



**Architectural & Historical Report
for
21 Ocean Avenue
Siasconset, Massachusetts**

June 17, 2022

Prepared by Marsha L. Fader, AIA Architect and
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 21 Ocean Avenue known as Rudder Grange, 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 21 Ocean Avenue 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 21 Ocean Avenue is significant for its late nineteenth-century mansard style, for the survival of original architectural details, and as an experiment in 'Sconset summer accommodations.

It was one of the first houses built for the Sunset Heights subdivision that heralded the expansion of the village to the south of 'Sconset. Photographs attest to the barrenness of the land as new seasonal and rental homes were being constructed (see page 12, photo SG14282). After several decades as a single family home rental, Rudder Grange, together with five neighboring rental cottages, became known as 'Sconset Cottage Club in 1911. At this time Rudder Grange was renovated to include a dining room that served those renting their room in one of the cottages. It was a new but short-lived business model for owner Isaac Hills Jr.

The mansard roof was a dominant architectural feature of the Second Empire style in vogue in the U.S. during the French regime of Louis Napoleon (1852-1870). With its double-pitch, the mansard roof essentially enclosed a second floor level while minimizing its height. Advances in the technology of millwork and in the printing of catalogs of ready-made decorative architectural cornice mouldings, brackets, porch railings, sawn balusters, columns, etc., which empowered architects like Charles H. Robinson to design and build cottages such as Rudder Grange.

Rudder Grange is significant for its French Second Empire style, a style that has minimal representation on Nantucket island. While nearly all of its detail was removed in the twentieth century, there are photographs that clearly illustrate its original abundance of period decorative detail. With its form and footprint still intact, this house would serve well as a future restoration project supported by historic photographs.

3. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

21 Ocean Avenue, Rudder Grange, circa 1875–84

Rudder Grange is one of the early houses built on Magnolia Avenue (also known as Hill/Hills Avenue 1898-1923) in the Sunset Heights development of Siasconset on the bluff south of Main Street. Charles H. Robinson (1829–1915) and Dr. Franklin A. Ellis (1833–84) were partners in the Sunset Heights development in 1872. They built the Ocean View House hotel (1872–73), pavilion (1876–77) and annex (1883) and sold dozens of house-lots in the area south of the hotel bordered by Ocean, Grand, and Atlantic Avenues. Robinson was the chief architect and builder on Nantucket at the time, employing a large workforce that constructed two-story Victorian cottages similar in style and size to the first houses built on the north bluff of Siasconset and contrasting with the small 18th- and 19th-century cottages in the center of the village, and the Underhill cottages that were modeled after them in the 1870s and 1880s on Evelyn, Lily, and Pochick Streets.

Isaac Hills Jr. (1864–1926) moved from Rochester, New York, to Nantucket with his mother, the poet Caroline Parker Hills, after the death of his father, Isaac Hills (1798–1881). They lived at Cliff Lodge, 9 Cliff Road, in the town of Nantucket year-round, after summering for a number of years on the island. At the age of

twenty-one, Isaac Hills Jr. invested in real estate in Sunset Heights. He purchased eight house lots and two cottages on Magnolia Lane from Charles H. Robinson in 1885. That summer he advertised for rent:

On Sunset Heights, Siasconset, on Magnolia Avenue, commanding an excellent view of the ocean, within a stone's throw of the hotel, a beautiful French-roof cottage, containing six sleeping rooms, sitting room, reception room, dining room and kitchen. The principal rooms have hard wood floors, laid in pattern, and the house has inside blinds. All the rooms are large and airy. Water in the house.

The “French-roof” or mansard roof feature identifies the cottage as Rudder Grange, one of the two Robinson cottages on Magnolia Lane purchased by Hills in 1885. In 1888, Hills turned Rudder Grange to face east (presumably the cottage previously faced Magnolia Lane on the north). Harry Platt's *Map of the Village of Siasconset on the Island of Nantucket*, 1888, shows the footprint of the cottage before it was moved. William F. Codd's 1896 map of Siasconset and all Sanborn Insurance Company maps 1898–1949 show the house in its current east-facing orientation. Hills placed an ad in the *Inquirer and Mirror* in 1894, describing Rudder Grange as a seven-bedroom cottage available for the summer.

Isaac Hills rented Rudder Grange and his other purpose-built rental cottages on Magnolia Avenue—Villa Marguerite (2 Magnolia, now known as Tern Too), Casa Fortunata (4 Magnolia, now known as Still Magnolia), Genesee Lodge (6 Magnolia, now known as The Good Tern), and Thornycroft (10 Magnolia)—to individual families each summer for more than two decades before changing his business model with the creation of the 'Sconset Cottage Club in 1911. In the club plan, one could rent a room in any one of Hills's cottages and take meals at the club's headquarters, Rudder Grange, where the first floor had been reconfigured to feature a large dining room.

The *Inquirer & Mirror* reported May 25, 1912, that the proprietor of the club, James H. S. Fair, had installed a compressed air water supply and was in the process of extending the front of the building to accommodate more diners. The next year, M. W. Gouin added a large dormer window and a piazza “to the 'Sconset Cottage Club annex, fronting on Ocean Avenue.” The 'Sconset Cottage Club had a limited life span, probably influenced by the outbreak of World War I, which impacted travel to the island. The cottage club became known as the 'Sconset House in 1919.

Hills suffered financial and personal difficulties, and began selling his 'Sconset properties. He sold Genesee Lodge in 1919, and in 1921, he sold Rudder Grange and Villa Marguerite to his son Isaac Hills III (1897–1963), a veteran of World War I who, as Lieutenant Commander, would command his own ship in the South Pacific in World War II. A few months later, Isaac Hills III sold Rudder Grange to Levi Starbuck Coffin (1845–1932), manager of the Ocean View House since the 1880s, and proprietor of Bloomingdale Farm in Plainfield, on the outskirts of the village. According to the *Inquirer and Mirror*, Coffin made unspecified “improvements” to Rudder Grange in 1922, and continued to rent the cottage for summer accommodation. In his will, he left the cottage in trust for the benefit of his daughter, Ethel Coffin Austin and the children of his son, Louis. Trustees sold the cottage to Leonard A. Block (1891–1957) and Elizabeth T. Block (1902–86) of Washington, D.C., in 1948.

The Blocks summered on Nantucket from the early 1930s, renting various houses in 'Sconset, including Rudder Grange. According to Roger Block (1932–2016) his father Leonard believed it was safer for his children to spend the summer and early fall on Nantucket, to avoid the polio virus prevalent in the city in the warm months, so for many years the family extended their summer stay at Rudder Grange to October 1. Roger's older brother, Huntington, owned Casa Fortunata at 4 Magnolia Avenue for many years, after which he purchased several properties on Morey Lane, including Aloha and Bunker Hill.

The Block family were seasonal residents of Rudder Grange for more than 75 years. In 1967, Elizabeth R. Block transferred the title to Rudder Grange to herself and her son, Roger. Following her decease, Roger Block transferred the title to himself and his wife, in 1990. In 1996, Roger and Miriam created the Rudder Grange Nominee Trust, with Roger as Trustee. Elizabeth and Jonathan, children of Roger and Miriam were trustees in 2010, when they each took one-half share ownership of the property.

4. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

4.1 Description

This late 19th-century house on the corner of Ocean Avenue and Magnolia Avenue is a wood-framed structure built with a distinctive mansard roof and a footprint in the shape of an uneven cross. While the house has been stripped of its original exterior architectural display of Victorian trim, it has retained its wrap-around front porch, its arrangement of rooms, and its round arched windows and entry doors. This description documents the existing form and details followed by an analysis of its historical evolution.

One enters the first floor from an elevated porch facing the ocean. The porch wraps around the front room with its original round arched windows and double doors. A small living/reception room has a fireplace and stair to the second floor. The dining room is immediately behind with bedrooms flanking it on either side and forming the cross. A kitchen is behind the dining room with rear doors to the north and the south and an interior back stair to the second floor. A door at the southwest leads to an exterior entrance to a bathroom, a deck, and a garage. The northern rear door leads to a ramp and Magnolia Avenue. A utility room is in a shed addition at the rear of the house.

