



**Architectural & Historical Report
for
2 Center Street
Siasconset, Massachusetts**

November 29, 2021

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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 report 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 the Old Historic District of Siasconset, the property at 2 Center Street known as Cathcart House, Arietta Hussey House, and Takitezie, in Siasconset is a contributing resource within the Nantucket 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 study is to present the history of the dwelling at 2 Center Street 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 historical maps and photographs of the property, an examination of the records on file at the town of Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Probate Court and Planning and Land Use Services (PLUS) records, 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 house at 2 Center Street is significant for its 200-year evolution. The early 19th-century T-plan of this typical 'Sconset village fishing house was built by prominent whaling captain James Josiah Coffin and subsequently owned by one of Nantucket's most successful shipowners and whale oil merchants, Zenas Coffin and his heirs until 1856. Roland B. Hussey, editor of the *Inquirer & Mirror* for many years, owned the house into the early 19th century. It is also distinguished by its unusually clear title history together with a wealth of historic photographs.

Architecturally, there is notable survival of early structural framing, its gable roof, a fireplace mantelshelf and moulding details, and a modified plan of rooms. It is significant for bridging the two worlds — from fishing village to resort village — all within the same footprint. A mixed-use residential and commercial history with the Gretchen Hyde Gift Shop and Gladys Lee's shop is also part of its historical significance.

3. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

2 Center Street, Siasconset: Cathcart House, Arietta Hussey House, Takeitezie

A relatively clear title history for 2 Center Street sets it apart from many of its more inscrutable neighbors on Shell, Center, and Broadway in the village of Siasconset. Most authorities (Underhill, Forman, May) agree that the cottage was built by whaling captain James Josiah Coffin (1755–1838) before 1814. A deed from Aaron Mitchell to Zenas Coffin dated 1817 (NRD Book 24, p. 495), supports this assertion, describing the property as “my Siasconsett house at Siasconsett in Nantucket that I bought of James J. Coffin together with all the land, rights, privileges and appurtenances thereunto belonging.” Coffin probably built the cottage in the period 1811-1814, around the time of the War of 1812, when 'Sconset gained importance as a fishing village, providing necessary sustenance for a community hindered by maritime blockades and privateers during that conflict. He had acquired the property from the estate of Gershom Drew (d.1809), in 1811, described in Drew's estate inventory as a “piece of house lot land at Siasconset . . . together with a barn.” James Josiah Coffin was a renowned whaling captain who sailed out of English ports for forty years. In 1824, at the age of sixty-nine, he discovered and charted the Bonin Islands south of Japan.

Aaron Mitchell held the cottage for just a year before selling it to Zenas Coffin (1764–1828) in 1818. One of Nantucket's most successful shipowners and whale oil merchants, Zenas Coffin and his heirs owned the property until 1856. Coffin's 'Sconset cottage was purchased by retired whaling captain Samuel C. Wyer in 1861. He and his wife, Charlotte Coffin Wyer, had returned to the island from a whaling voyage in the *Young Hero* in 1855. Like many of their whaling community peers, the Wyers lived in town and spent their summers in 'Sconset. Samuel Wyer died in 1872, and in 1878 Charlotte and her daughters sold the 'Sconset dwelling to Sarah M. Gardner Cathcart, second wife of Charles S. Cathcart. Arietta Cathcart Hussey inherited the house from her parents in 1896, and kept it in the family for another thirty years. She was married to Roland B. Hussey, for many years editor of the *Inquirer and Mirror*. The cottage is first referred to as Takitezie in the *Inquirer and Mirror* on October 22, 1898, during the time Arietta and Roland Hussey were owners.

Two Center Street changed hands twice in the first half of the twentieth century. Arietta Hussey sold it to Alice F.M. Travers in 1927. Gretchen Hyde operated a gift shop in Takitezie in the summer of 1934, (*I&M* 6/9/1934) and perhaps other summers as well (see photo F843, page 25). In 1945, Travers sold the cottage to Gladys Lee, an artist who annually exhibited pastel portraits, watercolors, and pencil drawings in Nantucket's Sidewalk Art Show, and who also ran a gift shop in the cottage (*I&M* 5/27/1944) before Gordon and Adelaide Porter purchased it in 1966. The Porters added a guest cottage to the south side of the property in 1985. The guest cottage was known as 2 Center Street, and the house now known as 2 Center was then known as 4 Center. Porter heirs sold their property to Thomas A. Holmes in 1999. In 2004, Holmes sold the Center Street compound to Robert Conte and Eric Brochette, who in turn sold the property to Douglas J. and Cecilia L. Hepworth in 2009.

Douglas and Cecilia L. Hepworth acquired the adjacent cottage at 6 Center Street in 2011 and made some significant changes to the expanded compound. The 1985 cottage (2 Center) was removed in order to create space to bring in equipment to lift Takitezie and set it atop a new foundation and full basement, raising the ridge height of the cottage 9 inches and shifting the cottage 2.5 feet south of the north boundary with 6 Center Street. Interior changes were made to both cottages as shown on architectural plans by BPC Architecture (2 Center) and Botticelli & Pohl (6 Center).

4. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

4.1 Description

This early 19th-century structure is a one-and-a-half-story, wood-framed, post-and-beam house. Situated at the western end of what began as a fishing village in the 17th century, this house is part of what was recognized as the Old Historic District of Siasconset in 1956.

Located between Center and Shell Streets, its footprint includes two bedrooms, one bathroom, a living room with fireplace, and a kitchen and dining room with fireplace. There are door entrances for both street frontages at the east and west as well as the south. A loft includes one bedroom and bathroom.

The ridge of the gable roof parallels the two streets, running north/south with its brick chimney at the ridge. On all sides of its rectangular form there are later additions, including a hip-roofed extension to the south with a bay window, entry door, and a bulkhead; a small-gabled addition at the northwest, a hip-roofed porch at the east and dormers on both east and west slopes of the gable roof. These additions represent more than 200 years of evolution. Surviving all of the changes are three early plank frame windows: two are 4/4 window sash on the west side and one is a 6/6 window sash in the loft on the north elevation.

There is a high eave line at the central portion of the house with long extended 'bent' roofs at the south bringing the eave line to within four feet of the ground. This southern portion of the structure forms a T-shape to the plan of the rooms with the original bedrooms in the "T" of the plan at the south.

This house has exterior entrance doors from the south, from the east/Center Street porch, and from the west/Shell Street. Entering from the southern entrance, there is an L-shaped living room with fireplace and a bedroom on the east side. This is believed to be the oldest part of the house (excluding the 4-5 foot addition at the southern end and extension of the west wall toward Shell Street) that would have included an additional 1-2 bedrooms. Original post-and-beam framing is exposed with typical beaded floor joists and upper level floor boards as the ceiling. An east-west interior bedroom partition wall retains its early door trim (now a closed off door opening) and vertical board wall construction. The walls are finished with later beaded vertical and horizontal boards. There is a stained-glass sliding window in the east bedroom and a stained-glass hopper window, hinged at the bottom, on the west wall of the living room. The floors have been renovated with wide-width pine boards with a natural finish.

The northern portion of the living room has its fireplace on the north wall. It has a natural finish wood mantelshelf and what appears to be original mouldings above and below the mantelshelf. There is a cast-iron fireplace insert, an off-center stone hearth, and larger brick sizes, all indicating masonry changes. This room has wide horizontal board wainscoting with a natural wood finish.

North of the living room is an early addition of several smaller rooms: a dining room, kitchen, and laundry

room. While these spaces may be original in their layout plan, there have been many improvements which preclude accurate identification. There is an exposed brick-faced fireplace surround and throat with grey slate stone mantelshelf, surround and larger brick hearth. There are exposed ceiling/floor joists (some of which are sistered), wide random-width floor boards, and a vertical board, north/south partition wall between the dining and kitchen rooms. A northeast corner cupboard appears to be early together with wallpaper remnants on whitewashed wood and plaster walls. The corner cupboard is painted wood with a board-and-batten door with H-hinges, Blake's Patent door pull and wood turnpiece.

The kitchen has open-stud walls and partially-exposed rafters that illustrate various periods of change. Above the stove on the north wall is an early typical window opening casing. The back side of this north wall remains with its earlier painted, exterior shingles with a closed-in door opening in what is now a bedroom. This bedroom is accessed from the dining room and includes a separate bathroom.

South of the kitchen is a laundry room and a stair to the second floor. The second floor and its stairway may have evolved from being a loft when the house consisted of the original two-three bedrooms with a living room space. See Forman's conjectural floor plan, page 5, (*Early Nantucket*, p. 207). There is now a bedroom with shed dormers added on both east and west slopes of the gable roof and a bathroom at the loft level.

