

A Religious Ethic Shapes a Community: Typical Nantucket Houses

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*F*OR the curious or casual stroller of Nantucket's historic streets and lanes, the abundance of vernacular architecture built by the island's eighteenth-century English settlers reveals a distinct aesthetic sensibility. Houses of a particular, pleasing simplicity and a rigorous consistency of style create an organized, serene appearance that has come to signify the island. Behind the wonderfully ordered array of these exteriors are the comfortable and supremely functional less-known interiors of these homes. Unseen are the pattern of the rooms, the giant hearths and tidy cabinetry, the wide hand-planed floorboards, the carved wooden pegs joining massive beams and posts, and plaster work that exposes marks of a trowel. Exteriors reflect the taste, style, and order of the period, but the interiors speak of the Nantucketers who built and lived their lives in these homes (FIGURE 1).¹

In his 1945 book, *Three Bricks and Three Brothers*, island resident and author William E. Gardner describes a tiny yet important historic moment inside a Nantucket home:

Wednesday.

February 27th 1774.

Fourth Day.

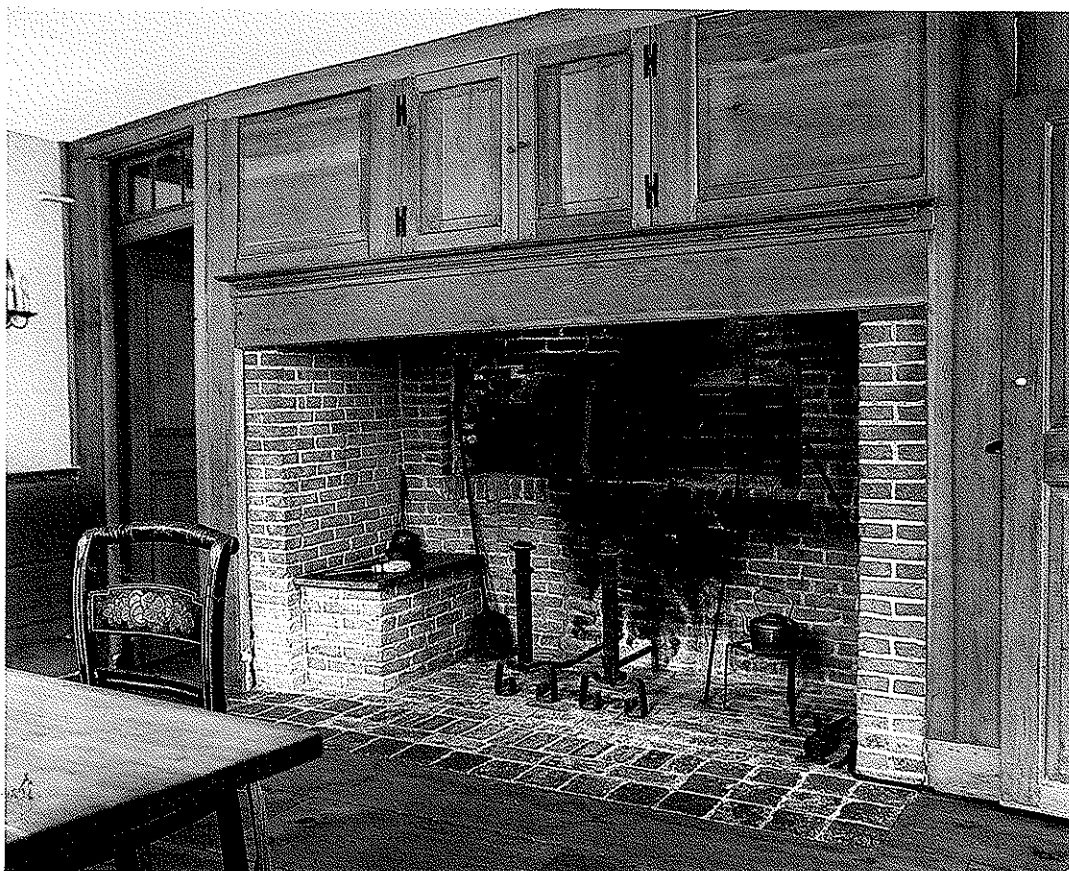
The birthday of Joseph Starbuck.

A mite of humanity on this day, but some day he would be the richest whale merchant on Nantucket and a builder of many ships and three brick mansions for his three sons.

Dinah, his mother, felt the first birth-pains late in the afternoon. She left the kitchen by the little door at the side of the huge fireplace. She entered a passageway by the warm chimney. In the middle of the passage she stopped and pulled from the "blanket-closet," built into the chimney, a soft warm blanket new from the loom. She snuggled it close to her neck and ear and entered the small bedroom in which all her children had been born.

{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 1: Thomas Starbuck House, Built ca. 1726–90, 11 Milk Street. *The plan of Starbuck's comfortable but modest four-bay house was developed and advanced by members of Nantucket's Society of Friends (or Quakers). Thomas Starbuck was descended from Mary Starbuck, who (as was mentioned in Chapter 1) was instrumental in establishing and advancing Quakerism on the island. When Thomas and his wife, Dinah, had their home on Milk Street, the Friends were a significant force on the island, both politically and socially. Their religious ethic directed them to a life of humble simplicity and practical living.*



{ LEFT }
 FIGURE 2: Interior, Thomas Starbuck House. *The large hearth located in this former kitchen is an indication of construction conventions from the early 1700s. The overall four-bay plan of the house, however, reflects the building design that was popular later in the century.*³ Photograph by Jeffrey Allen, 2002.

Dinah Starbuck's closets, passageways, fireplace, and little doors exist today nearly as they did that winter afternoon in 1774 (FIGURES 2, 3). The interior of the well-maintained Thomas Starbuck² dwelling, built after 1726 and moved in 1790 to 11 Milk Street, has much to say about the life of the former residents. Traditional floor plans, the exposed post-and-beam frame, and interior doorways display the connections of living: rooms for sitting, cooking, and sleeping. Architectural details such as stairways, cabinetry, and closets inform us of the domestic activity. Worn wooden steps vividly expose the pattern of use in the home.

From the mid-1700s to the mid-1800s, Nantucket was a scene of growth and prosperity due to the ever increasing "greasy luck" of the whaling enterprise.⁴ It was, in essence, the vigorous industry

{ OPPOSITE }
 FIGURE 3: Interior Passageway, Thomas Starbuck House. *The narrow walkway between front and rear rooms included a space behind the kitchen hearth for both a storage closet and gun cabinet. With a location next to the heating source, stored items were kept dry.* Photograph by Jeffrey Allen, 2002.



and single-mindedness of the island's flourishing Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)⁵ that propelled Nantucket into a hugely successful global whaling port. The success of the whale fishery brought an expanding population, and an urban conglomeration developed with streets and lanes tightly lined with houses (FIGURE 4) and industrial buildings. The protective and insular nature of the faraway island and the earnest doctrine of the Society of Friends resulted in an entire community of architecture that has a distinct visual character. During a visit to Nantucket in 1772, writer and historian J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote: "Sherborn [sic] is the only town on the island, which consists of about 530 houses . . . they are all of a similar construction and appearance; plain, and entirely devoid of exterior or interior ornament."⁶

More than just the plain, visual form of its houses, which were essentially early English in derivation and evolution, the Friends' pervading ethic set Nantucket apart from other towns in New England. Although austerity was as much a mainland Puritan principle as it was for the Friends, it may be the Quaker doctrine of spiritual egalitarianism and communality that resulted in the extraordinary number of similarly styled houses that form the heart of the present historic district.

