



Architectural & Historical Report

for

**The Siasconset Public School
The Siasconset Fire House**

**10 West Sankaty Road
Siasconset, Massachusetts**

October 15, 2019

**Prepared by Marsha L. Fader, AIA Architect
& Betsy Tyler, Historian
for The 'Sconset Trust, Inc.**



THE 'SCONSET TRUST, INC.

Preservation Easements

The 'Sconset Trust preserves the unique character of the east end of Nantucket Island in Massachusetts through conservation of areas of open land and preservation of structures of historical and architectural significance in 'Sconset. The Trust works with the entire island community and collaborates with conservation and historic preservation groups to achieve its goals.

This House History was prepared to highlight the important architectural and historic features of this house. The Trust hopes that emphasizing such features will encourage current and future owners of historically significant houses to preserve important interior and exterior building features for future generations. The Trust stands ready to assist homeowners in assessing the appropriateness of tools like preservation restrictions and rights of first refusal, which may include tax benefits.

For more information on how the Trust can help, please contact the Executive Director, Elizabeth G. Grubbs.

The 'Sconset Trust is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Please visit the web site at sconsettrust.org.

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1. SUMMARY AND PROJECT SCOPE

Built in 1917, the two buildings at 10 West Sankaty Road in Siasconset are a contributing resource within the Siasconset Historic District, a National Historic Landmark District, which is listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places as well as a local historic district.

The intent of this report is to present the history of the structures at 10 West Sankaty Road and establish its architectural and cultural significance. This study includes a survey and study of the architecture, form and materials of the existing structure, a survey of historic photographs of the property, an examination of the records on file at the town of Nantucket Registry of Deeds, as well as published and archival sources.

This report was prepared for The 'Sconset Trust, Inc. by Marsha L. Fader, AIA Architect and Betsy Tyler, Historian.

2. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The structure at 10 West Sankaty Road, Siasconset, is significant for its architectural style, for its civic use as both a school house and a fire station and for the substantial amount and integrity of original form and materials that have survived. The classical style of its architecture, built high above grade, continues to provide a presence unlike any other in 'Sconset or on the island.

The Siasconset Public School, its listed historic name with the Massachusetts Historical Commission, represents strong educational values and a substantial, classical architectural presence in a small village. In the year of construction in 1917 and the years that followed, the nation's economy was focused on World War I and recovery from the Great Depression, not on new construction.

Public schools "embodied a confident vision of the future for its citizens. They continue to be an important symbol of the progress and stature of a community. Their appearance reflects the civic role they hold as well as a host of practical concerns and idealistic goals at the time they were built. In turn, schools have significantly impacted the course of physical, social, and economic development in communities."

From "An Honor and an Ornament: Public School Buildings in Michigan", State Historic Preservation Office, Michigan Historical Center, September 2003, p 1.

3. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The building now serving as a storage facility for the Nantucket Fire Department, was designed and built as a schoolhouse for the children of 'Sconset in 1917.

Siasconset Schoolhouse, 1917–1963

In 1838, thirty-one individuals purchased shares to raise funds for the construction of a purpose-built schoolhouse in Siasconset at the site now identified as 10 West Sankaty Avenue. Called the Franklin School, the Siasconset school was one of fifteen neighborhood schools offering free education across the island and on Tuckernuck at that time. For many years, the town paid rent on the property where the Siasconset schoolhouse stood, but in 1878, the Town of Nantucket acquired the schoolhouse and about half an acre of land from Matthew Crosby, for \$200. (Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Book 66, p. 85).

By 1916, the one-room Franklin School was considered unsuitable for continued use. The building was sold and removed, and plans were made to construct a new two-room schoolhouse on the site, for \$7,000. Horace L. Gibbs was awarded the contract, and began work on the building in the spring of 1917. It was one of four schools operated by the town of Nantucket: another small school was in Polpis, and two large schools—Academy Hill School (grades one-high school) and the South School on Orange Street (grades one-four) had consolidated the numerous small neighborhood schools of the nineteenth century. The Annual Report of the School Department of the Town of Nantucket for the Year Ending December 31, 1917 states: "The long sought building at Siasconset is at last a reality. The new building is commodious and well-lighted, and

teachers and pupils are much delighted with their new building.”