4.2 Alterations/Evolution

Spanning more than 200 years and seventeen different owners, the house at 2 Center Street has seen many changes. While there are surviving original features described below, many are no longer extant, visible, or discernible. The following study of changes, therefore, has drawn upon a wealth of historic maps and photographs to describe this evolution.

This house has evolved from a typical 18th-century 'Sconset village house with a T-plan of rooms: bedrooms at the wider, southern end of the "T" in an east-west direction, with a common room with fireplace to the north, to include the following exterior changes, beginning with the earliest:

- Photo GPN558 on page 5 shows the house in an early 19th-century form with no additions at the south. An addition does exist on the west elevation which is an extended roof that created a larger living room. Note the wood shutters on all visible windows with latch bar assemblies on the exterior. There is a horse carriage on the lawn together with a gathering of women in the street with long formal-looking gowns and men with hats. This footprint may be what appears on the 1881 *Bird's Eye View*, page 8, although the west elevation is not visible.
- A one-story addition at the east side of the southern end of the house was added with a balustrade. It is visible in photos P3773 and PH53-36 on page 21. A hip-roofed porch existed to the west of this addition. Both were merged at some time into one-hip-roofed addition the full width of the house. These additions first appear on the 1898 Sanborn map. Sarah M. Cathcart and her daughter Arietta Cathcart Hussey, who held ownership from 1878 until 1927, would have made these changes and all of the changes that follow.
- Two, one-story gabled structures appear in photo PH53-36 on page 21 at the northwest corner of the property that may or may not have been attached to the house. They may have been outdoor privies.
- A shed-roofed bay window at the south with metal roofing was added together with dark-colored wood shutters on most windows, a shed-roofed dormer on the southern end of the east roof slope, and what appears to be a white color on the wall shingles. All window sash is a dark color. See photos GPN3302 and GPN2644 on page 22, SC612-239 on page 23, and GPN3201 page 22.
- A hip-roofed open porch at the east/Center Street entry was rebuilt. This porch roof was reconstructed soon after 2010 when it appears on an Historic District Commission (HDC) application. It is currently wood-shingled. Its original roof covering, however, appears to have been flat metal secured with nails at the eave line. See photo GPN3301 on page 23. The porch does not appear on any of the Sanborn maps since it was not considered part of the footprint of the house.
- A northern addition was built with a fireplace backing up to the original fireplace with the dining and

kitchen space. A stair to a loft may have been relocated from the east to the west side of the fireplace masonry where it now exists. Evidence of a door and window on the north wall (of the north addition) exists in the kitchen and bedroom.

- A second northern addition was made which now includes a bedroom and bathroom.
- A sign on the southeast corner for “Gretchen Hyde Gift Shop” is shown on photo F843 on page 25. The trim and shutters were painted a dark color.

The entire structure was moved onto a new concrete foundation and full basement, 2.5 feet south of its original the northern property line during the Hepworth ownership after 2009.

4.3 Character-Defining Features

This house is a one-and-a-half-story gable form with its character-defining features that include:

- A 200-year evolution illustrating the original 19th-century T-plan of a Sconset village house with its subsequent major additions to the north;
- Survival of early structural framing, gable roof, a fireplace mantelshelf and moulding details, and plan of rooms;
- A wealth of historic photographs resulting from its prominent location at the southern end of Shell and Center Streets at Main Street.
- A mixed-use residential and commercial history with the Gretchen Hyde Gift Shop and Gladys Lee’s shop.

4.4 Outbuildings

A long rectangular outbuilding appears at the southern end of the property on the 1881 *Bird’s Eye* map, with its gable ridge running parallel to Center Street. There are also several small buildings at the north of the house. The 1888 Platt map and 1896 Codd maps both include a building at the southern end of the property with different, conflicting footprints. The 1898 and 1949 Sanborn Insurance maps do not include any outbuildings at the southern end of the property.

A guest cottage was built at the southern end of the property in 1985. The guest cottage was known as 2 Center Street, and the house now known as 2 Center was then known as 4 Center. During the Hepworth ownership after 2009, the guest cottage was removed.

5. PROPERTY INFORMATION

5.1 Property Identification: 2 Center Street, Nantucket Assessor’s Map: 73.2.4 1, .09 acres, zone SOH.

6. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

6.1 Published and Archival Sources

Forman, Henry Chandlee. *Early Nantucket and Its Whale Houses*. (Nantucket: Mill Hill Press, second edition, 1991)

Forman, Henry Chandlee. *Underhill’s The Old Houses on Sconset Bank* (Nantucket: Myacommet Press, 1961)

May, Michael. *‘Sconset House by House*. (Nantucket Preservation Trust, 2018)

Stackpole, Edouard. *Whales and Destiny: The Rivalry between America, France, and Britain for Control of the Southern Whale Fishery, 1785-1825* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1972)

Tyler, Betsy. *A Brief History of 2 Center Street* (Nantucket Preservation Trust, 2010)

Inquirer and Mirror: 10/22/1898 – called Takeitezie; 6/9/1934 – Gretchen Hyde Gift Shop; 5/27/1944 – Gladys Lee Gift Shop

6.2 Further Study

Further study into the lives of many of the people who owned this house is recommended, including: James Josiah Coffin, Zenas Coffin, Sarah Cathcart, Arietta Cathcart Hussey, Roland Hussey, Gretchen Hyde, and Gladys Lee.

6.3 Historical Maps & Plans

Conjectural Floor Plan, page 207. Forman, Henry Chandlee. *Early Nantucket and Its Whale Houses*. (Nantucket: Mill Hill Press, second edition, 1991)

Map of the Village of Siasconset, 1835. Proprietors Records Book No. 2, Folio 205.

Walling, H.F. *Siasconset* detail from *Map of Nantucket*, 1858.

Stoner, J.J. *Siasconset* detail from *Bird's-Eye View of the Town of Nantucket*, 1881.

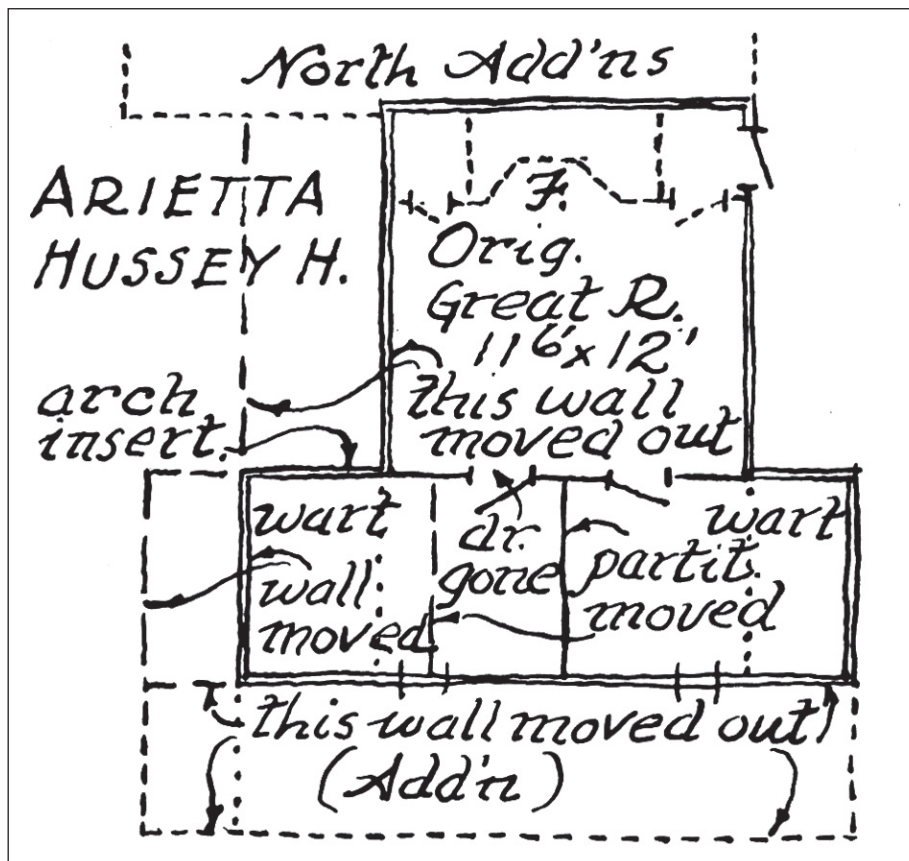
Platt, Harry *Map of the Village of Siasconset on the Island of Nantucket*, published by E. T. Underhill & Co., New York, 1888.