An understanding of the collective, visual direction of the typical Nantucket house begins with the history of the Society of Friends and an examination of their beliefs. On Nantucket, the Friends were in the right place at the right time. They gained a firm foothold and momentum on the island because their individualist, egalitarian practices fit with the independently minded early colonists. During its first fifty years of English inhabitation, Nantucket was home to a group of people tolerant of various religions and of mixed denominations themselves, including Puritans (Congregationalists), Baptists, and "Nothingarians." Some islanders, like Tristram Coffin (a leader of the first purchasers), did not follow any particular religion.⁷ Contrary to the unyielding and often punishing Puritan order on the mainland, the early colonists of Nantucket had no tithe laws or prescription to attend any particular church.⁸ Notably, no church existed on the island until the Friends built a meeting house in 1711.⁹ Distanced by the sea from the mainland Puritans, who persecuted those not following their doctrine, the island was a haven and an ideal ground for an alternative religious order to take root. In the tolerant and isolated atmosphere of Nantucket, the membership of Friends quickly grew.

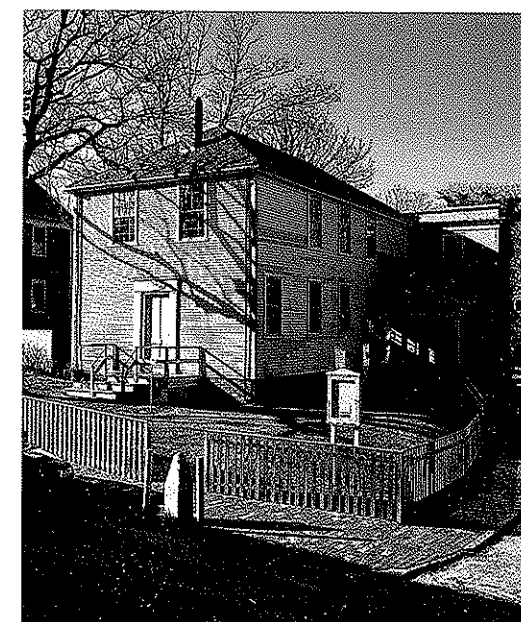
In a vivid dissertation on the history of the Friends in his book *Quaker Nantucket*, historian Robert Leach illuminates the ethics and doctrines of the religion. He writes that the Friends had an independent character and "denied the authority not only of the clergy but also the primacy of scripture as the sole expression of God's will. Instead, Quakers read the Bible as a manifestation of the Spirit of Truth. They believed that any individual could access the spirit without resort to liturgy, ceremony, doctrine and sacrament."¹⁰

{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 4: Peleg Bunker House, Built ca. 1750, 4 Trader's Lane.

An early version of the typical Nantucket design, this house is surrounded by a ship-rail (capped-picket) fence. Popular on dwellings throughout the town, fences help create a respectful separation between the public way and the private home.





{ ABOVE }

FIGURE 5: Quaker Meeting House, Built 1838, 7 Fair Street. Originally built as a school, this structure was the last Meeting House on Nantucket. It is open to the public as a museum and owned by the Nantucket Historical Association. The Friends that remain on the island still hold their Meeting in the quiet and spare interior.

{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 6: Second-floor Hall at 11 Mill Street, Built ca. 1790. Minimal woodwork, a ship-tight order, and polish give this typical Nantucket house interior its impeccably neat character.

Along with the pursuit of spiritual equality for all members (across both genders), the Quakers' highly personal organization of their Meeting led to a particularly cohesive community. Leach explains, "Despite Quakerism's apparent reliance on individual interpretation of both divine will and righteous behavior, it is essential to Friends that the community of meeting exist. The silent atmosphere of the Meeting for Worship leads to a deeply spiritual state shared by the individuals in the assembled body. . . . Thus pioneer communities, as Nantucket was to find, could draw a kind of communal strength from Quakerism that was not necessarily available to less spiritually synchronized bodies of believers or to isolated individuals. The interconnectedness of the meeting experience . . . gives Quakerism much of its strength"¹¹ (FIGURE 5).

An ethic of spiritual egalitarianism and the powerful interconnectedness that emerged from the Quaker Meeting manifested itself in daily life. As a community, the Friends lived, spoke, and dressed in a simple manner.¹² Their architecture followed their values—a plain house, of one particular and practical floor plan, was recommended for all members.¹³ For their homes, the Quakers (for the most part) chose a two-and-a-half-story, four-bay style¹⁴ house with a functional and efficient organization of space and small but ample proportions. In addition to the Friends' admiration of and expertise in practical efficiency and simplicity of design, the structure was also influenced by island living (especially the high cost of shipping goods) and the maritime economy of Nantucket. As with the lean-to style, shipwrights, who understood well that space was a premium and their vessels must be economical in both square footage and materials, were employed in the construction of houses (FIGURE 6). Isaac Folger, for instance, kept an account book dated 1797–99, in which he noted carpentry done on several "whail" boats and "1 flatbottom boat," the latter for his customer Paul Coggeshall.¹⁵ Carpenter John Coffin recorded labor done on houses, a barn, and several "shops" such as Prince Gardner's "oyl works," as well as labor on Gardner's ship *Joanna*.¹⁶ The influence of house/shipbuilders can be noted in the streamlined tightness of the Friends' house plan, the excellent craftsmanship, and in many of the architectural details.¹⁷



FIGURE 7: George Coffin House, Built in 1820, 33 Milk Street. Successful shipwright George Coffin (1787–1867) built this house himself. Recorded in the *Historic American Buildings Survey*, his descendants stated that being a shipwright, Coffin gave particular attention to the interior finish of his home. The rear kitchen ell was constructed at the same time as the main section of the house, indicating Coffin's financial success. Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.

The plain, space-saving four-bay house designed by Nantucket's maritime Friends is regarded as a "typical" Nantucket house (FIGURE 7). Its timber-frame construction and simple design were characteristic because an overwhelming number of this dwelling type were built from approximately 1750 to 1820 during a period of great economic growth and political and social influence enjoyed by the Friends. Although hundreds of the structures were later removed or fell into disrepair after the severe economic decline suffered after the collapse of the whaling industry, nearly two hundred of these plain but appealing houses still remain on island.¹⁸

Because of its utter simplicity and the indigenous nature of its plan, developed by the Friends (for both ethical and practical reasons), the typical Nantucket house occupies its own stylistic category. The Friends' plan for their homes (FIGURE 8) derived from the existing conventions on island: baffle-entry designs (small entrance vestibule) with a single, central chimney and a restrained version of the

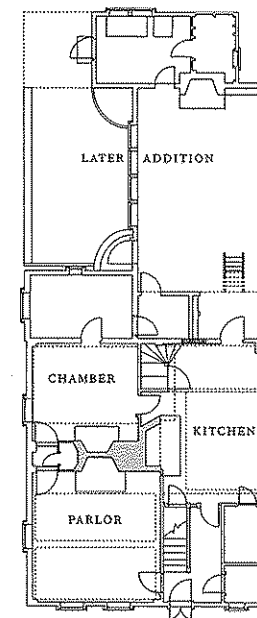


FIGURE 8: Plan of the Job Macy House, Built ca. 1790, 11 Mill Street. Illustration by Richard Valdes, 2003. *The straight set of stairs within the front entrance hall, two small rooms opposite the stairs, the off-center chimney, and the passageway from the parlor to the rear chamber are the common features of a typical Nantucket house.*

