built-ins and wood-burning fireplace that is the envy of all who see it. Looking for privacy? There's a telephone room.

Annunciators, original tiling, inimitable millwork by artisans, and porcelain fixtures in the baths lend to the sense of time travel. Flying two floors up a stairwell, a wallpaper pattern with a bird motif is in perfect condition. It's likely original and likely from a top-notch decorator who oversaw finishes and touches during the original construc-

tion. As a counterpoint, the eat-in kitchen with island is airy, snappy, and remodeled with stainless appliances and Deer Isle granite counters. Generous window seats put guests in contact with the outdoors and the mammoth views, the lawn spilling down from an original slate terrace to stone walls near the waterline.

Near but not *to* the waterline. Another concession to the Town. But really, from this incredible house, it's de facto shorefront. The listing sheet says "2,000 feet of waterfront shared, 0 feet of waterfront owned."

Upstairs, six bedrooms charm with wood-burning fireplaces, some with entire walls in exquisite high-register 'country' wood paneling with matching crown molding, the other walls in plaster. Even the fragrant, russet attic has a bay window that lights up the space with striking, unforgettable views.

Marketed separately is the original

Payson guest cottage, on 2.35 acres. I'd never have thought a guest cottage could be a steal at \$625,000, but if you want to be part of something magical without the burdens of administering the entirety of something magical, look no further. The window seats are adorable, the kitchen with island brilliantly scaled. Wood paneling in the living room with fireplace is so warm and friendly it rekindles the lost memory of how *charmant*—how Payson—the world used to be. ■

Details: A Closer Look

"Mrs. [Marion] Payson had set it up that there could be seven buildable lots in addition to three lots already committed to existing structures," says listing agent David Banks. At press time, "five of the possible seven of the buildable lots have sold, from \$600,000 to \$650,000 each.

"David Bateman, Nathan Bateman, and Peter Anastos bought the original parcel for \$5.5M. They hired me to help develop it, envision the lots, and market it," along with the original house.

Details from a different era still charm, such as the "phone system to the barn so they could call from the house to have the horses brought to them for riding. Just as you enter, there's a curved door [into a room] where fresh flowers were prepared."

The bespoke door was steamed into shape the way shipwrights shape the curved hulls of boats.

Another great touch: "I like the bar in the [wood-paneled] library."

On the legal side, "There is a dispute between Peter E. Robbins [with siblings Jen, Bill, and Mary] against the Town [for desiring to put] a 30-space parking lot [near the beach]. He is bitter about the sale because the town didn't approach him to buy it [while he was an owner, before the investment trio of Bateman, Bateman, and Anastos bought it]."

"That's not true," Bill Robbins says. "It all unraveled. In our opinion, a parking lot like that, and certain other issues, can't happen because of our grandmother's conservation easement."

In his guess of guesses, where does Banks think the buyer will be standing when he or she decides to buy this house?

"The front foyer." Decades after the clatter of little thoroughbreds, it's still all about the grand entrance.

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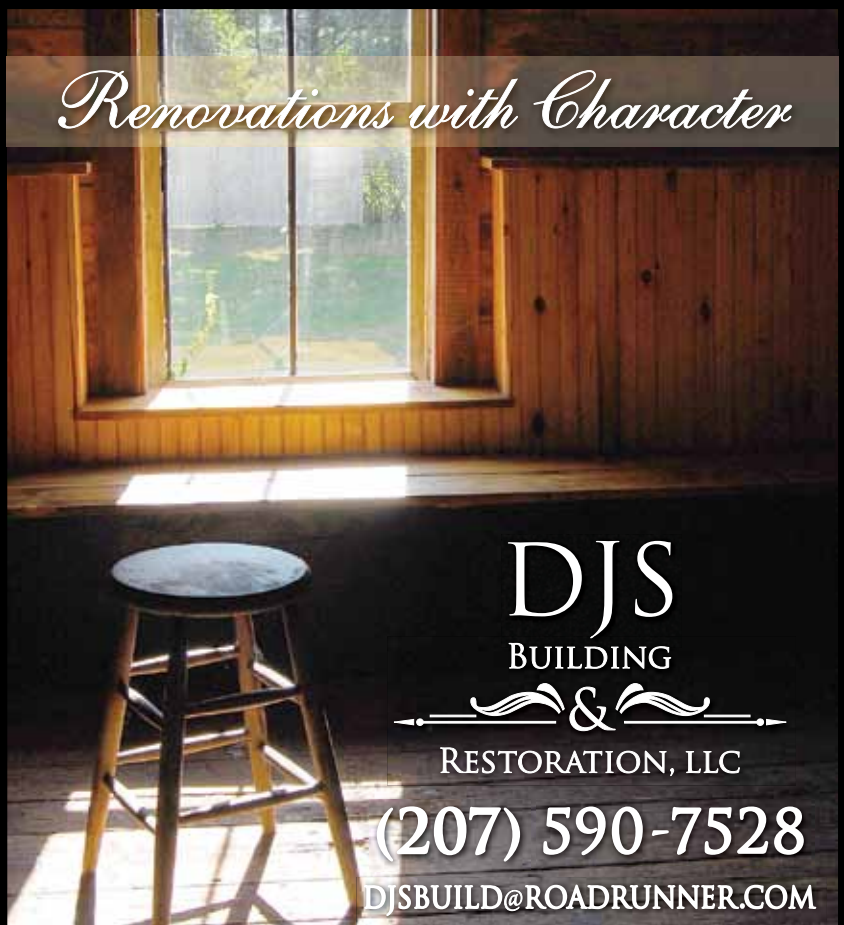
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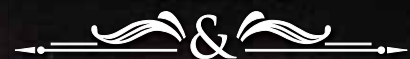
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