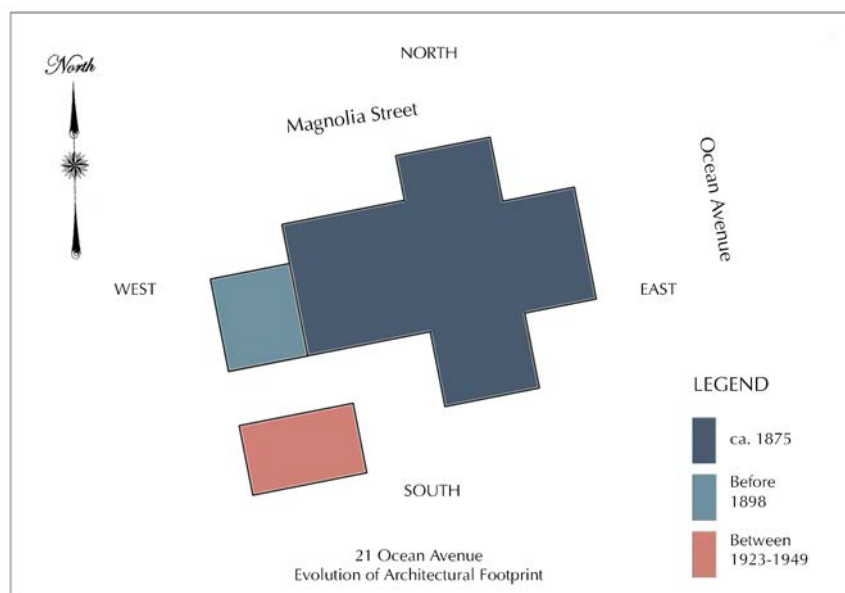
The dining room has an unusual wainscot with vertical boards with two horizontal reeded bands that match the door trim. The dining room and the front room have simple parquet wood floors. The front room fireplace mantelpiece is a simple classical design with pilasters. Its design is in contrast with the robust nature of the original architectural trim and may have been a replacement.

The second floor includes four bedrooms and one bathroom. The front stair retains its natural finish newel post and railing. Wood doors feature four recessed panels trimmed with moulding, glass and mineral door knobs.

The distinctive mansard roof of this house was originally accompanied by a wealth of decorative and functional detail typical for the Second Empire architectural style of its late nineteenth-century period. Projecting roof and porch eaves displayed mouldings and brackets together with open work porch columns with capitals, brackets, and plinths surrounded by sawn balusters. It was also typical for all of the woodwork to be painted with different colors as seen in photo p20541 on page 13.

4.2 Alterations/Evolution

The footprint of Rudder Grange remained the same since it was built in the late nineteenth century with a few minor exceptions and one major, short-lived change. For more than 140 years, its footprint has been the shape of an uneven cross, with a projecting front-to-back axis surrounded by a wrap-around front porch. Extensive alterations were made at the back section of the house and with the removal of all of its original exterior decorative and functional trim.



The approximate order of alterations include the following:

- relocation of the house from its original Hill/Magnolia Avenue-facing orientation to facing Ocean Avenue and the ocean;
- a 1-story rear addition may have been added or may have been original. It appears on the 1898 Sanborn map. It may have housed an early privy or bathroom with indoor plumbing;
- in 1912 a large dining room was added at the ocean street front of the house as shown in the photo on page 14. This addition consisted of connected gable-and hip-roofed sections with an entry porch. The interior had wood floors and open-stud construction with vertical tongue-and-groove wood sheathing. This major addition was built and demolished in the window of time between the publication of the Sanborn maps of 1909 and 1923.
- a 'compressed air water supply' was installed in 1912 as the house was altered to serve as a dining room for the 'Sconset Cottage Club';
- while a sewer system existed in 'Sconset by the 1890s, town-supplied domestic water and electricity was not available until 1926. Although Isacc Hills Jr. advertised 'water in the house' in 1885, it is not clear to what extent that water or water systems existed. Private system improvements in the house by Levi Coffin before 1921 may have accounted for the increase in its tax evaluation;
- during the ownership of either the Coffin or Block families in the 20th-century, all of the original exterior architectural detail was removed. All mansard roof cornice trim and brackets, all porch eave trim and brackets, porch posts and sawn balusters were removed along with its polychromy. At this time also, the front bedroom single window may have been enlarged to become one central 'picture window' flanked by two 2/2 windows. Two 2/2 windows replaced the picture window in 2000.
- the Sanborn map of 1949 includes a garage and a deck at the southwest area of the property. An exterior shed or privy may also have been converted to its current use as a bathroom with an exterior entry at this time. This bathroom was further renovated in 1995.
- a ramp was installed at the north/Magnolia street and rear side of the property;
- a shed houses an open-stud utility room at the back of the house.

Interior alterations include the following:

- the kitchen was renovated during the 1912 change-of-use as the 'Sconset Cottage Club dining room and by the Block family into its current design during the twentieth-century. It includes a secondary stair to the second floor that may be original;
- evidence of unknown changes exist in the dining room china alcove;
- a second brick chimney which no longer perforates the roof was added mid-way in the second floor plan;
- a closet was added in the northern first floor bedroom;
- cornice moulding was added in the front living room and dining room. The mantelpiece in the front living room may have also been a twentieth-century change. Its restrained classical style together with the cornice moulding is not in the original exuberant Second Empire mansard style consistent with the original exterior architectural detail;
- a toilet room was added under the front stair;
- a lift was installed at the front stair.

4.3 Character-Defining Features

The character-defining features at 21 Ocean Avenue include the following:

- the surviving plan of rooms and building footprint;
- original circular arched windows and doors on the front facade with its distinctive exterior and interior trim and interior wood shutters;
- 4-panel doors with original glass and mineral door knobs;
- simple parquet wood floors in the front room and dining room;
- a distinctive clay chimney pot on top of the brick chimney which appears in early photographs.

4.4 Outbuildings

No outbuildings are known to have existed until a garage appears on the Sanborn map of 1949.

5. PROPERTY INFORMATION

5.1 Property Identification: 21 Ocean Avenue, Nantucket Assessor's Map: 73.3.1 Parcel 18, 0.13 acres in the SOH zone.

5.2 Setting: This house is located within the Old Historic District of Siasconset in the 1872 Sunset Heights subdivision south of Main Street. With lot sizes less than one-half of an acre, very little ground area remains beyond the footprint of the typical home. There is an uninterrupted ocean view at 21 Ocean Avenue.

At 21 Ocean Avenue, there is a combination of lawn, plantings, and fencing. Privet hedge borders most of the side and rear property lines. Perimeter foundation plants exist at the front vertical board porch apron as well as near the rear door and north ramp. A horizontal board fence with capped posts defines a portion of the front edge of the lawn. The 1911 photo p20541 shows an unpainted picket fence with rough-hewn posts.

6. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

6.1 Published and Archival Sources

Carr, Rita. "Magnolia Avenue: A Window Into 'Sconset's Past." *The Fanlight-NPT News*, Nantucket Preservation Trust, January 23, 2020

Hill family biography, typescript (partial manuscript, unidentified author) NHA Research Library biography file; Isaac Hills III obituary, 3/15/1963, unidentified Cape Cod newspaper, NHA Research Library biography file; 'Sconset Cottage Club pamphlet with photographs, NHA Research Library Siasconset blue file.

Inquirer and Mirror: Isaac Hills renting "French-roof house," 6/6/1885; Rudder Grange for rent, 6/9/1894; James S. Fair enlarging Rudder Grange, 6/1/1912; M. E. Gouin adding window and piazza, 6/8/1913; Rudder Grange moved and turned "25 Years Ago," 11/1/1913; Coffin improving Rudder Grange, 5/13/1922; Levi S. Coffin obituary, 1/30/1932;

Lancaster, Clay. *Holiday Island: The Pageant of Nantucket's Hostelries and Summer Life from Its Beginnings to the Mid-twentieth Century*. (Nantucket Historical Association, 1993)

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) NAN 2110

Newhouse, Nancy. *Voices of the Village: An Oral History of 'Sconset*. ('Sconset Trust, 2004)

6.2 Further Study

Further study of the work of architect Charles H. Robinson and his architectural stylistic resources is recommended. Did he own period pattern books? What companies supplied the ready-made mill-work for this Second Empire house?