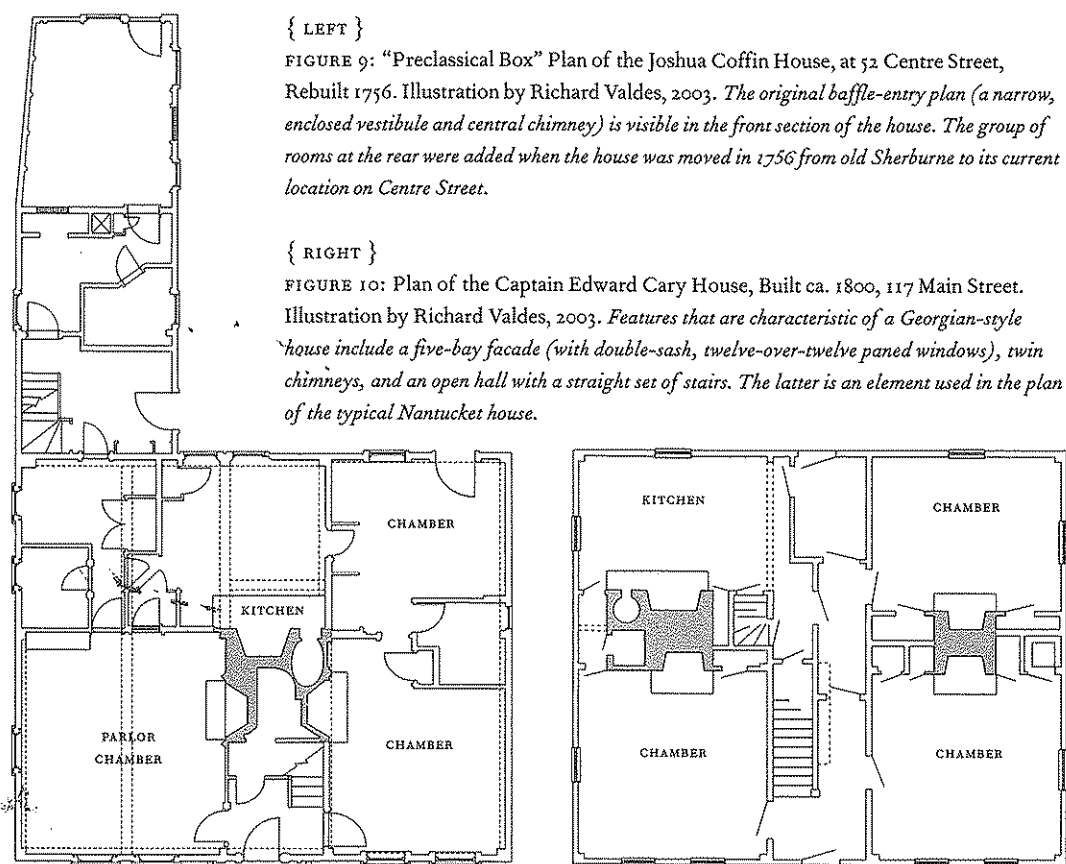
Georgian style (circa 1720s to 1800s), having a long central entrance hall and one or two ridge chimneys. The elaborate model of the Georgian style—with its symmetrical and wide five-bay facade and a heavy door crown—reached great heights of popularity on the mainland but was not in particular favor with the practical, humble, and economically minded Nantucketers.¹⁹

Evolution to the four-bay typical Nantucket house began when the baffle-entry lean-to (eighteenth century) proved to be inadequate in filling the practical demands and taste of established, prosperous families. In answer to the need for expansion and a call for greater comfort, the low rear wall of the lean-to house was raised, which transformed the cramped, second-floor storage area into adequate living spaces. The former lean-to house could comfortably accommodate a larger family with its several ample bedrooms on the second floor.

The need to expand the height of existing lean-to houses also resulted in dwellings originating as full two-and-a-half-story houses such as the Charles Gardner house, built circa 1740, on Quarter Mile Hill (CHAPTER 1, FIGURE 12), or the house moved from old Sherburne and rebuilt in 1756, at 52 Centre Street²⁰ for the mariner Joshua Coffin (?–1780) and his wife, Beulah (Gardner) (1734–1813). At times referred to as "late colonial," a "preclassical box," or the "New England farmhouse" by architectural historians,²¹ these plain, two-and-a-half-story, two-room-deep dwellings were near duplicates of those in mainland New England.²² Like the raised lean-to, the preclassical houses have a limited, baffle-entry plan with steep or winding stairs fronting a single chimney that aligns with the entrance (FIGURE 9). Plans included three-, four-, and five-bay varieties, an example of the latter found in the Joshua Coffin house. Approximately one hundred of these two-and-a-half-story, central or ridge chimney, three- and five-bay types remain on Nantucket.²³ But as seen in most Nantucket homes, over time many of these structures have been extended, reconfigured, and/or given decorative detailing of several architectural styles, the result of which makes exact categorization difficult or impossible.²⁴

The four-bay typical Nantucket house is a blended style incorporating the single chimney feature of the baffle-entry plan (lean-to and preclassical) and the open hall of a Georgian or early Federal-style design (circa 1780s to 1820s),²⁵ such as the Captain Edward Cary house, built circa 1800,²⁶ at 117 Main Street. The Cary house is an open-hall type (FIGURE 10) with two chimneys, a raised basement, a symmetrical facade of five bays with double-hung sash windows of twelve-over-twelve panes of glass. The front-door transom, sidelights (windows), and fine pilasters (flat columns) are Federal-style elements. The hip roof on the Cary house, unusual for Nantucket, is a feature known to both the Georgian and Federal styles.

With the urbanization of Nantucket, houses built on the island in the late eighteenth century no longer, as a standard, faced south. Rather, facades were aligned with the street, and houses compactly



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FIGURE 9: "Preclassical Box" Plan of the Joshua Coffin House, at 52 Centre Street, Rebuilt 1756. Illustration by Richard Valdes, 2003. *The original baffle-entry plan (a narrow, enclosed vestibule and central chimney) is visible in the front section of the house. The group of rooms at the rear were added when the house was moved in 1756 from old Sherburne to its current location on Centre Street.*

{ RIGHT }

FIGURE 10: Plan of the Captain Edward Cary House, Built ca. 1800, 117 Main Street. Illustration by Richard Valdes, 2003. *Features that are characteristic of a Georgian-style house include a five-bay facade (with double-sash, twelve-over-twelve paned windows), twin chimneys, and an open hall with a straight set of stairs. The latter is an element used in the plan of the typical Nantucket house.*

fit one next to another (FIGURE 11). In her colorful memoirs of her youth on Nantucket, Elizabeth Crosby Bennett (1843–1919) describes the arrangement of houses in town: "Finger next to thumb they were set, so that you could look in, if you weren't mannerly, to see your nearest neighbors eating their Thanksgiving turkey and cranberry sauce."²⁷ A beautifully preserved Quaker-style dwelling located in the urban landscape, the Thomas Starbuck Jr. house at 11 Milk Street, saw a transition from an early baffle-entry plan to a typical, four-bay Nantucket form. Tradition suggests that sometime after his marriage in 1726, Thomas Starbuck I (1708–1776), a grandson of one of the original island purchasers, built a large house in the Capaum Pond area of Nantucket's initial English settlement. As noted in the records of the Historic American Building Survey, the Starbuck house was