From 1917 to 1965, the Siasconset School was attended annually by approximately twenty students in the lower grades. Older students were bussed to town to attend the Academy Hill School. The School Committee sought to bus all students to school in town on several occasions throughout the school’s history, but parents protested that the younger students would benefit more by staying close to their homes in the village.

After only five years, the building needed repairs, according to the Annual Report of the School Department of the Town of Nantucket for the Year Ending December 31, 1922: “The building at Siasconset is in need of immediate repairs. The roof was put in good condition last fall, but the entrances and interior need immediate attention. The plaster is down in several places, notably in the front and back halls. In the front hall I would recommend wood sheathing to a height of five or six feet, with wood pulp plaster above. In the back hall a part of the ceiling has fallen and must be replaced. Both the doors at the front and back entrances, need a thorough overhauling, and I am in doubt whether the front doors can be made entirely serviceable, due to faulty construction when first put in; but something should be done at once.” The Annual Report of the School Department of the Town of Nantucket for the Year Ending December 31, 1927 details additional changes made to the then ten-year-old building: “Many repairs have been made during the past year, both in town and in ‘Sconset. The conditions in ‘Sconset were rather serious. The roof leaked, the floors were warped, slate blackboards were falling out of place and everything needed paint. Each of these conditions was remedied and in addition, electric lights, running water and modern toilets were installed. There is no doubt but that the pupils attending school in ‘Sconset are entitled to the same sanitary conditions as those in town. With both rooms filled with pupils it was imperative that existing conditions be corrected.” The building appears to have been substantially and sufficiently repaired, as little mention of its condition is made in subsequent reports of the School Department. The 1955 Annual Report mentions that an oil-burning heating system was installed in the building, replacing an earlier coal-burning system.

The community’s use of the schoolhouse is noted in the Annual Report of 1935: “The spare Siasconset school room has been a means for the people of that village to gather for several community meetings and the school department has been glad to give them hearty co-operation.” Seven years later, as noted in the Annual Report of 1942, the Siasconset School was closed at the outbreak of World War II and “the American Red Cross is allowed the use of the Siasconset building for war work and is responsible for the expenses of operation.” At the end of the war, the school re-opened to local students in grades one through five. The number of students attending had decreased substantially, to a dozen or fewer for most of the succeeding years of the school’s operation. Extensive repairs were made to the building over the winter of 1962/63 (*Inquirer and Mirror*, October 24, 1963) just prior to the permanent closing of the school in the fall of 1963.

Siasconset Fire Station, 1967 –2016

In 1965, Deputy Fire Chief John Santos Sr. recommended to the Board of Selectmen a plan to convert the north side of the schoolhouse into a combination fire and police station, at an estimated cost of \$4,000. A cement pad would be laid and a twelve-foot-wide door installed on the north side, where the fire trucks were to be housed. The building was transferred from the School Department to the Board of Selectmen in order for the conversion to begin. The original plan was for the building to house two fire engines, a police station, and a community room. (*Inquirer and Mirror*, December 16, 1965).

The original, tall schoolhouse windows were replaced in the early 1980s, and the cellar windows were removed. (*Inquirer and Mirror*, November 20, 1980; July 15, 1982). A warrant article requesting \$150,000 to renovate the Siasconset Fire Station in 1989 was deferred (*Inquirer and Mirror*, March 2, 1989; April 6, 1989) and a subsequent request for \$50,000 for repairs to the station was rejected by the town’s capital committee (April 16, 1992). Emotional pleas from ‘Sconset residents at the annual town meeting in 1992 were met with an offer from Phil Bartlett for the Board of Selectman to match funds up to \$21,000 if the residents could raise half the money needed for repairs (*Inquirer and Mirror*, May 7, 1992). In 1996, the town allocated \$25,000 to complete renovations of the ‘Sconset Fire Station, which presumably had begun sometime in 1994/95. A new chimney was part of the renovation project. In 2007, the fire alarm room was renovated (*Inquirer and Mirror*, March 15, 2007) and in 2009 the Community Preservation Committee funded a \$60,000 renovation of the Hose Cart House on the south side of the Siasconset Fire Station property. (Nantucket Building Department, 73.4.2 29)

From 1967 until 2016, this building served as an active fire station. It is currently used for storage by the fire department and is no longer an actively-staffed station. The town of Nantucket commissioned a feasibility study in 2019 by architects SMRT. This study produced renderings for further adaptive re-use as a fully-staffed, year-round fire station with a substantial two-story addition.

4. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

4.1 Description

Built in 1917 by the town of Nantucket, this structure is a wood-framed, two-room schoolhouse. The architectural style is classical with its entrance located in the center of a projecting section. The design may be described as a rural school standard design typical for the early 20th century. The builder was Horace L. Gibbs. No architect is known.

The building is a shingled, one-story structure with above-grade concrete foundation walls providing a 6-riser stair at the entrance. The projecting pedimented entrance is classically-detailed to include a deep entablature with round medallions on the frieze supported by double pilasters on both sides of double doors framed by a transom and sidelights. Wide concrete stairs are framed by large, curved concrete forms. There are no railings. The north-south rectangular portion of the cruciform has a hipped roof with gable-roofed east and west projections. The entry pediment is detailed with a trimmed overhang and a classical circular window. From an early photograph the original wood entry doors appear to have been two-panel, vertical board doors.

The cruciform plan of the building contains two equally-sized classrooms, an entry vestibule and rear toilet rooms. A central storage and basement access stair divides the two school rooms. This area is intact and divides the current two fire truck bays.

Original interior walls of the two classrooms have survived the conversion into a fire station. There are blackboards, built-in cupboards with wood and glass doors and drawers on the north wall of the south classroom and the south wall of the north classroom. Five-horizontal panel doors with their original hardware exist throughout the interior, some with porcelain door knobs.

A wood stair to the basement that appears to be original, is in good condition. The basement includes a space for an oil tank along with several storage spaces. 'Sconset resident and former fire department employee, Snooky Eldridge, described early toilet rooms having been located in the basement. There is also a large space separately-accessed from the north classroom, under the vestibule.

The west end of the two classrooms leads to a hall and two rooms that served as boys and girls toilet rooms.

The Siasconset Public School was built immediately prior to a World War I ban on construction aimed at the conservation of building materials.

The 1923 Sanborn Insurance Map notes the school building as being roofed with slate. The date of removal is not known.

4.2 Alterations/Evolution

The 102-year old 'Sconset School/Fire Station has evolved through two distinct uses. For the (46) forty-six years between 1917 and 1963, this structure was built by the town of Nantucket and served as a public school for the 'Sconset community. From 1967, the year the structure became the official Siasconset Fire Station until January of 2016, (49) forty-nine years later, the structure served as a fire station. The alterations made to the structure relate to this major change of use and to repairs and maintenance.

Prior to the adaptive re-use of the structure, two changes were made. Toilets were installed in 1927 in separate rooms at the rear of the building, one for boys and one for girls. A heating system of unknown type was

installed in 1946. Prior heating may have been with individual stoves in each classroom.

The major alteration made for the conversion of the school to a fire station consisted of the removal of the structural framing of the two classroom floors. From the original high level of the classroom floors, removal allowed the creation of two bays for fire trucks entering at the ground level. The *Inquirer & Mirror* newspaper reported extensive repairs between 1962 and 1963, a cement pad poured on the north side in 1965 together with 12-foot wide doors installed at the new truck bay entrances.

In 1980 and 1982, seven (7) banked classroom windows on the south side of the south classroom and the north side of the north classroom were removed and replaced with three (3) equally spaced, 6-over-6 windows. The original windows were 12-over-12 sash approximately nine (9) feet in height, terminating at the exterior fascia. Other fenestration changes include the removal of what appears to be 6-light windows in the north and south elevations of the entry vestibule with the replacement with 6-over-6 windows matching the replacement classroom windows. Four (4) basement windows of 8-lights were removed when the space became a fire truck bay. A 3-light basement sash was added at the south elevation below the entry vestibule.

The *Inquirer & Mirror* newspaper reported “funding provided for chimney construction” in 1996. This may be the year that a chimney was added in the south fire truck bay/original south classroom to serve a new heating system. The visibility of this new chimney at the front/southern roof disrupts the original symmetry of the structure. The original chimney, located between the two classrooms at the rear/west, is intact below the roof and can be seen in early exterior photographs.