Wm. F. Codd. *Siasconset*. Compiled from the Assessor's map of 1892 by J. B. Snow and from Surveys by H.M. Waitt and Wm. F. Codd to date, 1896.

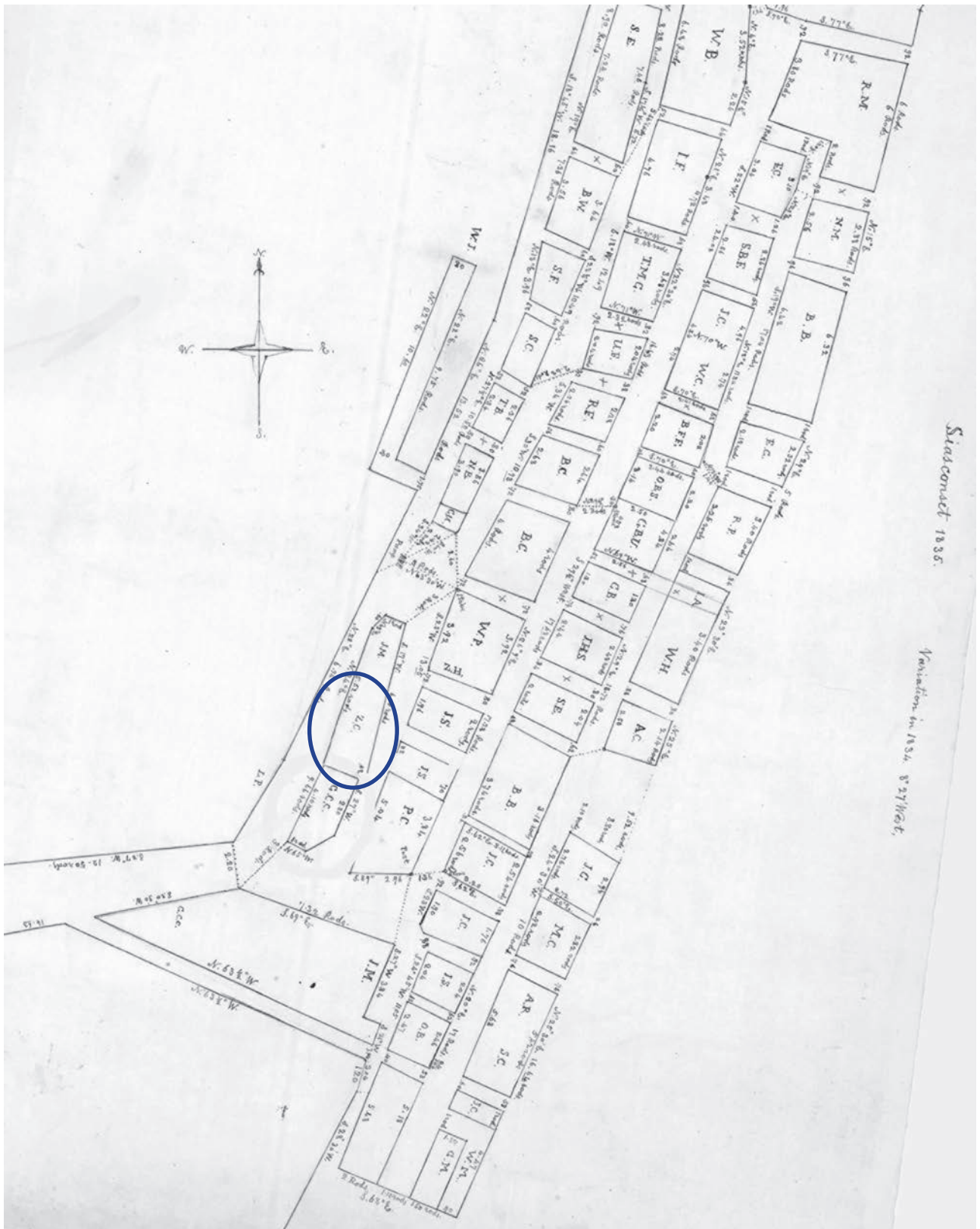
Sanborn Insurance Company : July 1898, sheet 14; October 1904, sheet 18; August 1909, sheet 20; October 1923, sheet 24; October 1949, sheet 24

BPC Architecture elevations and floor plan, 2010

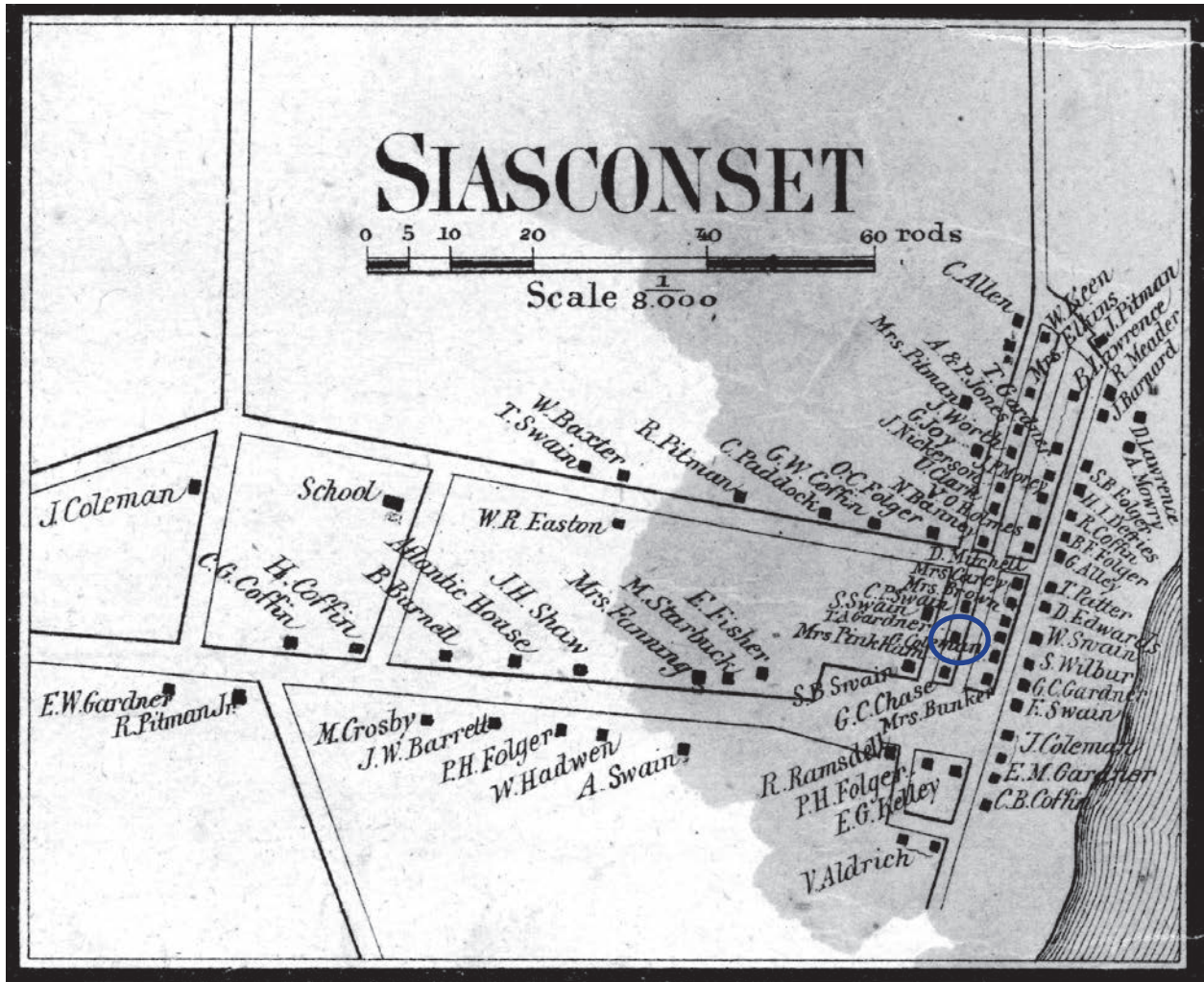
Site Plan, 2-4-6 Center, Island Surveyors, 2011