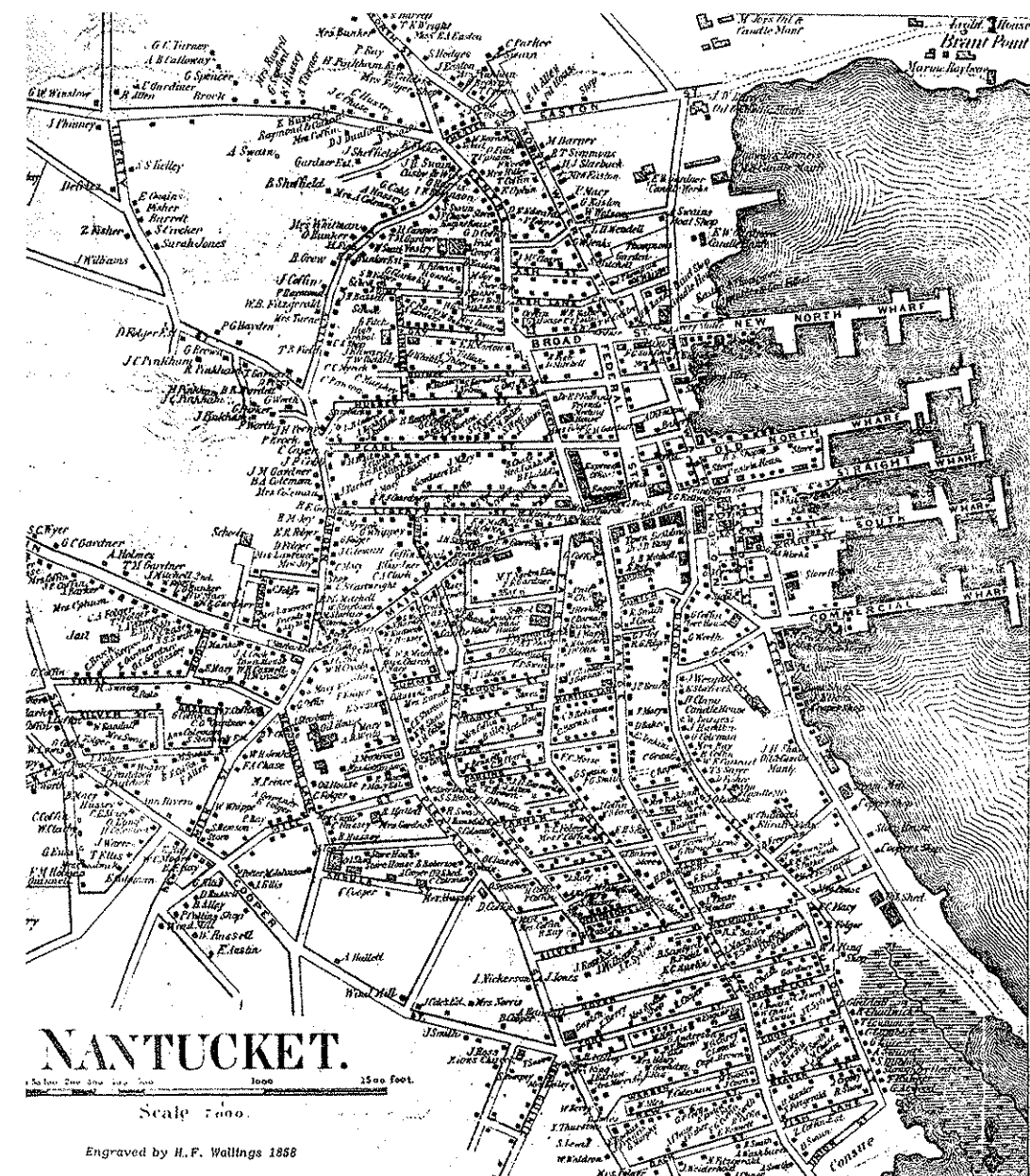


FIGURE 11: Town of Nantucket. Surveyed by Henry Wallings, Superintendent of State Maps, 1885. *Providing an excellent chart of Nantucket's urban composition, this meticulous map notes streets and lanes, the location of public meeting houses, industrial buildings, and dwellings with the names of the homeowners.* Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.

NANTUCKET.
Scale 7:000.
Engraved by H. F. Wallings 1888

divided and half of it was moved to its present location in 1790²⁸ (FIGURE 1). Repositioned in the bustling eighteenth-century Starbuck neighborhood,²⁹ the house was rebuilt by Thomas Starbuck Jr. (1742–1830) and his wife, Dinah (Trott) (1743–1824), who married in 1761. In its reassembly, the Starbuck house was converted into a typical Nantucket house of four bays with an open, formal entrance hall (FIGURE 12).

Yet not all of the Friends were in favor of the full two-and-a-half-story mass, no matter how humble or compact its form. Many of the Friends clung to the earlier, established lean-to design as ethically appropriate.³⁰ At approximately the same time Thomas Starbuck Jr. reconstructed his house on Milk Street, Job Macy built a home at 11 Mill Street, circa 1790³¹ (FIGURE 13), built with two full stories, front and rear. It is said that Macy's Quaker father objected to what he thought was an ostentatious height and vowed he would never set foot in the house—and he never did.³² Eventually, the style of home built by Macy would be fully accepted. The house met with the Friends' approval because the structure was functional, efficient, and roomy without the extravagance or decoration of the larger Georgian styles found on the mainland.

Exterior and interior features of the Job Macy house distinguish the early phase of the typical Nantucket design. The fully shingled house has a plain, four-bayed facade with two windows at one side on the first and second floors, each having twenty-four panes of glass in double-hung sashes. On the opposite side are narrower windows and the entrance with its four-pane transom and raised-panel door.³³ A single masonry chimney rising from the ridge of the roof caps the house and is aligned just opposite the front door. The facade is asymmetrical yet balanced in the relationship of its divisions.

Servicing a fireplace in each room, the multipurpose chimney is an efficiently located element carried over from the lean-to plan. But the typical Nantucket house departs from the lean-to and the preclassical house in its spatial arrangement. A narrow vestibule opposite the front door evolved into an open and more formal entry hall for receiving guests. Instead of a confrontation with a wall and difficult to climb winder stairs,³⁴ there is a staircase ascending transversely, ending in winders only at the



{ LEFT }

FIGURE 12: Entrance Hall, 11 Milk Street. *The front entry to the Starbuck house is built with the utmost simplicity; even so, there is a touch of quiet elegance.* Photograph by Jeffrey Allen, 2001.

{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 13: Job Macy House, 11 Mill Street. *An 1811 description of Nantucket Town by essayist Joseph Sansom relates the Quakers' sense of frugality in home design: "[T]he town is supposed to have nearly doubled in population, in the last twenty years. Several new streets have been laid out in straight lines, and a number of houses have been built, within a year or two, with ceilings of ten feet high. This however is considered as a piece of useless extravagance, the old fashioned stories of eight or nine feet being generally reckoned high enough, and to spare."*





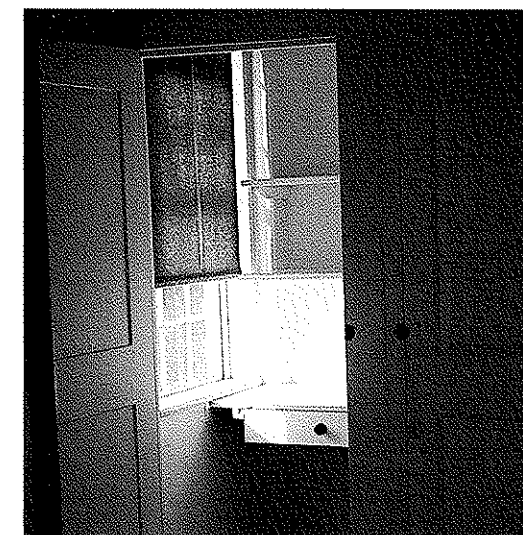
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 FIGURE 14: Windmill, Built in 1746 by Nathan Wilbur, South Mill Street. The Mill Street neighborhood was once the location of Nantucket's five windmills which stood on this hilly area at the edge of the town. One of these windmills remains standing and in service for demonstration purposes. It is owned by Nantucket Historical Association and is open as a museum.

{ RIGHT }
 FIGURE 15: Interior Front Hall, 11 Mill Street. Note the ivory disk at the top of the newel post. It was the custom to celebrate the final payment of the mortgage by installing an ivory disk or "mortgage button" in this prominent location.



{ LEFT }
 FIGURE 16: Hezekiah Swain House, Also Known as the Maria Mitchell House, Built in 1790, 1 Vestal Street. This typical Nantucket house was built by Hezekiah Swain and owned later (1818) by William Mitchell. It is the birthplace and home of William's daughter, the distinguished astronomer Maria Mitchell. The house is owned by the Maria Mitchell Association and is open to the public as a museum. Photograph by Margaret Moore Booker, 2002.