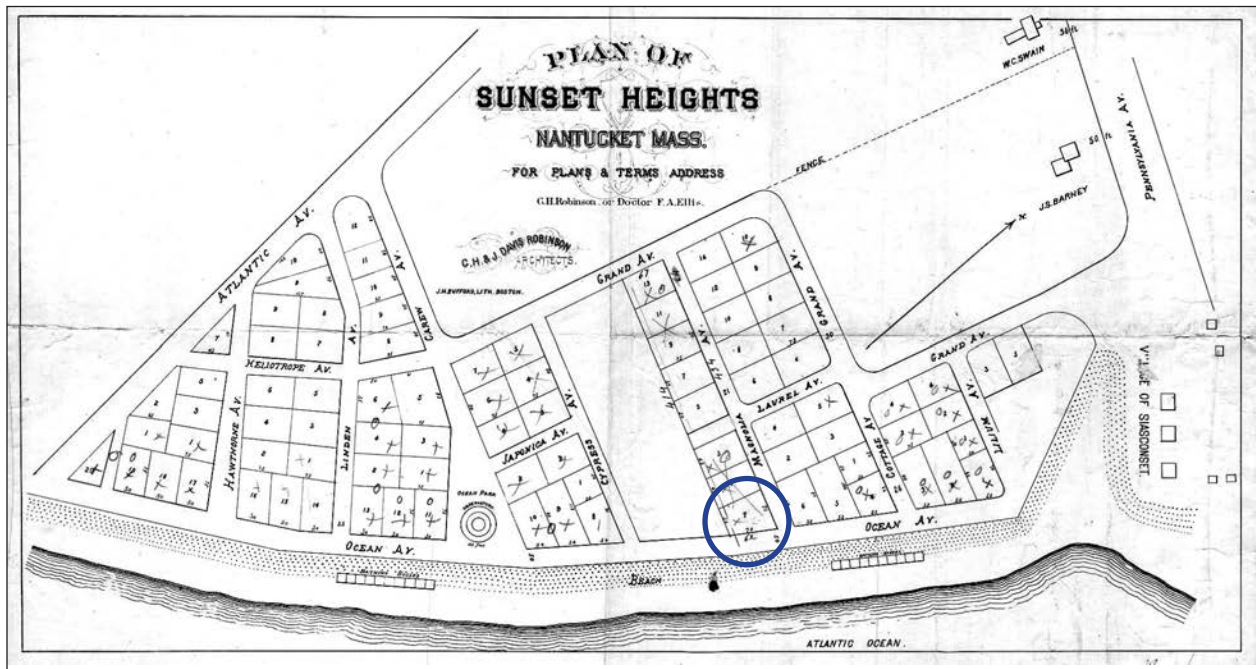
6.3 Historical Maps & Plans

1872 Robinson, C.H. and James D. *Plan of Sunset Heights, Nantucket Mass.* J. H. Bufford, Lith., Boston [1872]

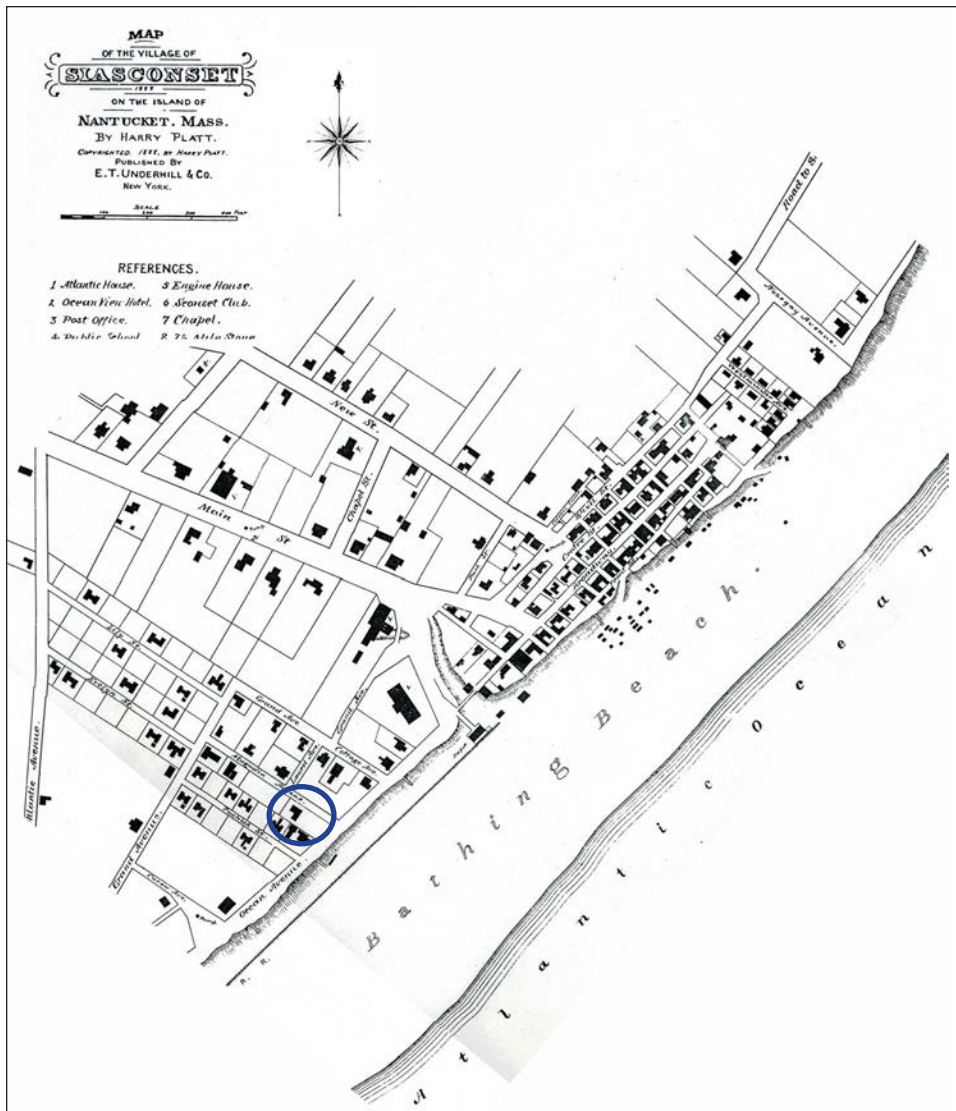
1888 Platt, Harry *Map of the Village of Siasconset on the Island of Nantucket*, published by E. T. Underhill & Co., New York, 1888.

1896 Codd, Wm. F. *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.

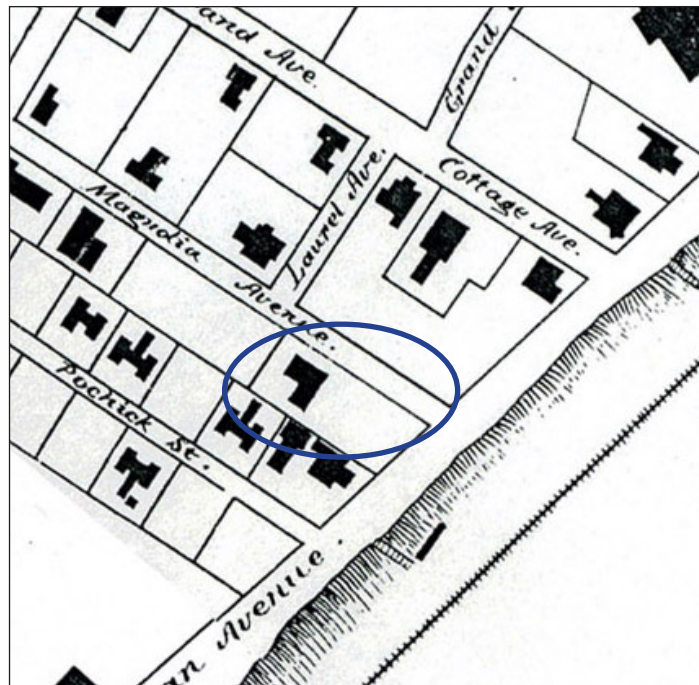
- 1898 Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket, July 1898, Sheet 15
- 1904 Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket, October 1904, Sheet 19
- 1909 Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket, August 1909, Sheet 21
- 1923 Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket, October 1923, Sheet 26
- 1949 Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket October 1949, Sheet 26