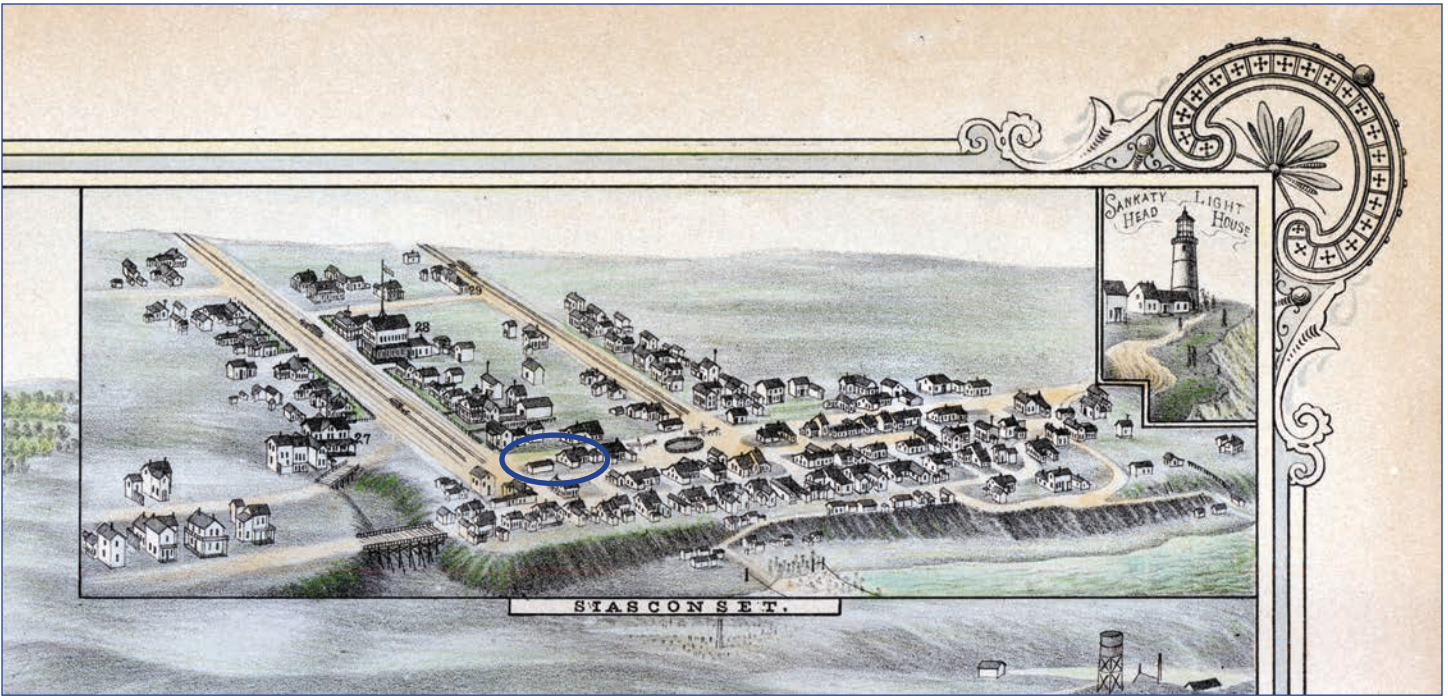
Early Conjectural Floor Plan, Forman, *Early Nantucket*, p. 207



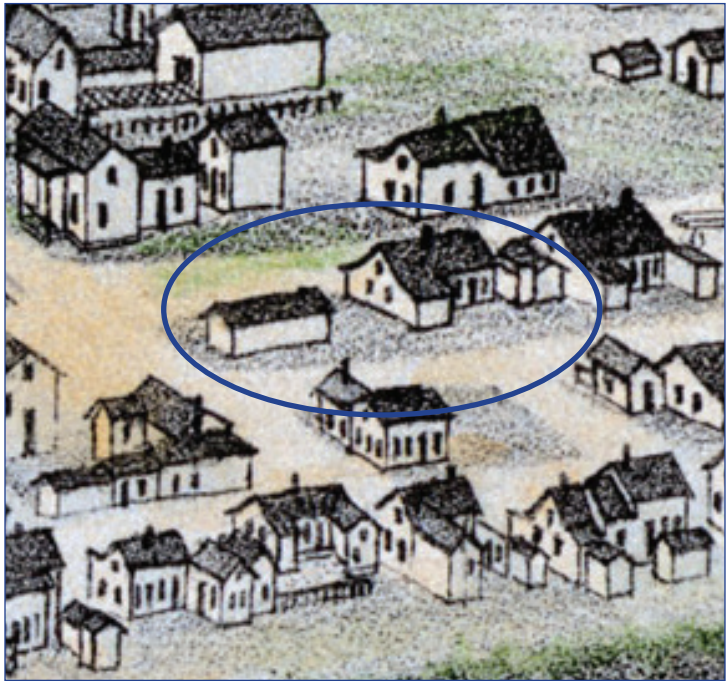
Map of the Village of Siasconset, 1835
 Zenas Coffin, owner



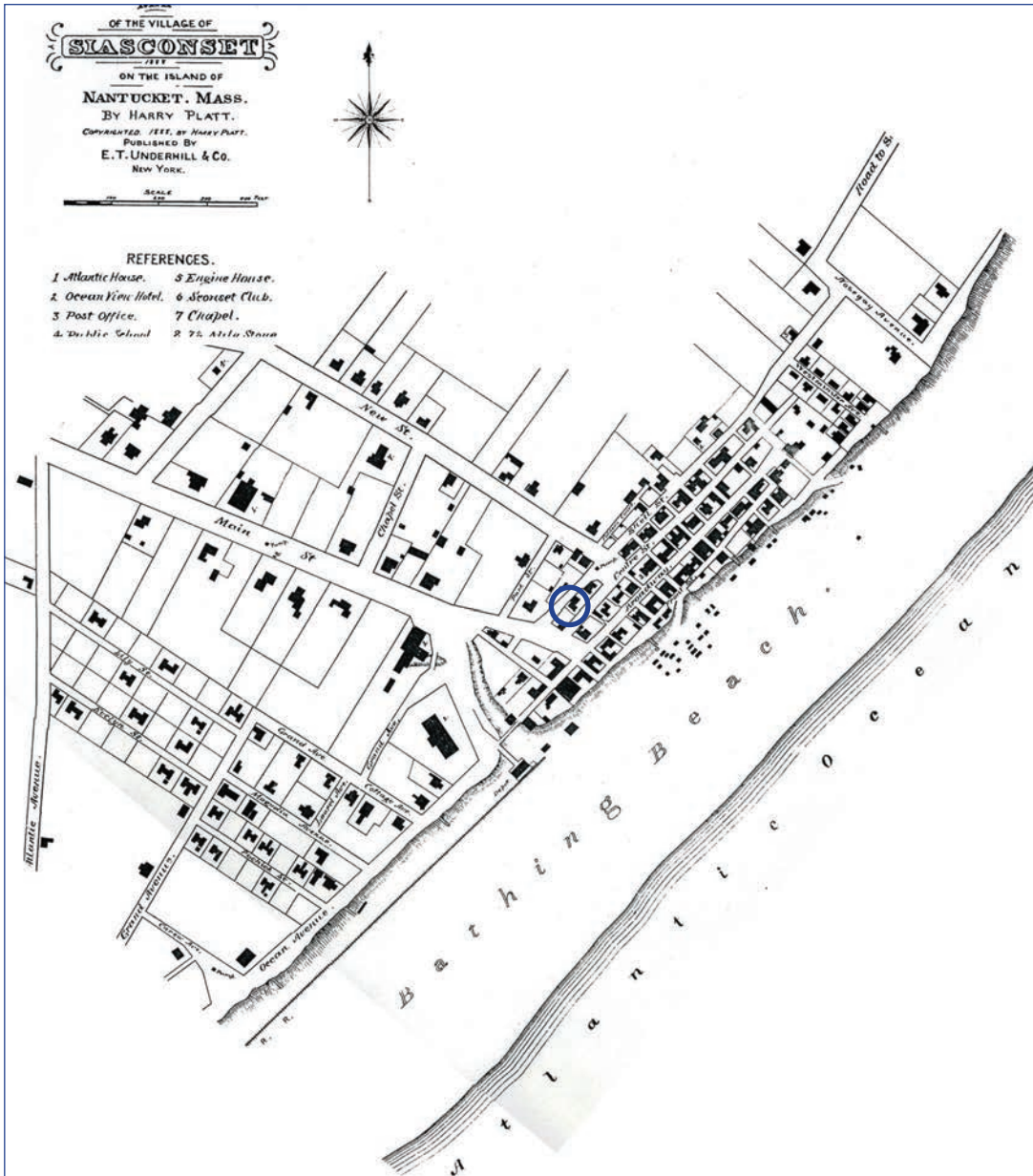
Siasconset detail from Map of Nantucket, by H. F. Walling, 1858.
 Thomas A. Gardner, owner