{ RIGHT }
 FIGURE 17: Maria Mitchell's Study, Built ca. 1830s, 1 Vestal Street. The small rooms of the typical Nantucket house at times served as much more than a storage area. Photograph by Patricia Butler, 2002.



second-floor landing (FIGURE 15). With an entrance hall reaching from the front to nearly the rear of the house, each of the rooms are separated for privacy and function.

A feature of the plan particular to Nantucket is the three- to five-foot area between the stairwell and the outside wall of the structure (FIGURE 8). This utilitarian space is divided into a front storage area and a milk-room (pantry), each having a window. The pantry opens onto the kitchen, while the storage space is accessible from the hall. The second-floor plan is identical. The Friends designed an orderly separation of rooms and a comfortable entrance that was practical and useful, unlike some of the grander entrance halls seen in coinciding house styles. In one typical Nantucket house at 1 Vestal Street (FIGURE 16), Quaker William Mitchell (1791–1869) put a small room to very good use. He arranged a study area in the storage space on the second floor (FIGURE 17) for his daughter, Maria Mitchell (1818–1889), who later became a renowned astronomer.

Even within a group of like-minded people, some variations, refinements, and modifications of the typical Nantucket house, such as rear extensions (as seen on 33 Milk Street, FIGURE 7) or the gambrel-roof



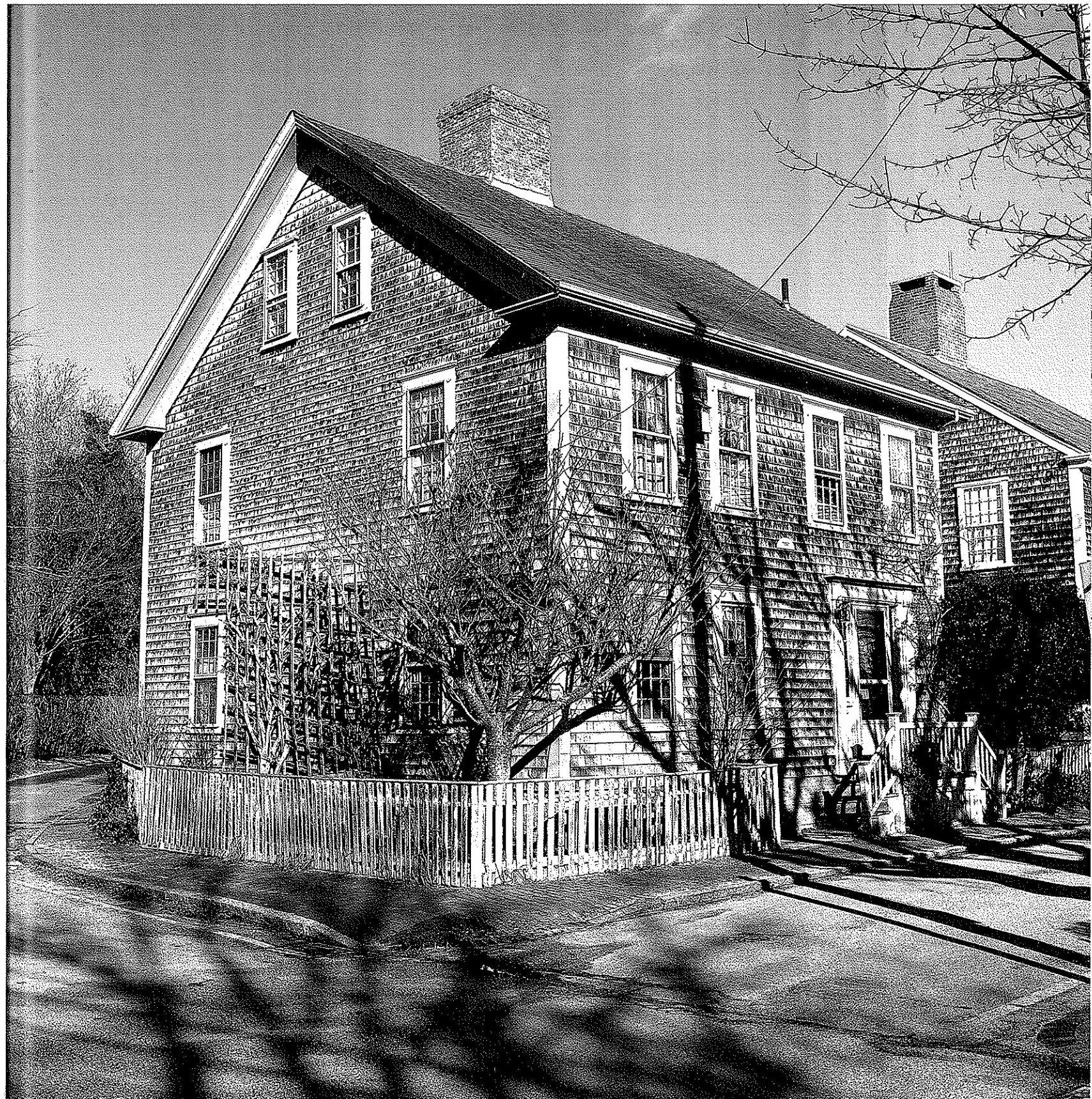
FIGURE 18 : View from the Orange Street Bluff of a Gambrel Roof House. Built during the late 1700s, less than ten of these barn-like houses exist on Nantucket (the one pictured is on Union Street). The design allowed for more space in the second-story rooms but the large roof was not a popular feature on island. Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.

house (FIGURE 18), were bound to occur.³⁵ A subtle modification to the form, the Maria Mitchell birthplace, for example, is a mirror image of the Job Macy house. It has the standard seven front windows, but the narrow pantry area is located to the left of the entrance instead of to the right. Window arrangements and interior plans vary slightly, though it is unclear whether these are concurrent or later alterations to the standard. For instance, a typical Nantucket house at 45 India Street (FIGURES 19, 20), constructed circa 1804³⁶ by carpenter Rescom Taber, is a near twin of the Macy house at 11 Mill Street. Differences exist but are subtle. On the Taber house, the narrow window to the left of the entrance is located on the side of the house rather than the front. In addition, the foundation of the Macy house is flush with the ground; the sill of the Taber house is slightly raised and its front door reached from a small double-sided staircase.

Inside the Taber house, the usual front-hall storage room was not included. Instead, the entrance was left open. Notably, the character of these late-eighteenth-century interiors of the Macy and Taber houses are essentially alike, each having the same basic spatial arrangement and the refinement of plastered and painted walls and raised-panel woodwork (FIGURES 21, 22). The current salmon red, green, blue, and white colors of the walls and doors in these houses would have been appropriate in the early nineteenth century as well (FIGURES 23, 24). A sheaf of Sylvanus Ewer's (1767–1836) financial papers from his life on Nantucket reveals his taste in paint color and may be indicative of the period. Over the course of several years, between 1819 and 1824, Ewer ordered “painting at [his] house” done by Seth Paddock. Ewer does not state whether he was painting the interior or exterior, but his list of colors includes rose pink, blue, green, yellow, black, and “whiting.”³⁷ Although Nantucket has long been known as the “Gray Lady,” because of the preponderance of weathered-gray unpainted shingles on the exterior of houses, color was actually common on late-eighteenth-century houses. Phebe Folger (later Mrs. Samuel Coleman, 1771–1857), an educated Nantucket woman, painted two watercolors, circa 1797, of the Pleasant Street area of town (FIGURE 25 and Introduction, FIGURE 2). These watercolors are significant because they show the houses painted red. In a memoir of her childhood, Elizabeth



{ OPPOSITE }
FIGURE 19: Rescom Taber House, Built ca. 1804, 45 India Street. This subtly modified typical Nantucket house does not have a front window to the right of the door that was common in the design. During the late nineteenth century, the house was given a Victorian "makeover" that included an ornamental door surround with side-windows, a porch, and a bracketed overhang (see Chapter 4, figure 9). Most of the decorative features have been removed. However, the deep overhang and the front door windows remain.