*Plan of Sunset Heights, Nantucket Mass.
C. H. Robinson, Dr. F. A. Ellis, 1872*



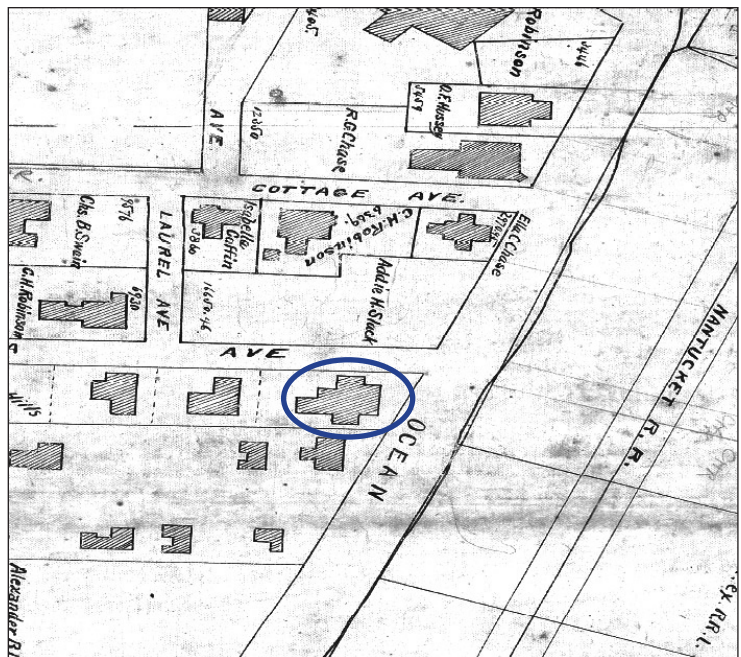
Platt, Harry. *Map of the Village of Siasconset on the Island of Nantucket*, published by E. T. Underhill & Co., New York, 1888.



Enlarged detail of 1888 Platt map.