Siasconset detail from *Bird's-Eye View of the Town of Nantucket*, by J. J. Stoner, 1881
Sarah M. Cathcart, owner



Enlarged detail of above property.
Bird's Eye View by Stoner



Harry Platt Map of the Village of Siasconset, 1888

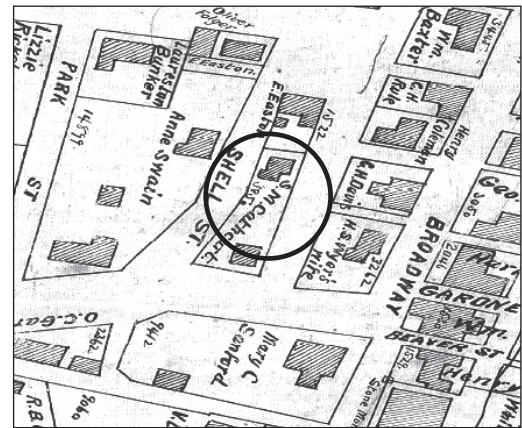


Enlarged detail of 1888 Platt map.

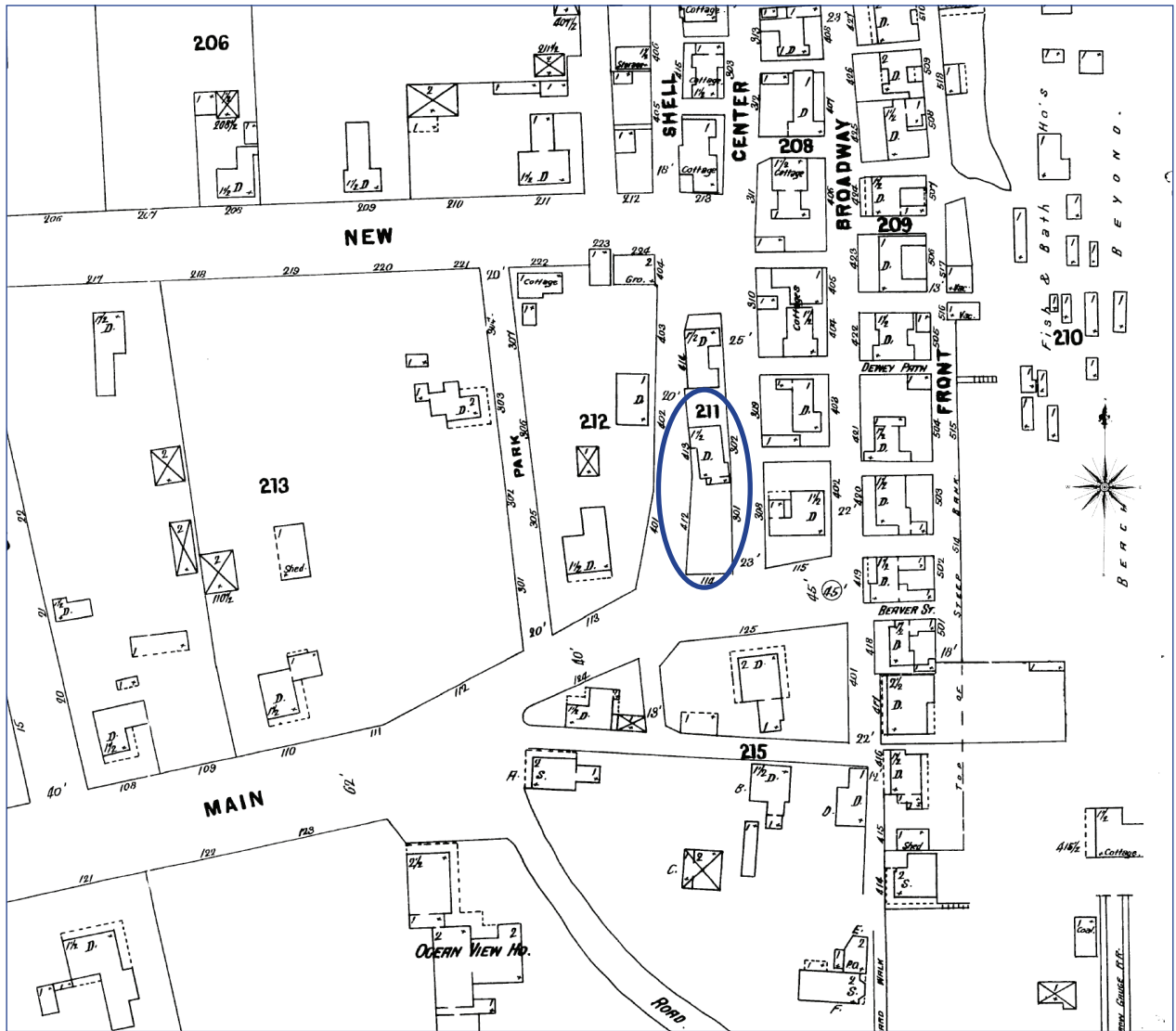
2 Center Street
Siasconset
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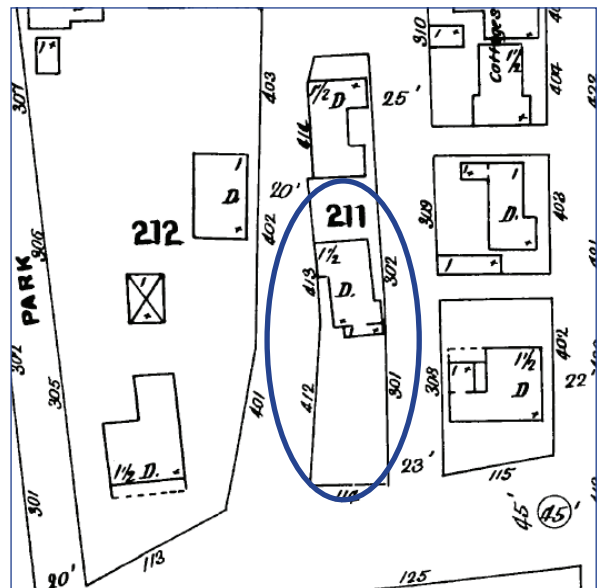
Wm. F. Codd. Siasconset. 1896.