{ ABOVE }
FIGURE 20: Historic Kitchen, 45 India Street. Currently filled with antique utensils, this former utilitarian room was an efficient work space when used as a kitchen. The homeowners now use it as a dining room but have occasionally cooked dinners and baked bread in the hearth.



FIGURES 21 & 22: Front Bedrooms, 45 India Street and 11 Mill Street. Remarkably similar, these two early-nineteenth-century rooms have raised-panel wall sheathing that is typical of the period. The woodworking creates a simple but attractive finish for the room. The mantel at 45 India Street is a twentieth-century addition.



FIGURE 23: Parlor, 45 India Street. Transom lights over the interior doors were a common feature in Nantucket houses, adding much needed light to small spaces. In this case the windows provide illumination to the narrow hall connecting the parlor and rear chamber.



FIGURE 24: Historic Kitchen, 11 Mill Street. A finished and plastered ceiling and planed beams were also found in less formal rooms, such as a kitchen. The shelves over the mantle were likely at one time to be a strictly utilitarian feature.

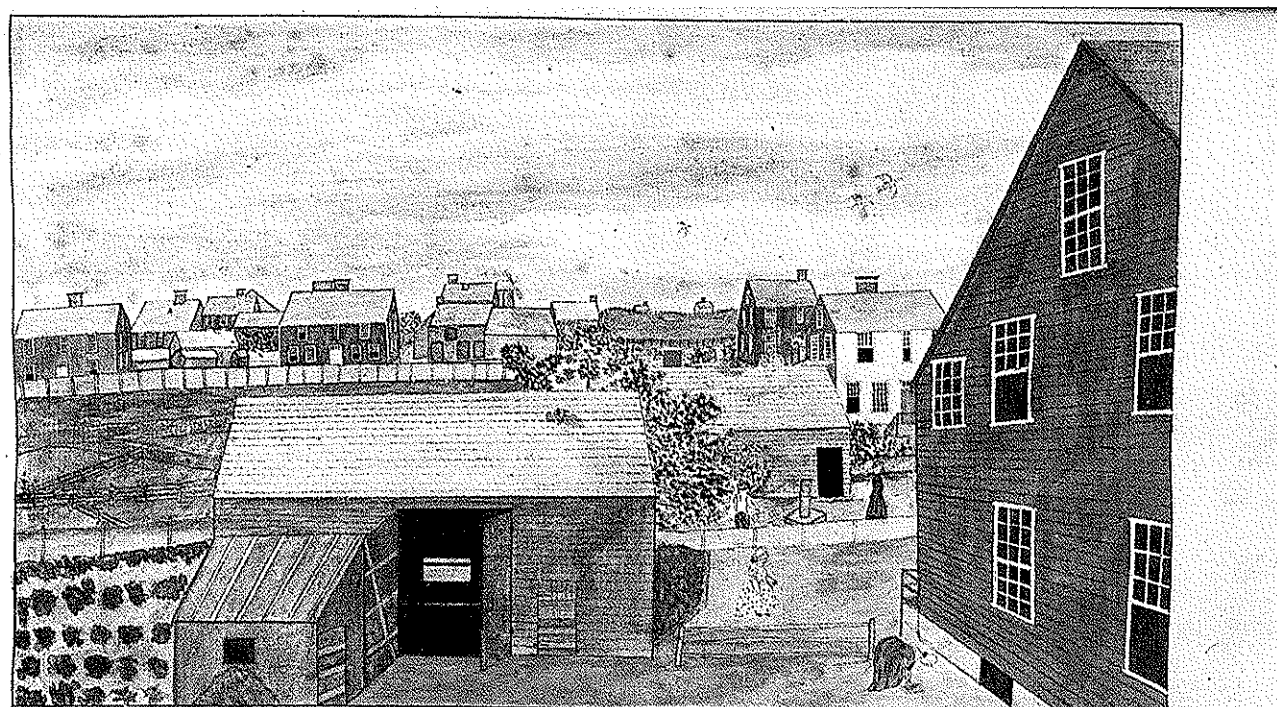


FIGURE 25: Phebe Folger, A Perspective View of Part of the Town of Nantucket Taken from a North Window in the House of Walter Folger, ca. 1797. Watercolor on paper. Folger's illustration of the Pleasant Street neighborhood was drawn from a window in the home of her brother, Walter Folger Jr. Note the three-bay lean-to and the center chimney houses of three and five bays in this watercolor drawing of the town. These residencies indicate the variety of design on the island found along with the typical Nantucket houses. Courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.



{ LEFT }

FIGURE 26: Attributed to William Swain, Captain Seth Pinkham (1786–1844), ca. 1844. Oil on panel. Seth Pinkham came out of retirement to make his last whaling voyage in 1844. It was his final trip, as he died of illness while in the South Pacific. Courtesy of Nantucket Historical Association. 89.128.1.

{ RIGHT }

FIGURE 27: Captain Seth Pinkham House, Built 1827–28, 40 Fair Street. A Pinkham descendant, Florence Anderson, writes in her memoir of the ancestral house: "It was . . . a square comely model prevalent in Nantucket through a noteworthy epoch of building. It had two storeys and a half for the main portion, with an ell of two storeys at the back. There was a neatly balustraded "walk" on top and the front steps were arranged in that Flemish manner which the island preferred, with a flight from opposite directions[.]"



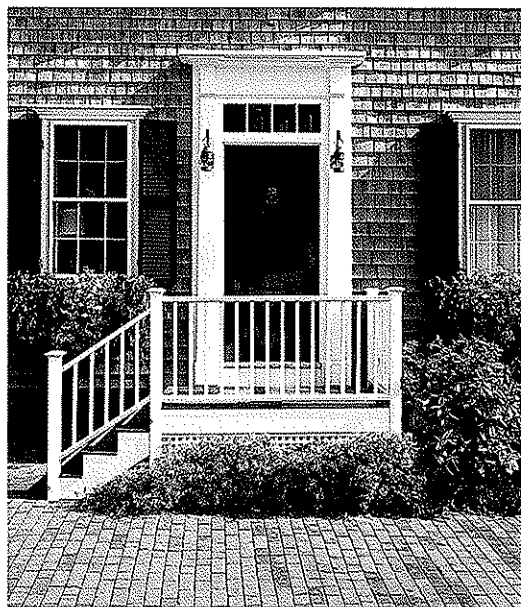
Crosby Bennett (1843–1919) offers an explanation of the exterior house color of the early eighteenth century: "White and green blinds [shutters] was the favorite color scheme. But also many houses were painted red. Few moderns will believe this. Perhaps the fashion came from aping the hue of bricks, a costly building material with us, for every brick had to be transported to our Island by water as a private shipment. You can count on the fingers of two hands our brick buildings."³⁸

With the whaling industry booming at the turn of the nineteenth century, homeowners could well afford to expand their houses. Additions at the rear and side were common and can be seen in all of the houses mentioned in this chapter. Many whaling captains built their homes on Orange, India, and Fair streets. Among them was Captain Seth Pinkham (1786–1844, FIGURE 26), who commanded the ships *Dauphin* and *Galen*, and had a home built on Fair Street. The Pinkham house (FIGURE 27) was constructed in 1827–28, in the latter phase of popularity of the typical Nantucket design, and had as part of the original plan a rear kitchen ell with its own fireplace that allowed space for a formal dining area in the middle of the house. With the wealth and worldliness that arrived through whaling to distant lands, came the temptation to live in ways other than

what the Friends had originally prescribed. Austerity of form and the limitation of the single, central chimney plan of the four-bay house preferred by the Friends lost favor with those financially capable and aware of more spacious and comfortable room arrangements. Contemporary with the typical Nantucket house, the Federal style was known and welcomed by affluent whaling merchants and successful captains. Islanders chose these larger houses and formal living schemes instead of the traditionally humble Nantucket home. Many dwellings, including the typical Nantucket house, displayed decorative features of the Federal style imposed on windows and especially doors (FIGURE 28).