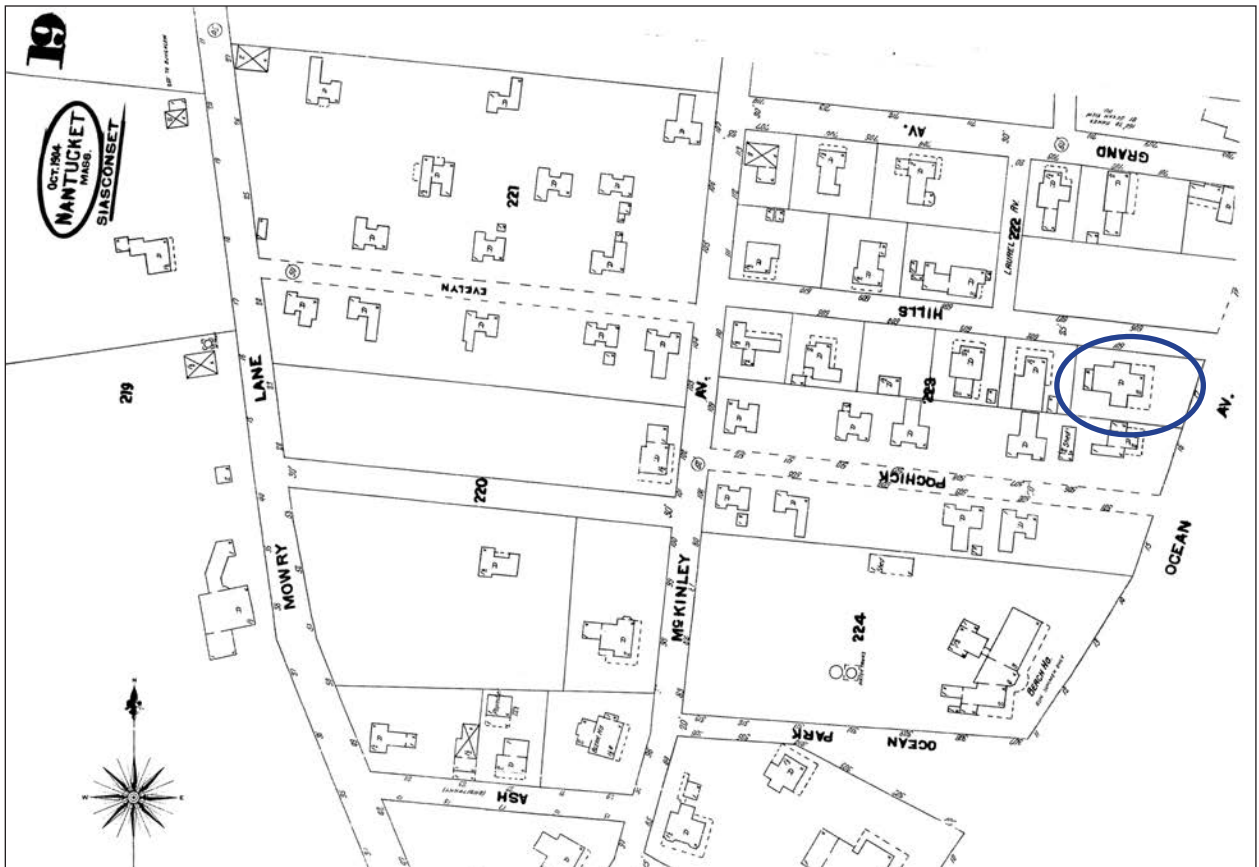
Codd, Wm. F. Siasconset, 1896



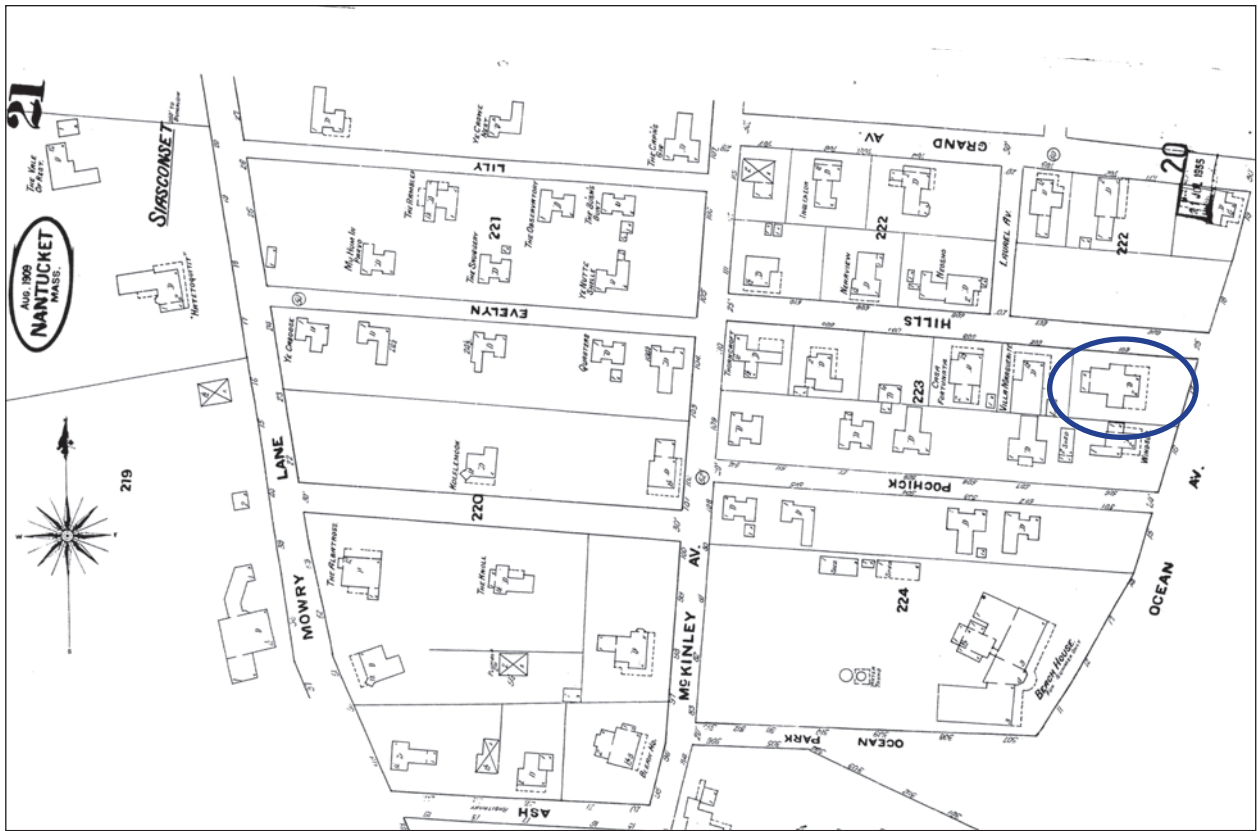
Enlarged detail of map above



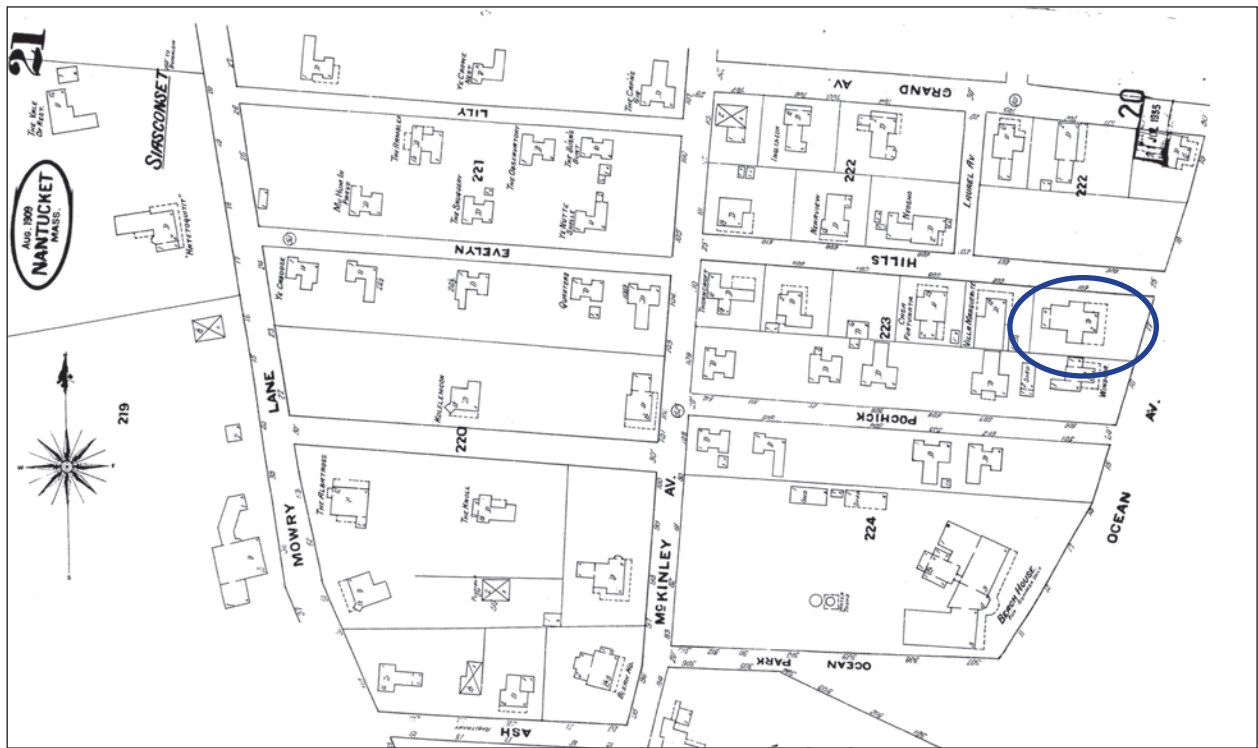
Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket, July 1898, Sheet 15



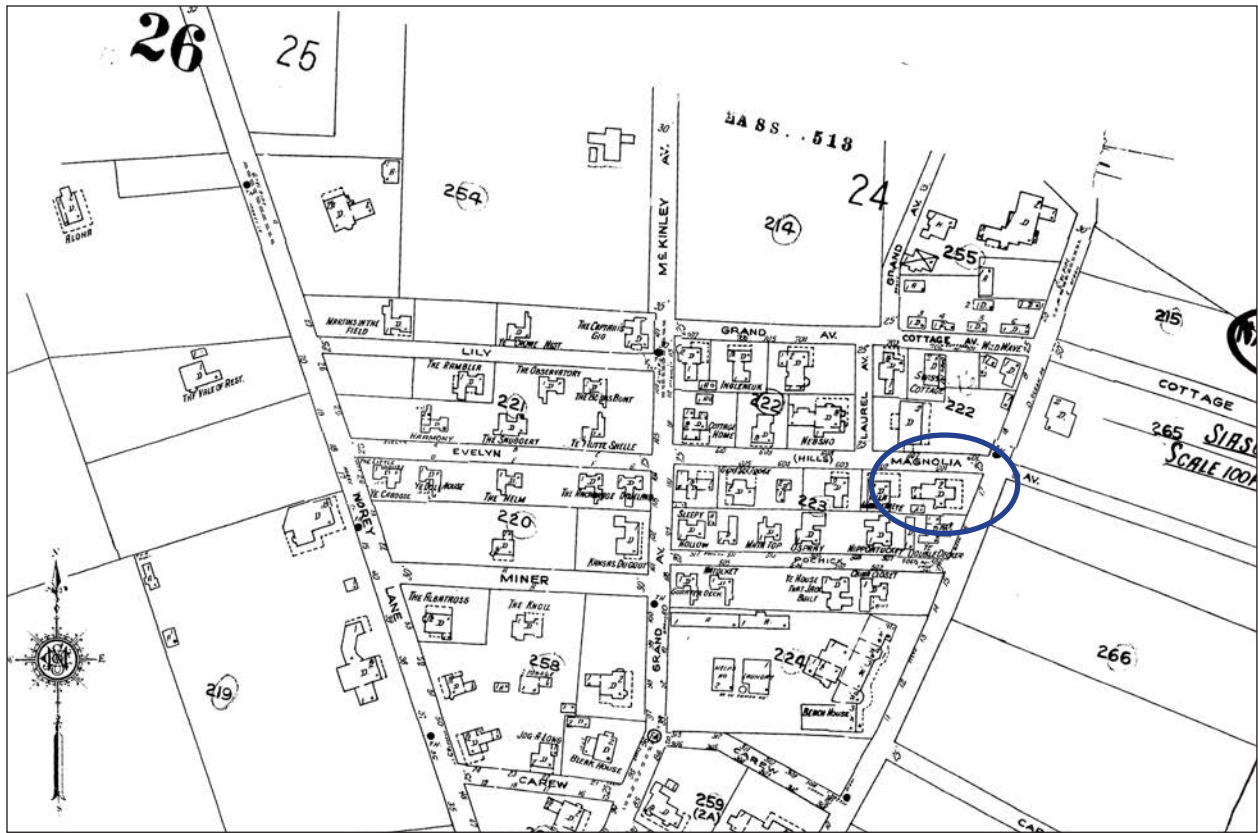
Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket, October 1904, Sheet 19



Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket, August 1909, Sheet 21



Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket, October 1923, Sheet 26



Sanborn Insurance Company, Nantucket October 1949, Sheet 26

6.4 Historical Photographs: Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association

SG14282: 1870s Stereograph of Sunset Heights entry gate

p21973: View of Sunset Heights looking up from the beach. Rudder Grange is not visible