Additional alterations include the replacement of original exterior cornice mouldings, downspouts, trim, shingling, painting, windows and doors reported in the *Inquirer & Mirror* newspaper in 1980, 1982, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2003, 2011. The design of the roof overhang/cornice & gutter assembly, however, has remained the same excepting moulding profiles. Toilet rooms were added at the north and south ends of the entrance vestibule at an unknown date.

The double rear exterior doors as well as interior doors appear to be original to 1917.

4.3 Character-Defining Features:

The structure at 10 West Sankaty Road has retained a great wealth of its original character-defining features, including the following:

1. The original form and footprint of the structure with its original framing, hip roof, and the projecting entrance with pediment. It is distinctly unique in ‘Sconset and the island.
2. Entry pediment with an overhang and round window;
3. Large projecting entry entablature with pilasters of simple capitals and plinths;
4. Double door entry with sidelights and transom;
5. Concrete treads and risers flanked by curved concrete ‘bookends’.
6. It is an early 20th-century two-room version of a one-room schoolhouse.
7. Original interior schoolroom built-ins include drawers, glass-doored cabinets, and blackboards.

4.4 Outbuildings

A wood-framed, one-story, gable-roofed Garage of approximately 360 square feet is located near or at the south property line, believed to have built in 1917 when the school building was built. It appears on the 1923 Sanborn Insurance Maps. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has recognized the Garage as an historic resource with the historic name ‘Siasconset Public School Garage’ and the common name ‘Siascon-

set Fire House Garage’.

Extensive repairs were made in 2009 and 2014 as reported in the *Inquirer & Mirror* newspaper and the Nantucket Building Department file. Funded by a CPC grant of \$60,000, work included re-shingling the roof and side walls, window and overhead door replacement.

5. PROPERTY INFORMATION

5.1 Property Identification: 10 West Sankaty Road, Nantucket Property ID/Parcel 73.4.2 29, .25 acres (11,098.00 square feet), zone SOH. The property is owned by the town of Nantucket with a current use code as a ‘Municipal Public Safety’ structure.

5.2 The SOH (Sconset Old Historic) zoning allows 50% ground cover of its 11,098 square feet or 5549 square feet. The two existing buildings represent approximately 2500 square feet, leaving more than 3,000 square feet of allowable future ground cover expansion.

5.3 The required 5-foot side setback at the south property line at the Garage may not exist which would represent a pre-existing non-conforming use.

6. OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS

1. Verification of the symmetrical cruciform of the building footprint. The Property Record Card shows it to be cruciform while the 1923 and 1949 Sanborn Insurance Maps do not show the same symmetry.
2. History of toilet rooms in the basement and at the main floor level.

7. FURTHER STUDY & INFORMATION

1. Architectural Drawings: The building and garage should be documented with a set of measured drawings by hand or created from laser scans as documentation and for future use proposals.
2. Archeology: The property may contain archeologically-significant artifacts due to the known existence of an earlier school building on the site.

8. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

8.1 Published and Archival Resources

Felch, Robert. “Siasconset School Presentation”, August 13, 2018.

SMRT Architects, Feasibility Study, 2019.

Annual Reports of the School Department of the Town of Nantucket, 1917–1963

The *Inquirer & Mirror*: List of school and fire station work reports:

- 11/19/1927 – toilets added
- 02/23/1946 – heating system added
- 10/24/1963 – extensive repairs made to building
- 12/16/1965 – cement pad poured on north side of school house; 12’-wide doors installed
- 11/20/1980 – windows replaced, north side re-shingled
- 07/15/1982 – south side re-shingled
- 03/02/1989 – warrant article for \$150,000 renovation of the Fire Station
- 04/16/1992 – request for \$50,00 worth of repairs by Chief Watts rejected
- 04/29/1993 – renovations
- 12/14/1995 - warrant for \$25,000 to complete renovations. Contract went to Arthur Smith
- 03/21/1996 - funding provided for chimney construction
- 12/16/1999 - \$30,000 for painting and re-shingling