Indicative of the societal evolution occurring among the affluent, Thomas Starbuck's prosperous son Joseph (1774–1861), a descendant of the island's founding Quaker, Mary Starbuck, was born in a typical Nantucket house. But after being disowned by the Quakers for marrying a nonmember, Joseph built a five-bay, twin-chimney home in 1809 for himself and his family on the appropriately named New Dollar Lane (CHAPTER 3, FIGURE 3). We see in the Joseph Starbuck house a decorative treatment of the front entrance and a more spacious interior plan. Another example is 27 India Street, a typical Nantucket house built circa 1794 for mariner Robert Folger (FIGURE 29). The house has architectural features and decorative elements not common to the style,³⁹ including a raised basement, a graceful set of double-sided stairs, a panel door with a simple entablature, and unusual wooden quoins⁴⁰ on the corners of the structure, all of which combine to project a refined, stately image.

Inevitably, such features that exhibited the status and wealth of their owners replaced the humility and communal equality of the typical Nantucket house. However, the modest-sized, four-bay house without ornament, overhang, or ostentation left an indelible mark on the island. Its aesthetic is responsible for the pleasing proportion and serene simplicity of much of Nantucket's historic architecture.



{ ABOVE }

FIGURE 28: Facade Detail, 40 Fair Street. Built by prosperous whaling captain Seth Pinkham during the late design phase of the typical Nantucket house, the front entrance of 40 Fair Street displays the refined features common to early-nineteenth-century fashions, including a shelf molding and four-pane transom over the door with graceful attenuated pilasters at each side.

{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 29: Robert Folger House, Built 1794, 27 India Street. Wooden quoins decorating the edges of this residence echo a masonry feature found in Georgian-style houses on the mainland.



Ship Shape: The Influence of Shipbuilding Techniques on Nantucket Architecture

NILES PARKER



Stairwell with Rope Handrail.

NANTUCKET ISLAND'S EXTENSIVE MARITIME history began from a humble start in fishing and shore whaling and developed into an extraordinary global whaling enterprise. Inevitably, Nantucket's unique relationship with the sea found its way into the island's architecture, and it remains evident today in many examples of both exterior and interior design details.

For generations, shipbuilders and carpenters have lived and worked on Nantucket. In fact, the Brant Point shipyard, located near the mouth of Nantucket Harbor, was active at the turn of the nineteenth century, with several ships built there for use in the whaling industry. Recorded in the histories of Nantucket and business account books, many of the island's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century carpenters and joiners who worked on building ships were also constructing houses. Island historian Obed Macy wrote of his grandfather, carpenter Richard Macy, building Nantucket's original Straight Wharf. Richard Macy's own account book of 1718 has several entries that record his work on boats. It is clear that shipbuilding techniques were common knowledge on the island and available to be appropriated into both the construction techniques and the decorative details of house design.

For example, structural devices such as ship's knees, which were braces for the framing of the vessels, are located in many island homes and are borrowed directly from shipbuilding models. A wonderful example exists in the Jethro Coffin house, popularly known as the "Oldest House," built on Sunset Hill in 1686 as a wedding present for Mary Gardner and Jethro Coffin, two descendants of Nantucket's first English families.

In the small and primitive fishing shanties of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Siasconset, a village on Nantucket's eastern shore, the use of a sleeping loft was an efficient design solution for fully utilizing a tiny space, much like the "below-decks" of a ship. In addition, many of these early fishing shanties, as well as some of the typical Nantucket houses, have narrow vertical stairways and rope handrails that lead to roof walks, fenced platforms located on

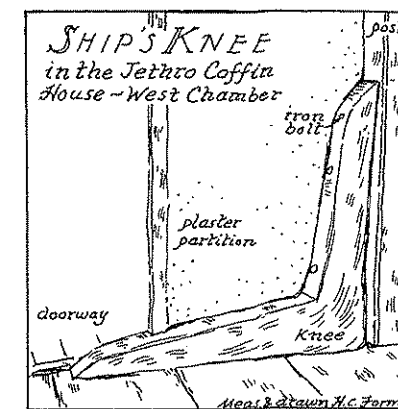


Illustration by Henry C. Forman, 1966.

rooftops. While the original purpose of the narrow stairway was to provide easy access to the roof in the event of a chimney fire, their design often echoed the ladders and ropework aboard ships that helped sailors ascend in tight spaces or clamber up masts for a better view. Over the decades many of these small homes have been enlarged, their steep stairways replaced or left unused; but the homes often retain the fanciful nautical details much appreciated today, including port-hole windows, ropework, and ivory-decorated railings.

Many of the houses built on Nantucket during its reign as a whaling empire remain as a testimony to practical and sound framing and joining techniques that were also used in shipbuilding. Varying from very real structural design solutions to purely fanciful, decorative touches, evidence of those techniques abound. Perhaps the best example of the latter are the omnipresent quarterboards found on Nantucket homes today. Derivative of the quarterboards that once adorned ships and stated the name of the vessel, these signs are carved with a name for the house or the owner and hung above a door or garage. While perhaps overly quaint, they remain as reminders of the influence that the sea and maritime activity have always had on the architecture and culture of Nantucket.

Whaling Prosperity, Cultural Changes, and Classical Design: Federal and Greek Revival Architecture

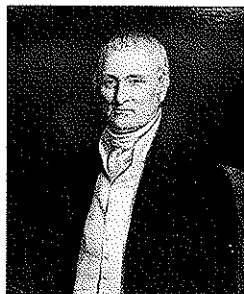
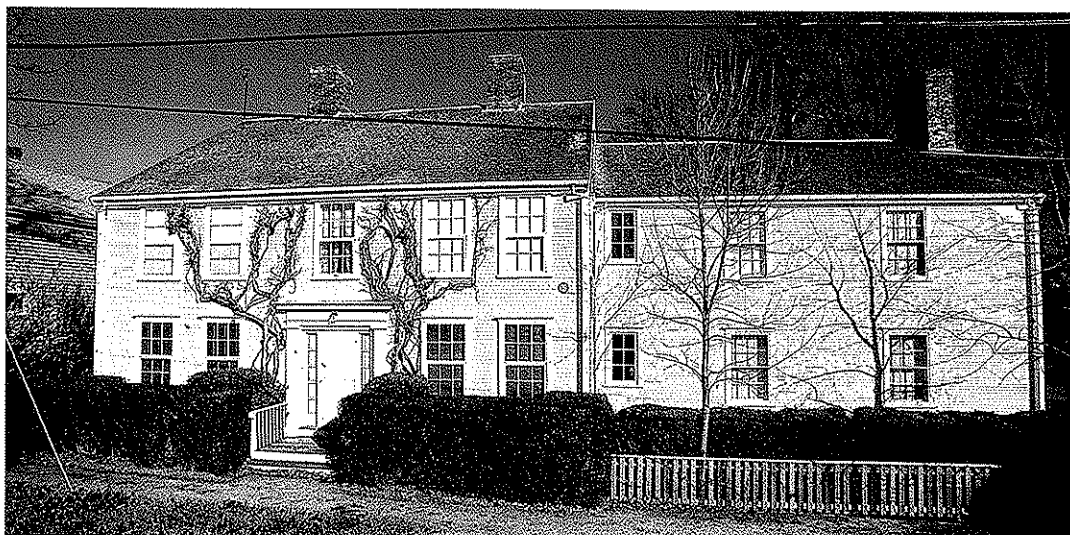
Patricia Egan Butler

AFTER the Revolutionary War, the United States decidedly sought independence not only from British rule, but also from British custom and culture. This historical period is often described as the beginning of the modern age in this country. Greatly accelerated shipping activity on the nation's coasts and inland waterways resulted in cultural and commercial transportation growth that transformed and established prosperous harbor settlements and river towns. Nantucket and its whaling industry were well positioned to profit from the burgeoning national and international trade opportunities. At the top and bottom of commercial Main Street, the 1772 Rotch Counting House (FIGURE 1) and the 1818 Pacific Bank represent the dramatic economic change on Nantucket that began after the American Revolution and continued through the mid-nineteenth century.