P20541: Rudder Grange, 1911: East elevation

P20542: Gathering of people on front steps, 1911

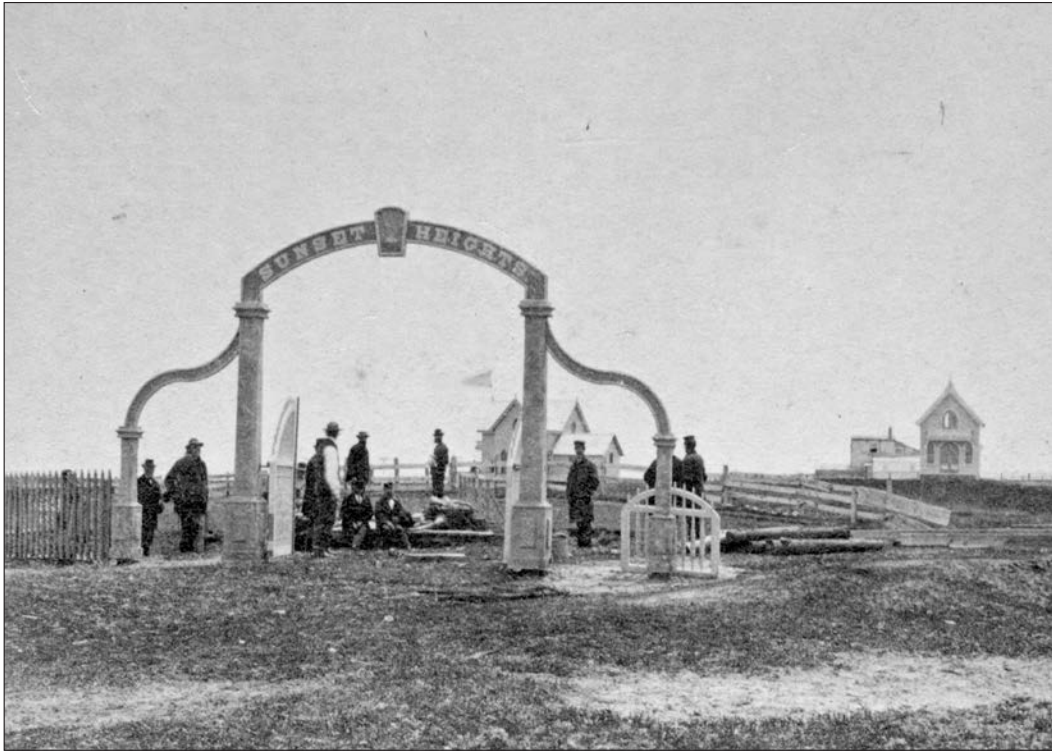
P20545: Woman with children on front steps, 1911

P20902: Interior, dining room, after 1911

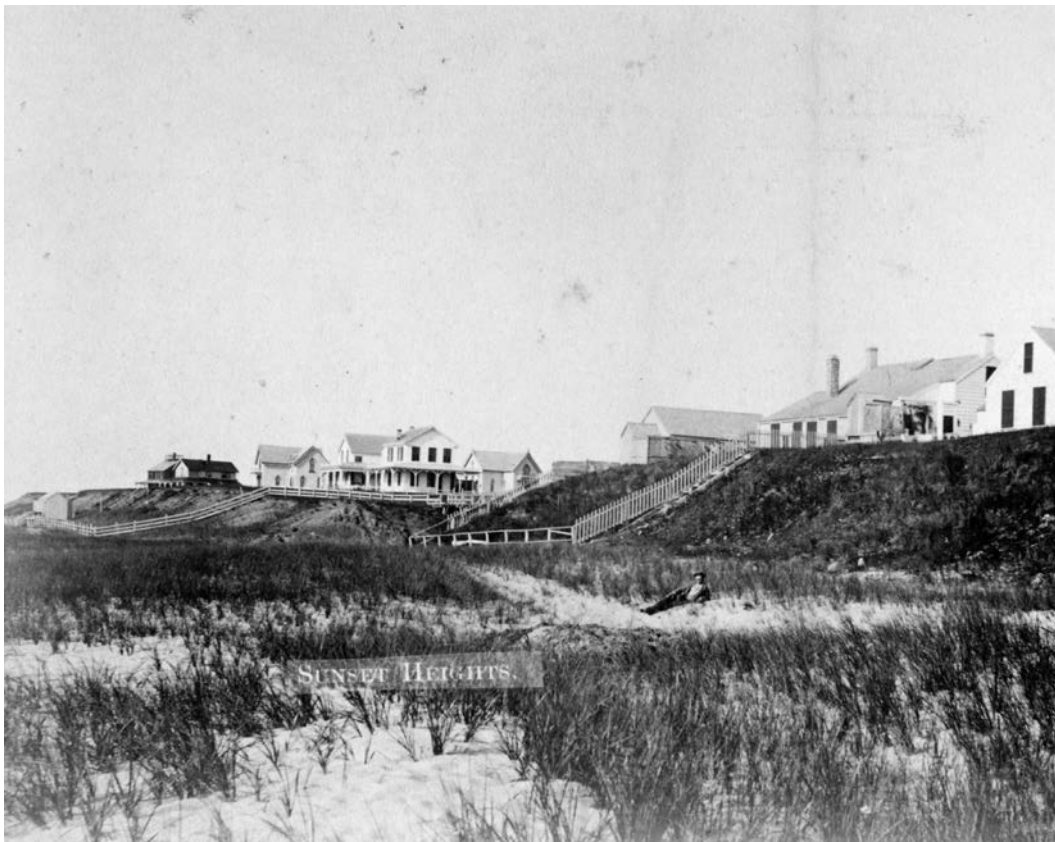
Sconset Cottage Club, photograph in undated pamphlet, NHA Research Library: buildings

Sconset Cottage Club, photograph in undated pamphlet, NHA Research Library: dining room

SC797-10: Magnolia Avenue looking east, 1960s



SG14282: 1870s Stereograph of Sunset Heights entry gate



P21973: View of Sunset Heights looking up from the beach. Rudder Grange, further to the north, is not visible



P20541: Rudder Grange, 1911: East elevation



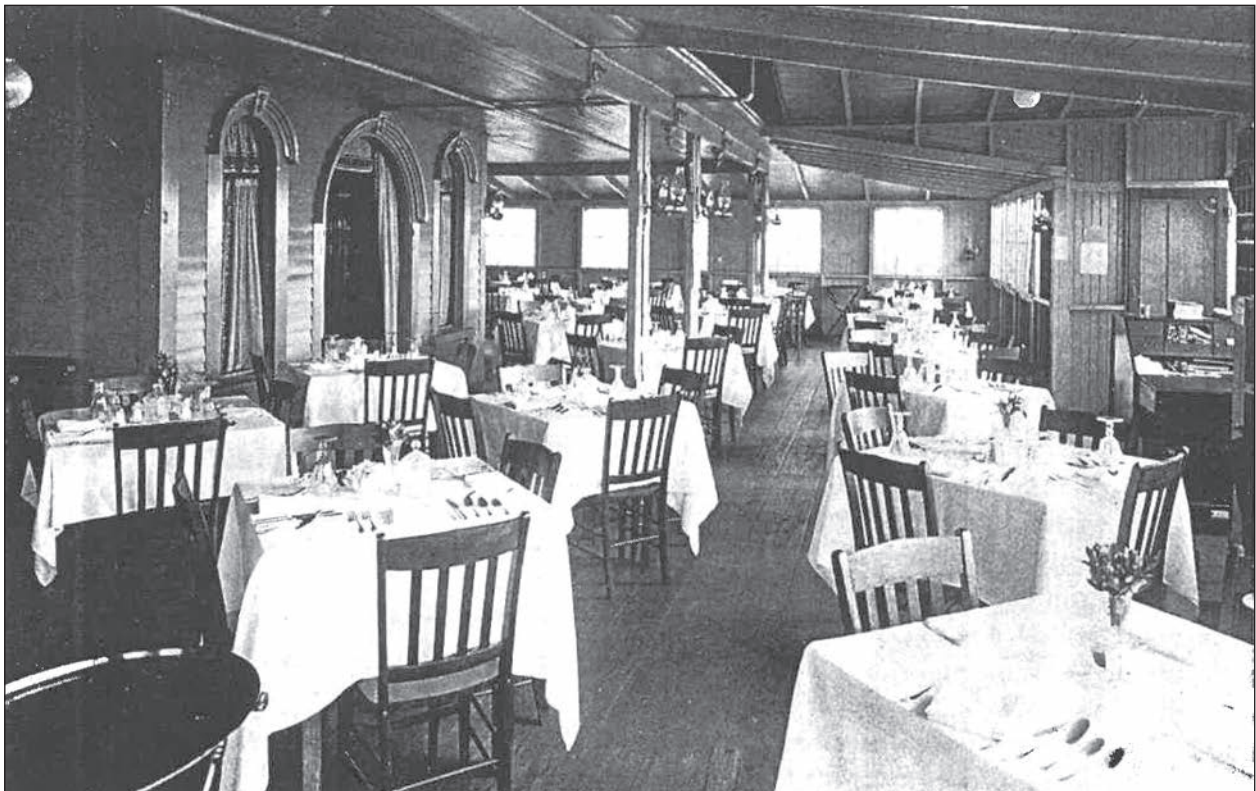
P20542: Gathering of people on front steps, 1911