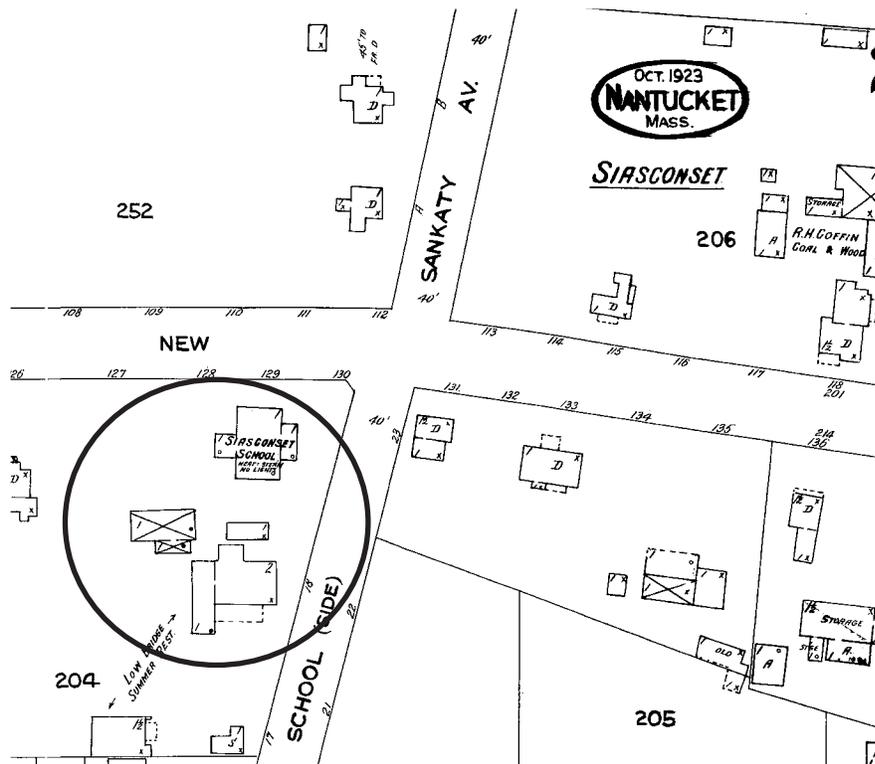
- 05/20/2003 – funds allocated for structural and roof issues
- 03/15/2007 – cost to renovate fire alarm room at ‘Sconset Fire Station 04/03/2011 - \$135,000 for roof and other repairs
- 12/24/2014 – article mentions recently renovated cart house next to ‘Sconset Fire Station 1
- 01/14/2016 – warrant article seeking \$150,000 for repairs to exterior of Sconset Fire Station

Nantucket Building Department file 73.4.2 29; no plans on file:

- 1996 – application approved for 1200 sq. ft. of new drywall, wood steps, handrail
- 2009 – repairs to the old Hose Cart House on the property: re-shingle roof and side walls; replace windows, replace overhead door with batten door (funded by CPC grant of \$60,000)
- 2014 – replace roof shingles and gutters on ‘Sconset Fire Station
- 2017 – replace fascia and wood gutters

8.2 Historical Maps

Sanborn Insurance Company maps, 1923, 1949.



1923 Sanborn Insurance Company Map

The earliest Sanborn Insurance Company map of the village that includes 10 West Sankaty Road is dated 1923.

The small round circle on the building footprint denotes that it had a slate roof.

8.3 Historical Photographs: Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association



SC8676-3: School children sitting on the front entry steps

Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association



SC864-34: South elevation & partial view of the entry/east elevation on the right, showing the original chimney and classroom & basement windows

In the foreground is The Tavern on the Moors where The School of Opinion gathered.

Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association

10 West Sankaty Road, Siasconset



Front east elevation showing the classical architectural detail of the entrance.

Date Unknown. Source: Robert Felch



SC688-2-23: South & east elevations showing the original chimney, classroom & basement windows, and evergreen trees

Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association

10 West Sankaty Road, Siasconset

8.4 Current Year 2019 Photographs



Front east entry elevation showing ca. 1965 addition of fire truck bay doors



North Elevation showing (3) windows that replaced the original (7) 12/12 windows



North side of the west elevation



South side of the west elevation showing
early double doors



South Elevation showing (3) windows that replaced the original (7) 12/12 windows and the front east entry elevation showing the ca. 1965 fire truck south bay



East Front Elevation Detail of classical pilasters, sidelights, transom, pediment and round window



Original Interior Classroom Built-in
Cabinets & Blackboard:
North & South Classrooms



North Elevation



Front east entry elevation showing ca. 1965 addition of fire truck bay doors



North Elevation