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THE HOWE SUMMER HOME “WINTER ROAD HILL” SILVER LAKE (MADISON), NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Significance: The Howe summer home, “Winter Road Hill,” stands on the eastern shore of Silver Lake in Madison, New Hampshire. Sited on a high bluff overlooking the lake, the building enjoys views of two islands that lie just offshore and of the legendary Mount Chocorua on the distant horizon. The Rev. Edward Cummings, a noted Unitarian minister from Boston, designed the house about 1895. Cummings was the father of the poet Edward Estlin Cummings (e e cummings) and was related by marriage to the Howe family. The family’s name for the house reflects the fact that its roadway provided wintertime access to Silver Lake for logging and ice harvesting.

William David (Will D.) Howe purchased the property from Edward Cummings’ widow in 1930, having already spent many summers at the home with his family. Will D. Howe was active in literary scholarship and publishing in New York. Inviting noted scholars, writers, artists and naturalists to the house during the summer, Professor Howe made the large, broad-roofed building the center of a lively intellectual and artistic life.

The area around Silver Lake, embracing parts of the towns of Tamworth and Madison, attracted a number of summer folk who together made the region one of New Hampshire’s most important, but least recognized, summer colonies. Among the summer residents in the area were philosopher William James, novelist Henry James, and physician Theobald Smith, a Nobel laureate, all of whom had property on Silver Lake. Another Silver Lake resident, dramatist George P. Baker, built an amphitheater and entertained a group of playwrights that included Eugene O’Neill. The American philosopher William Ernest Hocking summered nearby in Madison. President Grover Cleveland had a home in Tamworth, where his neighbor was Dr. John Finley, editor-in-chief of the *New York Times*.

Will D. Howe (1873-1946) was a leader in the intellectual life of the United States for nearly half a century. Born in Indiana, Dr. Howe graduated from Harvard in 1895 and earned his Ph.D. there in 1899, writing his dissertation on the Scottish ballads of Robert Louis Stevenson. Dr. Howe spent his early career as a professor of both American and eighteenth-century English literature. He was a founder of Skidmore College in 1911 and a long-time trustee of the school. He wrote many works on literature, including *The Howe Readers* (1909), *The Literature of America* (1929), and *American Authors and Books* (1943). He compiled editions of the poems of Longfellow and the writings of James Russell Lowell.

In 1919, Professor Howe helped to form the publishing house of Harcourt, Brace and Howe. In 1921, Howe became director and editor at Charles Scribner's Sons, holding that position until 1942 and playing a pivotal role in the development of American and English literature and publishing during the first half of the twentieth century.

While encouraging aspiring and established American writers and offering them a publishing medium, Dr. Howe did not abandon his scholarly interests. He was a lifelong champion of Phi Beta Kappa, becoming one of the moving spirits in the editorial guidance of its distinguished quarterly review, *The American Scholar*.

In 1945, after a few years of retirement, Dr. Howe "answered an urgent call from Emory University to help out the English department there." The following year, he did the same for the neighboring University of Georgia. There, he "died, as he would have chosen to do . . . in harness." John Kirkland Clark, president of Phi Beta Kappa, wrote Howe's obituary in the *New York Herald Tribune* on December 11, 1946. Clark noted sadly that Howe had "worked himself to death, in his seventies, to do his bit for the veterans who are filling our colleges in the post-war era."

Professor Howe's busy intellectual and business career took him to all parts of the world and laid heavy burdens upon him. Such a man needed a retreat, and the house at Silver Lake offered him an escape from the demands he met in his daily life.

Description: "Winter Road Hill" stands on a thirty-seven-acre tract that includes 1500 feet of shore frontage on Silver Lake. The surface of the lake lies at 466 feet above sea level, and the lake has an area of about a thousand acres. It is classified as a cold-water lake and is home to lake trout, salmon, and smallmouth bass. Seen across the lake is Mount Chocorua (3,475 feet), one of New Hampshire's most distinctive and legendary peaks. Dominating the skyline throughout this part of New Hampshire, Chocorua has inspired both Indian tales and literary works.

The house is a remarkable piece of architecture, quite unlike the cabins, bungalows or shingle-style cottages that other summer people were building on New Hampshire lakes during the early years of the twentieth century. Designed by the Rev. Edward Cummings, a skilful amateur architect who planned two other nearby summer homes, the building is based on Scandinavian precedents that Cummings had studied while attending international peace conferences in Norway.

The house has broad, flat roof planes with boldly projecting eaves that shelter a multitude of sleeping porches, picturesque overhangs, and textured wall surfaces. The house is staunchly built with a massive braced pine frame. Its capacious first-floor living room is spanned by pine summer beams, each measuring six by sixteen inches, drawn by a team of eight horses from the Canadian forest down through northern New Hampshire.

Fireplaces built from concrete heat the house. In the living room, two of these hearths are set within sheltered inglenooks, each with its built-in settee and bookshelves. A beam above the inglenooks is carved with the words, "And well I saw the fire light like a flight of homely elves," from Robert Louis Stevenson's poem, *A Christmas at Sea*. The noted British sculptor Charles Graveney inscribed the line, cutting one letter each day in Norse script.

In addition to a west-facing living room that spans the entire width of the building on its lake side, the house has a series of corner bedchambers, each with its own screened sleeping porch. The entire western half of the roof is treated as an elevated vantage point for relaxation or sleep. The open western gable of the roof offers unobstructed views of the lake and of the mountains beyond. The two broad planes of the pitched roof are pierced by square openings that admit the breeze and offer views of nighttime skies. The third-story roof aerie and the second-floor sleeping porches are furnished with canvas hammocks made for the cottage by sailmakers.

As befits a building that offered shelter and inspiration to a multitude of scholars and writers, "Winter Road Hill" is filled with books, prints, souvenirs, and specimens selected from the surrounding woods. Except for the addition of electricity, the house is virtually unchanged from the first decades of the twentieth century. Every built-in bench, bookcase, and projecting beam is filled with the extensive writings of Dr. Howe and his friends, or with the rich legacy of the Scribner publishing house.

"Winter Road Hill" offered hospitality to creative individuals throughout much of the twentieth century. The poet e e cummings, whose lakeshore cottage stood nearby and whose home was a few miles away, was one of the more lively visitors over the years. Professor Howe was a member of The Century Club, made up of men who had attained prominence in the arts, music, or literature. He knew Tom Wolfe, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, and English writers such as Sir James Barry and Lloyd Osborne, the stepson of Robert Louis Stevenson. He was deeply involved with the Rockefeller Institute in New York and was influential in securing the support of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., for the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. Professor Howe entertained guests from across the United States, from England, and from continental Europe. Guests at the summer home included college presidents, scientists, naturalists, and political figures, as well as innumerable writers.

One of Professor Howe's daughters, Lucia, a current owner of the house, became a noted designer in New York. She invited photographer Eliot Porter to stay at "Winter Road Hill." Out of Porter's fascination with the details of nature he observed and photo-

graphed during extended visits came the book *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World*, published by the Sierra Club in 1962. Many of the book's photographs were taken on the property of "Winter Road Hill."