P20545: Woman with children on front steps, 1911



Sconset Cottage Club, photograph in undated pamphlet,
NHA Research Library: buildings



PH 20902 Dining Room, Rudder Grange



Interior Dining Room Sconset Cottage Club, photograph in undated pamphlet, NHA Research Library: dining room



SC797-10: Magnolia Avenue looking east, 1960s:
North and West Elevations

6.5 Year 2022 Photographs



East/Ocean Avenue Elevation



Original Double Entry Doors



Original Round Arched Front Windows



Original Round Arched Front Window Sill Detail



South Elevation



South Elevation



Garage



Ramp at Back North Door



Ramp at Back North Door



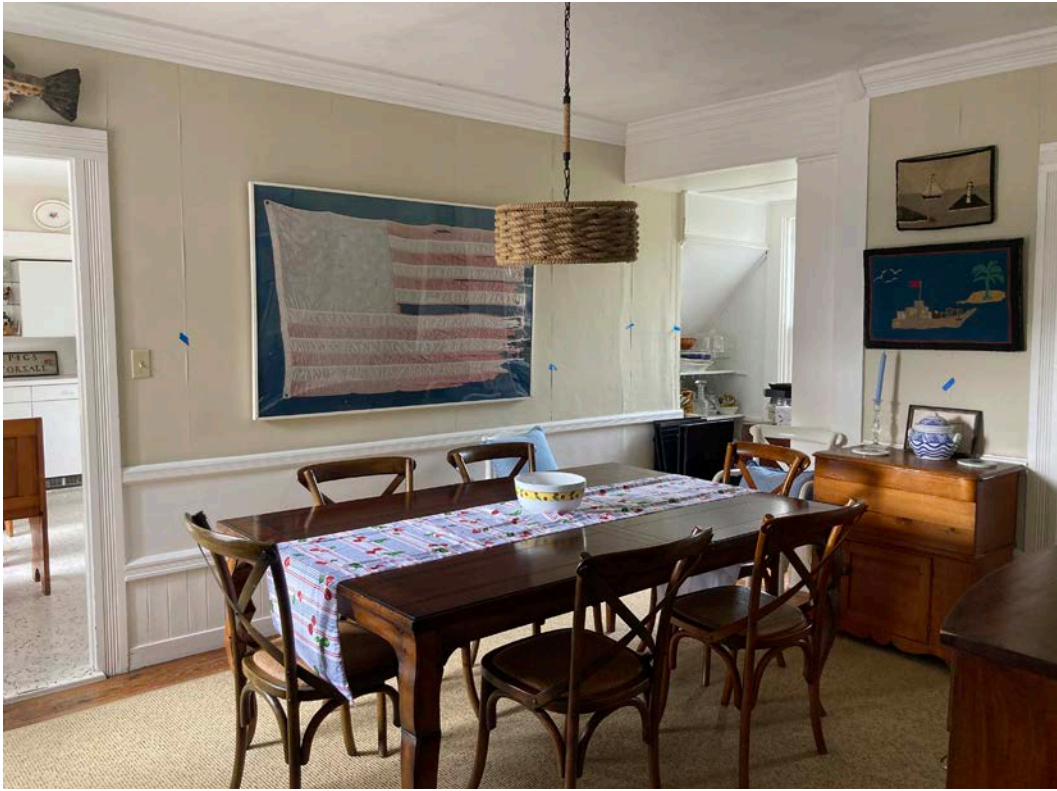
North Elevation



Living Room



Living Room



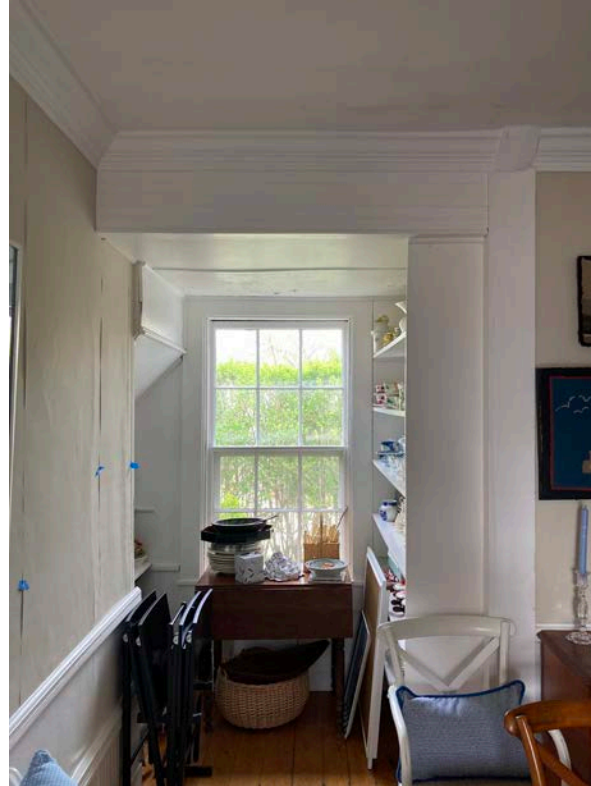
Dining Room



Dining Room Wainscot



Dining Room



Dining Room



North Bedroom, First Floor



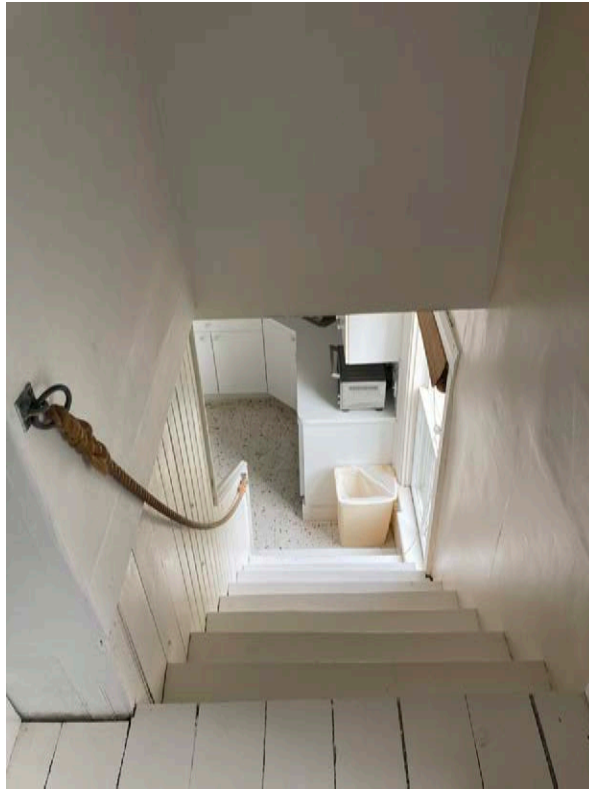
Kitchen



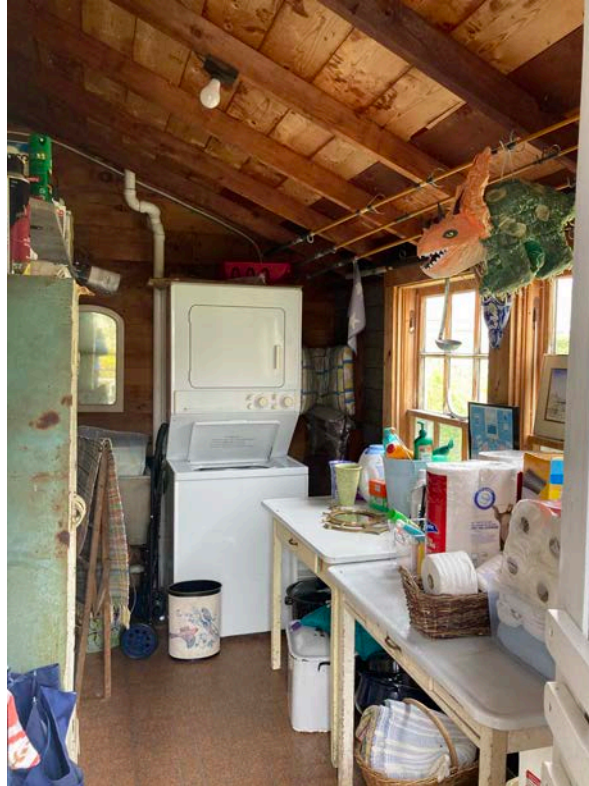
Kitchen



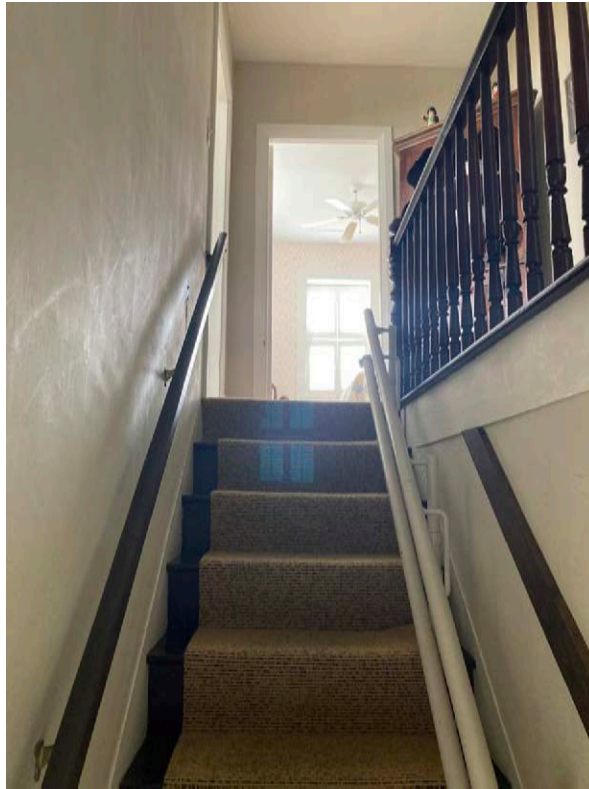
Kitchen Stair



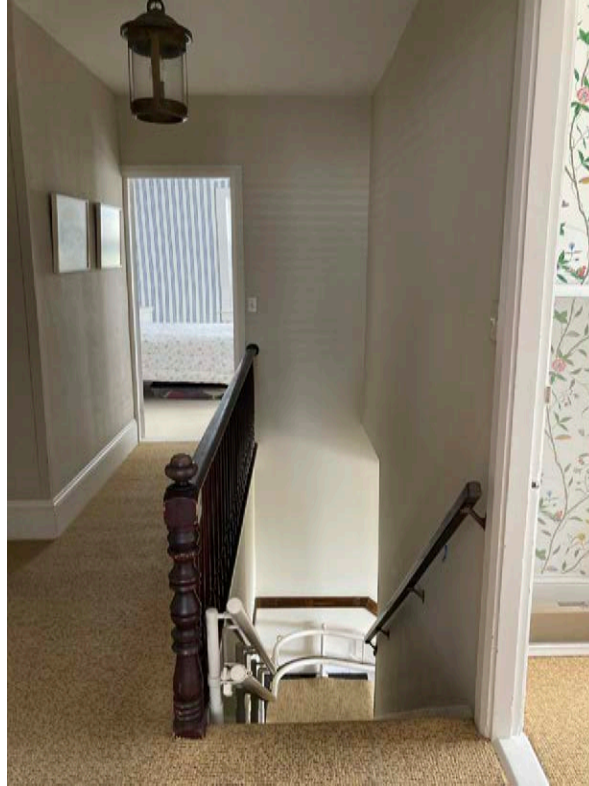
Stair to Kitchen



Back Laundry Shed



Stair to Second Floor



Second Floor Landing



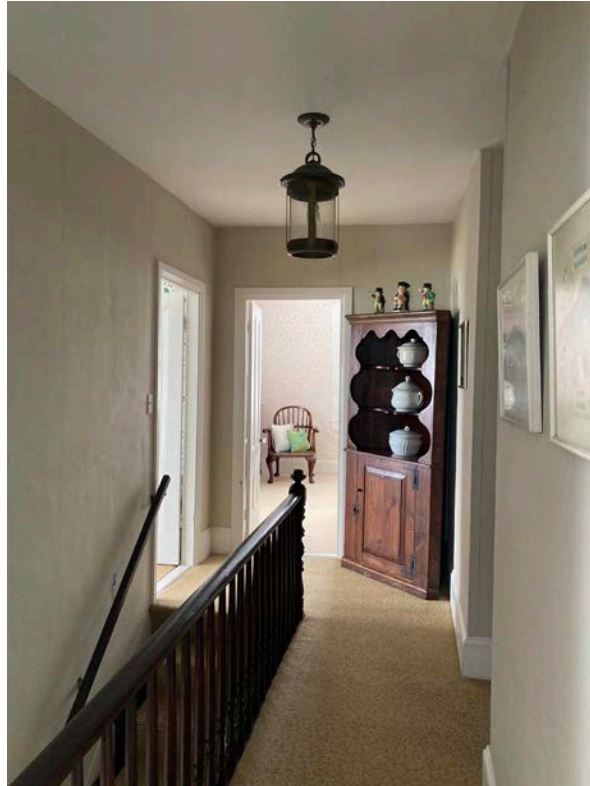
Northeast Bedroom, Second Floor



East Room, Second Floor



Front Room, Second Floor



Second Floor Landing



Southeast Bedroom, Second Floor



Door Hardware, Beveled Door Trim
Southeast Bedroom, Second Floor



Bathroom, Second Floor