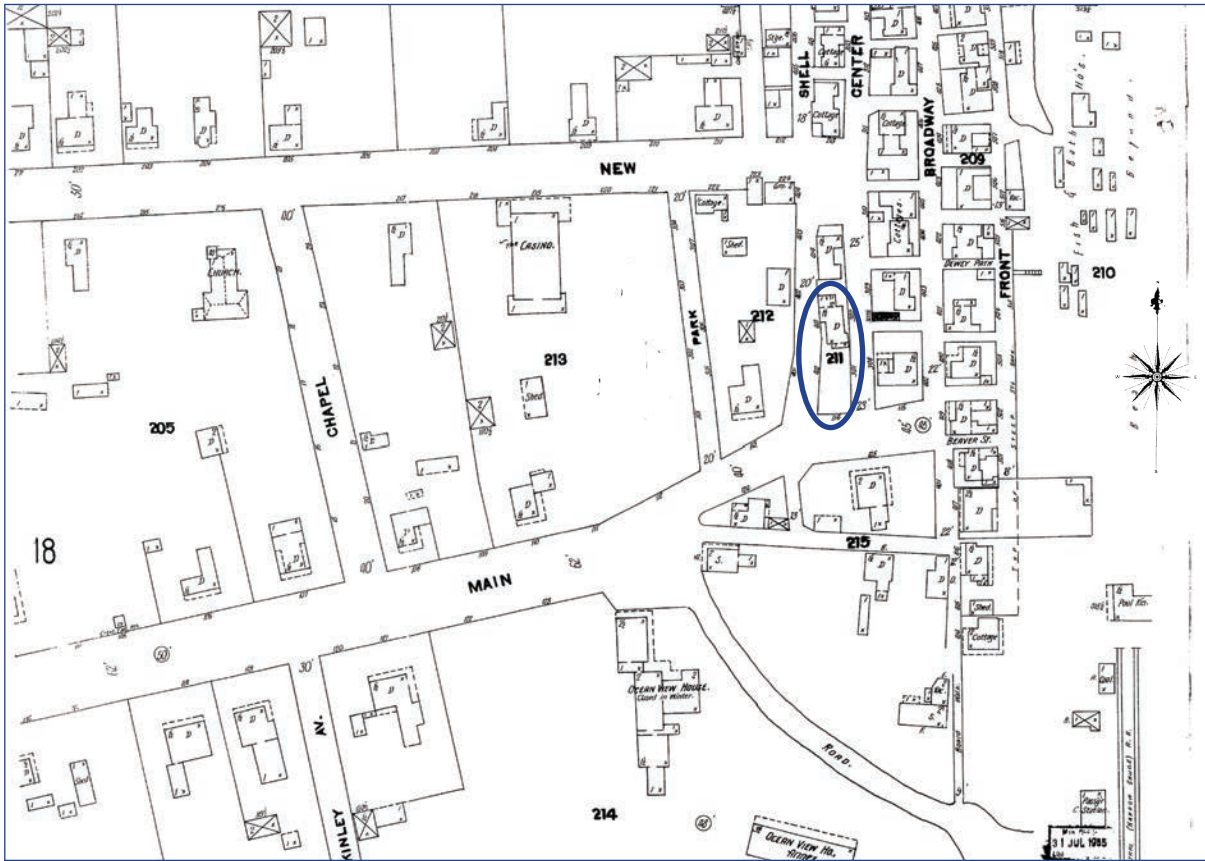
Enlarged detail of 1896 Codd map



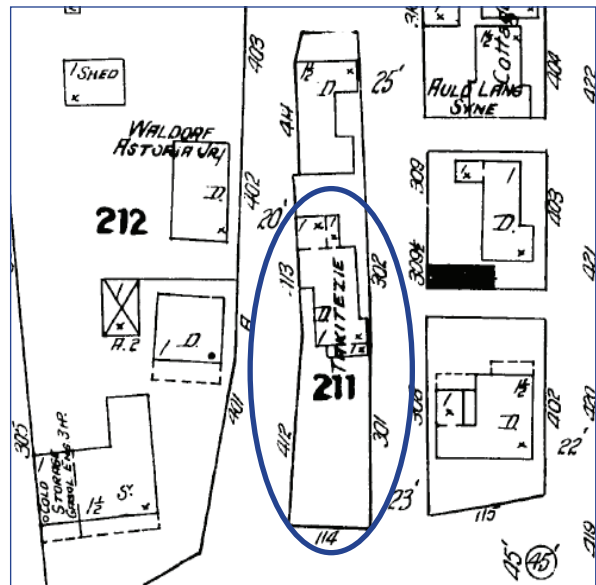
Sanborn Insurance Company : July 1898



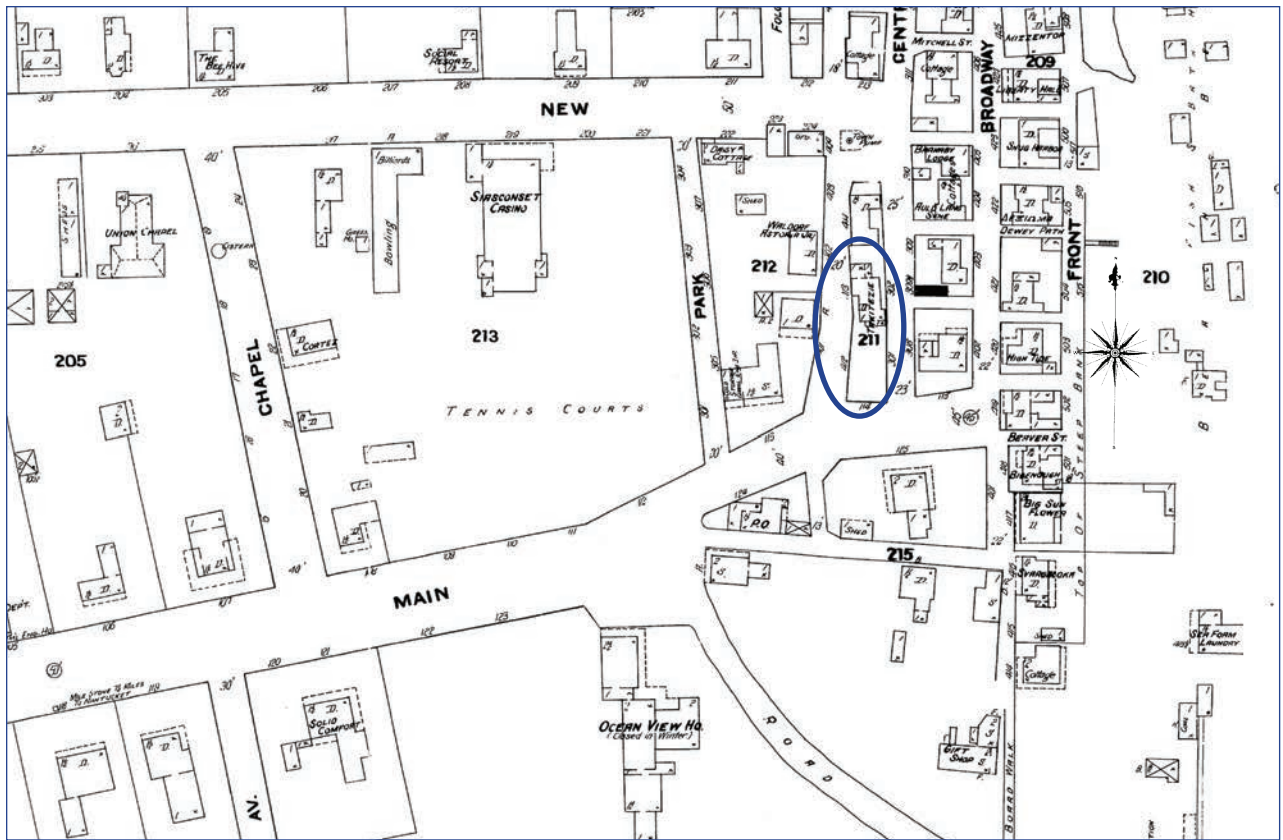
Enlarged detail of 1898 Sanborn map



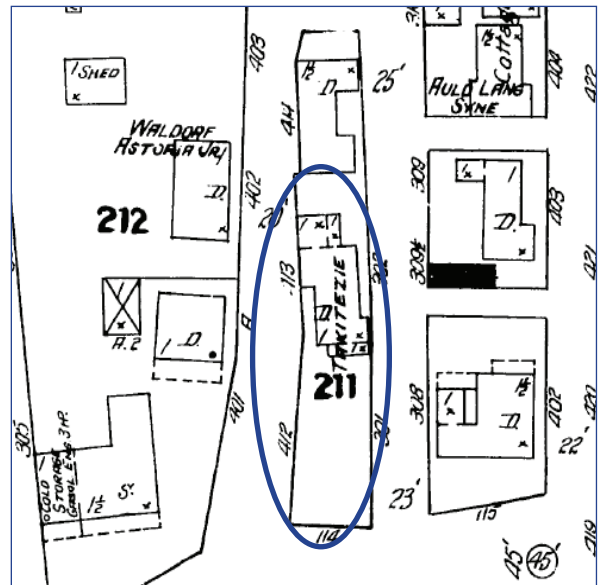
Sanborn Insurance Company :October 1904



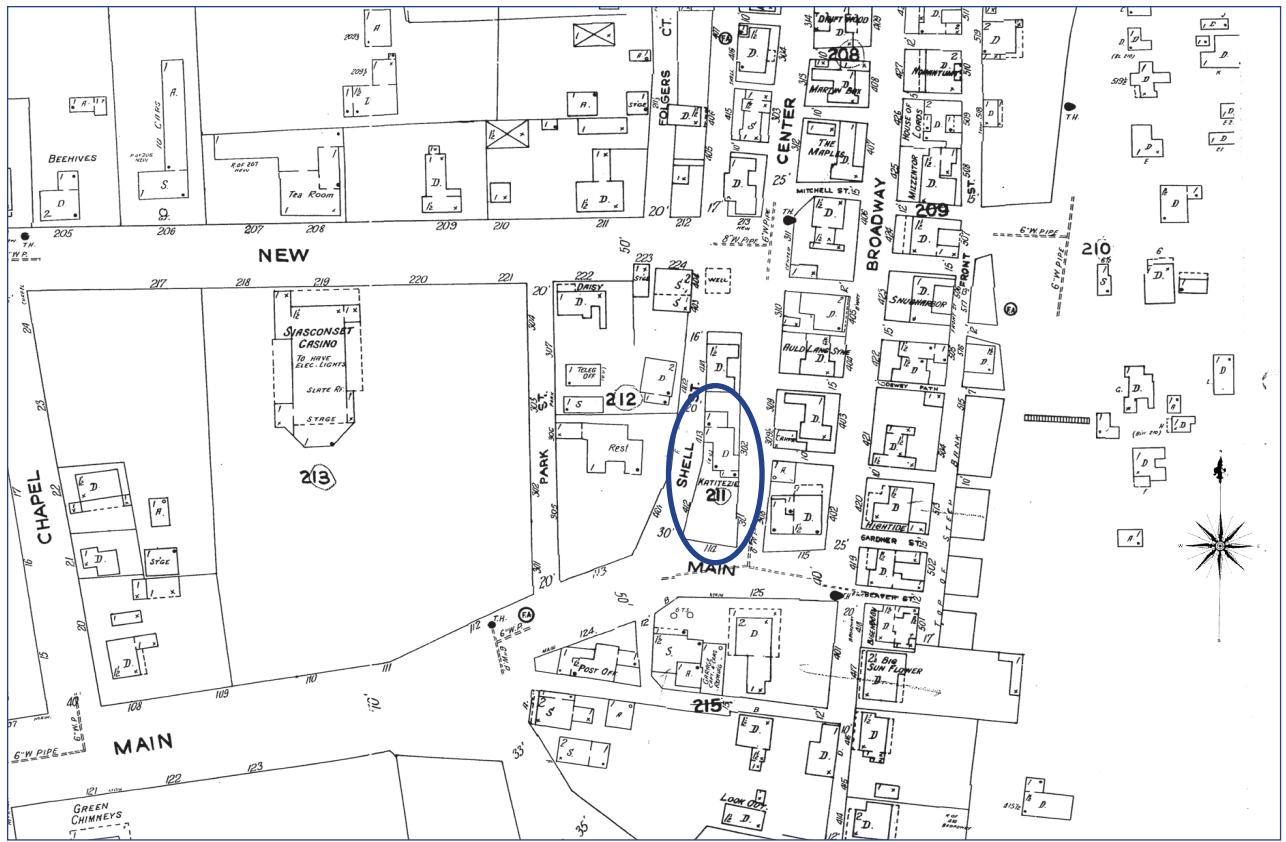
Enlarged detail of 1904 Sanborn map



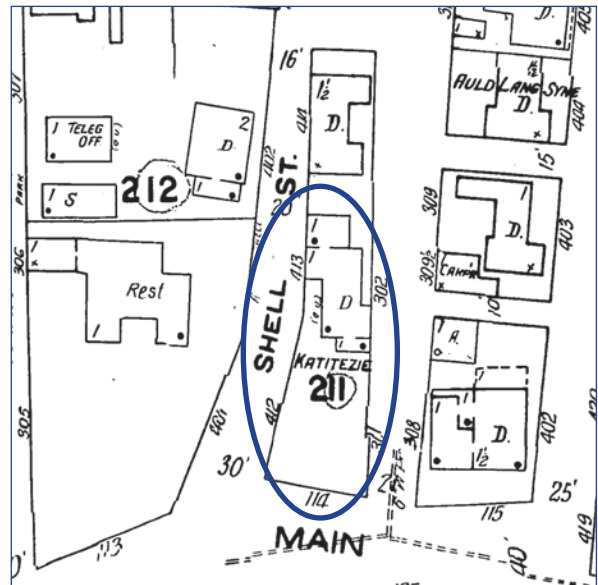