Northwest Bedroom, Second Floor

6.6 Chain of Title

Nantucket Registry of Deeds Book = NRD

1885 Robinson to Hills

NRD Book 68, p. 538–39: Charles H. Robinson to Isaac P. Hills, 1885

1921 Hills to Hills

NRD Book 99, pp. 152–55: Isaac Hills to Isaac Hills Jr. [III], 1921

1921 Hills to Coffin

NRD Book 99, pp. 367–68: Isaac Hills Jr. [III] to Levi S. Coffin, 1921

1936 Trustee to Butler

NRD Book 108, p. 136: Henry C. Everett, Trustee uwo Levi Starbuck Coffin for the benefit of Ethel Coffin Austin and the children of Louis Coffin, to James T. Butler, 1936

1936 Butler to Trustee

NRD Book 108, p. 137: James T. Butler to Henry C. Everett, trustee uwo Levi S. Coffin for the benefit of Ethel Coffin Austin, 1936

1948 Trustees to Block

NRD Book 112, p. 19: Richard M. Everett and Henry C. Everett Jr., trustees uwo Levi S. Coffin to Leonard A. Block and Elizabeth Turner Block, 1948

1967 Block to Block

NRD Book 143, p. 73: Elizabeth Turner Block, widow, to Elizabeth Turner Block and Roger W. Block, 1967

1990 Block to Block

NRD Book 348, p. 86: Roger W. Block to Roger W. Block and Miriam F. Block, 1990

1996 Block to Block

NRD Book 518, p. 143: Roger W. Block and Miriam F. Block to Roger W. Block, Trustee of Rudder Grange Nominee Trust, 1996

2010 Block to Block

NRD Book 1255, p. 58: Elizabeth Block and Jonathan Block, Trustees of Rudder Grange Nominee Trust to Elizabeth Block (1/2) and Jonathan Block (1/2)