Sanborn Insurance Company :October 1909



Enlarged detail of 1909 Sanborn map



Sanborn Insurance Company: October 1923 with October 1949 update



Enlarged detail of 1923/1949 Sanborn map



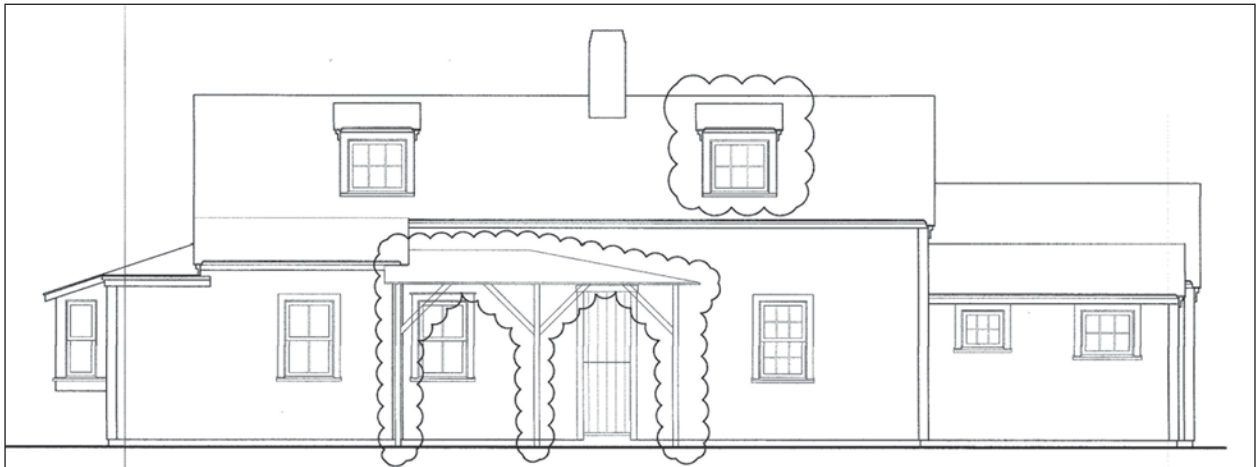
South Elevation
2010 Measured drawing by BPC Architecture



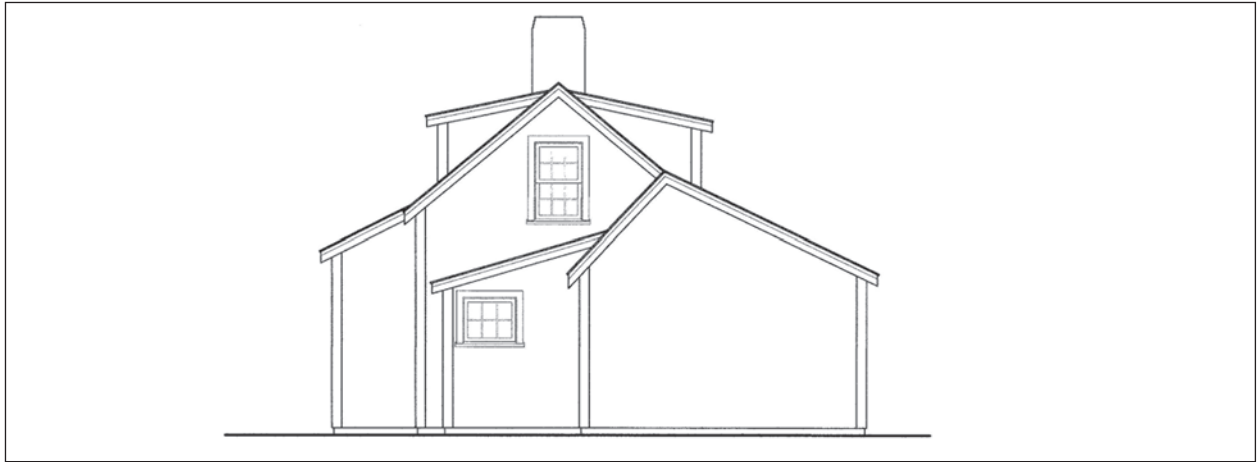
South Elevation Proposed East Porch Reconstruction
2010 Measured drawing by BPC Architecture



East Elevation
2010 Measured drawing by BPC Architecture



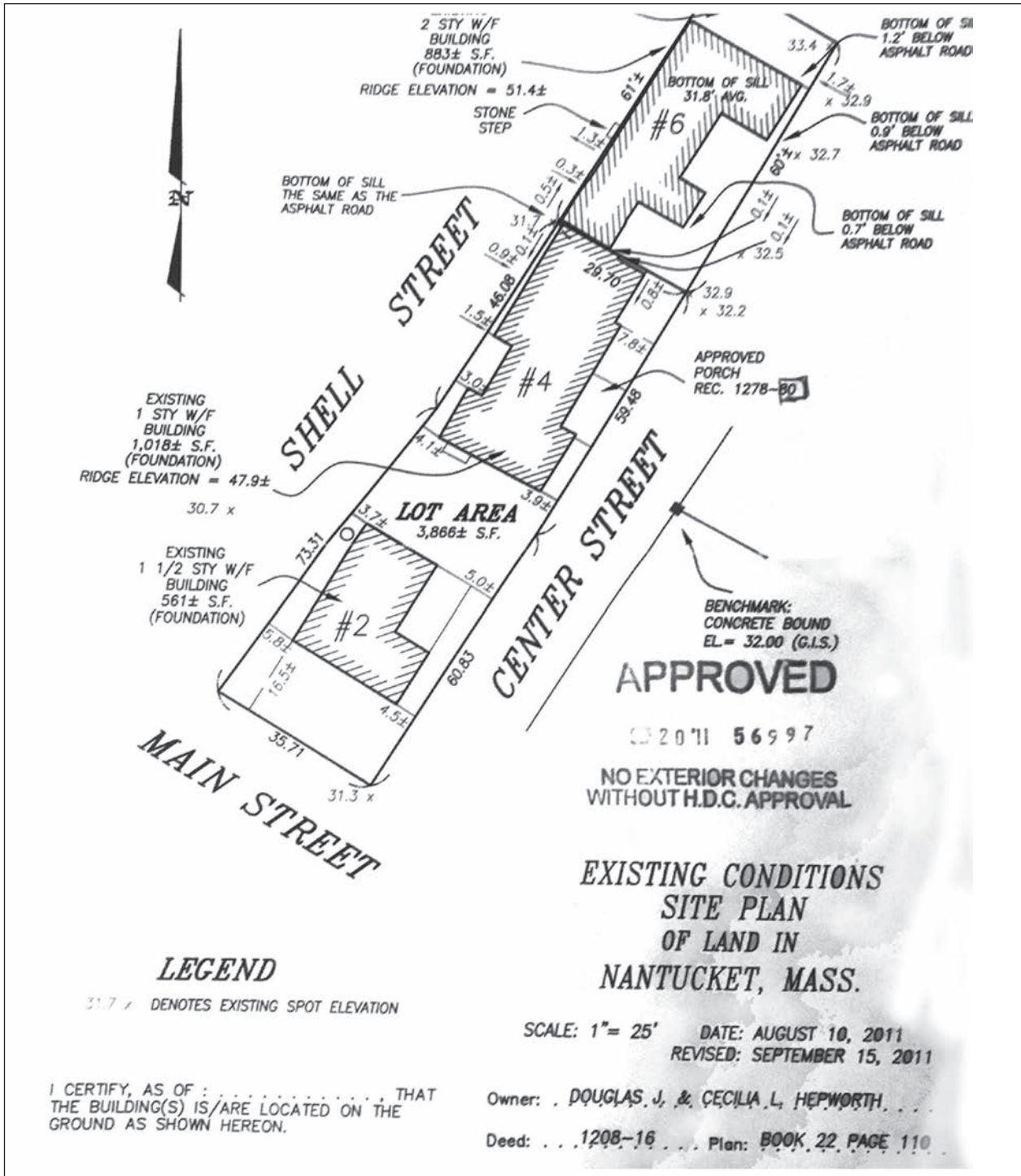
East Elevation Proposed East Porch Reconstruction
2010 Measured drawing by BPC Architecture



North Elevation
2010 Measured drawing by BPC Architecture



West Elevation
2010 Measured drawing by BPC Architecture



Site Plan, 2011

6.4 Historical Photographs and Illustrations: Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association with dates approximated by NHA)

GPN558: Looking north on Shell Street, south and west elevations of 2 Center Street

1936.28.1: Painting ca. 1885, identified in NHA accession book as "the Barnacle, later Takeitezie, 2 Center Street"

GPN3301: East Elevation showing the porch addition

P3773: Looking south on Center Street, 1890s

PH53-36: Looking north on Shell Street, west and south elevations, showing early south additions

GPN3302: Looking north on Center Street, south and east elevations, painted white

GPN2644: Roland B. Hussey with his portable chicken coop at Takeitezie, 1880s-90s

SC612-239: Arietta Hussey cottage, Takeitezie, 1910s

GPN3201: Looking northeast on Shell Street, 1920s. Note telephone poles

SC956-20: Looking northwest on Center Street, 1920s

GPN2473: East elevation, 2 Center Street, left side, behind

F843: Gretchen Hyde Gift Shop sign, 1930s, East elevation



GPN558: Looking north on Shell Street, south and west elevations of 2 Center Street



1936.28.1: Painting ca. 1885, identified in NHA accession book as "the Barnacle, later Takeitezie, 2 Center Street"

This is a difficult painting to reconcile because it depicts the earliest form with white-painted walls which did not exist in its early 19th-century form.



GPN3301: East Elevation showing the porch addition



P3773: Looking south on Center Street, 1890s



PH53-36: Looking north on Shell Street, west and south elevations, showing early south additions



GPN3302: Looking north on Center Street, south and east elevations, late 19th-century additions, painted white



GPN2644: Roland B. Hussey with his portable chicken coop at Takeitezie, 1880s-90s



SC612-239: Arietta Hussey cottage, Takeitezie, 1910s



GPN3201: Looking northeast on Shell Street, 1920s. Note telephone poles



SC956-20: Looking northwest on Center Street, 1920s



GPN2473: East elevation, 2 Center Street, left side, behind



F843: Gretchen Hyde Gift Shop sign, 1930s, East elevation

6.5 Year 2021 Photographs



South/Main Street Elevation



East/Center Street Elevation



North and West Elevations



East and North Elevations



East and North Elevations



West and South Elevations



Looking south at entry into Living Room



Looking north into original Living Room



Chimney Mantelshelf and Moulding Detail



Original Plank Partition Wall with Closed-off Door



Bedroom, Southeast



Exposed Chimney Brick Fireplace, Dining Room



Early Painted Corner Cupboard with Wallpaper Remnant, Dining Room



Dining Room, Wallpaper Remnants



Refrigerator Faux Book Case



Refrigerator Faux Book Case, Open



Kitchen looking northwest



Kitchen earlier north window trim opening



Bedroom Loft



Earlier exterior wall in north Bedroom

6.6 Chain of Title

Nantucket Probate Book = NPB

Nantucket Registry of Deeds Book = NRD

- 1811 Drew to Coffin
NPB 5, p. 326: Estate of Gershom Drew (d. 1809) to James J. Coffin (legal representative of William Drew)
- 1817 Coffin to Mitchell
NRD Book 24, p.233: James J. Coffin to Aaron Mitchell
- 1818 Mitchell to Coffin
NRD Book 24, p. 495: Aaron Mitchell to Zenas Coffin
- 1856 Coffin to Gardner
NRD Book 53, pp. 171-73: Heirs of Zenas Coffin to Thomas A. Gardner
- 1859 Gardner to Cobb
NRD Book 55, pp. 83-84: Thomas A. Gardner to George Cobb
- 1861 Cobb to Wyer
NRD Book 56, p. 200: George Cobb to Samuel C. Wyer
- 1878 Wyer to Cathcart
NRD Book 65, p. 224: Charlotte C. Wyer, widow; Charlotte E. Wyer, and Harriett A. Wyer to Sarah M. Cathcart
- 1927 Hussy to Travers
NRD Book 10, p. 362: Arietta Hussey, widow of Roland B. Hussey to Alice F. M. Travers [title from will of Sarah M. Cathcart]
- 1945 Travers to Lee
NRD Book 110, p. 424: Alice F. M. Travers to Gladys Lee, 1945
- 1966 Lee to Porter
NRD Book 129, p. 524: Gladys Lee to Gordon and Adelaide Porter, 1966
- 1985 Porter to Porter
NRD Book 234, p. 41: Gordon and Adelaide Porter to Bruce and Robert Porter
- 1986 Porter to Porter
NRD Book 264, p. 329: Bruce and Robert Porter to Bruce, Robert, and Lorna Porter
- 1993 Porter to Porter
NRD Book 427, p. 76: Bruce and Lorna Porter to Bruce Porter
- 1994 Porter to Porter
NRD Book 446, p. 446: Bruce and Robert Porter to Bruce, Robert, and Jana Porter
- 1999 Porter to Holmes
NRD Book 608, p.166: Bruce, Jana and Robert Porter to Thomas A. Holmes
- 2004 Holmes to Conte and Brockette
NRD Book 896, p. 89: Thomas A. Holmes to Robert Conte and Eric Brockette
- 2009 Conte and Brockette to Hepworth
NRD Book 1208, p. 16: Robert Conte and Eric Brockette to Douglas J. and Cecilia L. Hepworth