Each brick building was and continues to be a pivotal community symbol. The unadorned Counting House was built with a gambrel roof at the head of Straight Wharf by merchant William Rotch Sr. (1734–1828). The structure was used partly as his office, and the remaining space was occupied by the town, which had given Rotch the building site. Interestingly, this building is associated with an important event in American history. In 1773 the ships *Beaver* (owned by William Rotch) and *Dartmouth* (owned by William's father, Joseph Rotch) were sent to London with whale oil. Upon their return to Boston with English tea, the *Beaver* and *Dartmouth* were two of the three ships involved in the infamous Boston Tea Party.¹

Consisting of brick and brownstone, with a gable roof and double chimneys, the Rotch Counting House is a singular example of Georgian-style commercial buildings, such as those built in Boston. A third story was added after the Great Fire of 1846. In 1860, seven whaling masters—the captains Samuel W. Wyer, George Palmer, Obed Swain, William S. Chadwick, Charles A. Veeder, James Wyer, and Samuel Swain—purchased the Rotch Counting House for use as a gathering place. They named it the Pacific Club,² following the precedent of the Pacific Bank, to pay homage to the

{ OPPOSITE }
FIGURE 1: Rotch
Counting House,
Built in 1772 at the Foot
of Main Street, Also
Called Market Square.



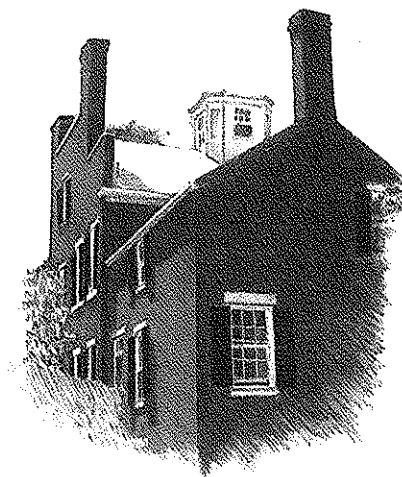
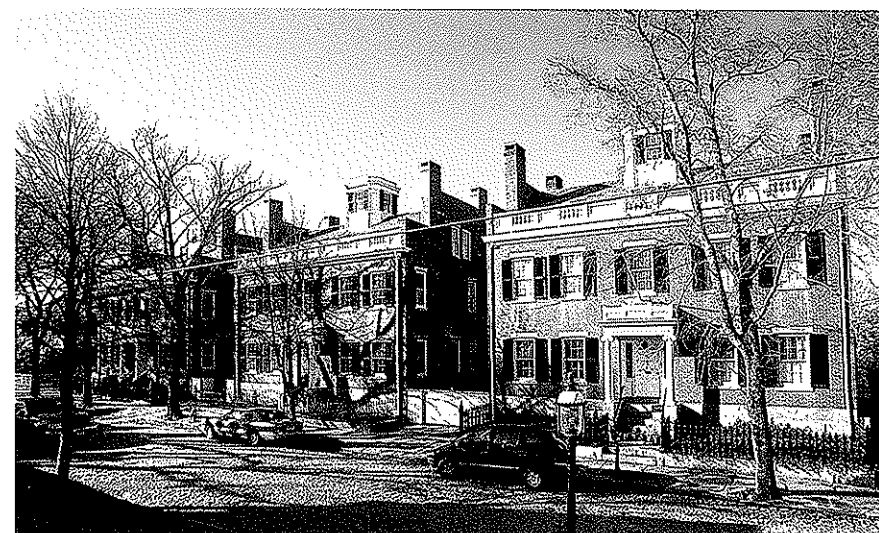
{ ABOVE LEFT }
FIGURE 2: Joseph Starbuck House, Built in 1809, 4 New Dollar Lane (Twentieth-Century Addition on Right).

{ ABOVE RIGHT }
FIGURE 3: John Bisbee, Portrait of Joseph Starbuck, 1847. Collection of Mrs. H. Crowell Freeman.

Pacific Ocean, its fabulously prolific whaling fields, and the island's resultant prosperity. Until recently, Pacific Club members and guests used the first-floor offices as a social club.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the thriving Nantucket Town's street development continued, with scores of houses built and numerous public and commercial buildings erected to address the needs of the expanding whaling industry. The harmonious streetscape we admire today was at that time based on tradition, practicality, order, and good planning. Subdivision of land, street and alley layout, and individual lot dimensions were systematic, but sympathetic to existing landscape contours and the community needs, generally separating industrial and commercial areas from domestic activities. Following the Quaker custom of separating public and private space, lots were sited close to, often within five feet of, the public path, with the edge of the lot prescribed by fencing. Interior space was further defined: formal parlors used for socializing were located in the front of the house, while private family areas—the keeping room, kitchen, and chambers—were in the back, closer to the garden.

Joseph Starbuck's house, built at 4 New Dollar Lane (FIGURE 2) in 1809, represents the significant religious, cultural, and architectural changes taking place on Nantucket in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In fact, this book's study of six of the Starbuck family homes, beginning with the Christopher Starbuck House (circa 1690) in Chapter 1, chronicles Nantucket's architectural and cultural history from the very successful perspective of one of the island's first families. Each of the



{ ABOVE LEFT }
FIGURE 4: The Three Bricks, Built on Main Street, 1836–38, for Joseph Starbuck's sons.

{ ABOVE RIGHT }
FIGURE 5: Brick Federal-Style Gables, Main Street, as Seen from Liberty Street. Illustration by Rose Gonnella, 1995. Pencil on paper.

Starbuck homes is instructive. In his book *A Mirror of Nantucket*, George Allen Fowlkes describes Joseph Starbuck (1774–1861) and his 4 New Dollar Lane home: “When he married Sally Gardner, he was disowned by the Quaker meeting, for Sally’s family belonged to the world’s people. Therefore, it seemed quite natural to the practical-minded Starbuck to build a house in the same fashion as the more elaborate ones in town. . . .”³ There were several post-1776 residences that departed from the customary Quaker house type and were considered “elaborate” at that time, and are now defined as Federal style. These homes, including the Cary House at 117 Main Street, built circa 1800, and the 1800 Obed Macy House at 15 Pleasant Street, featuring symmetrical, double chimneys, open staircases, and wide halls extending from front to rear, most likely set the precedent for Joseph Starbuck’s house plans.

Joseph and Sally Starbuck’s house had fine paneling, wide floorboards, and a full brick basement with a cooking fireplace, unlike the house Joseph had been born in at 11 Milk Street. After initially working as a butcher, Joseph became a whaling merchant and whaleship owner. By 1852, Joseph’s wealth was valued at \$150,000, and he was considered one of the Commonwealth’s richest men.⁴ East of the house at 4 New Dollar Lane, he built the Joseph Starbuck and Company spermaceti candle factory (now a residence) and oil-house-try-works, since demolished. The Starbuck property then included what is now Starbuck Court, off Pleasant Street. The accumulated wealth was given to his family in the form of homes. Between 1836 and 1838 he had the identical East, Middle, and West

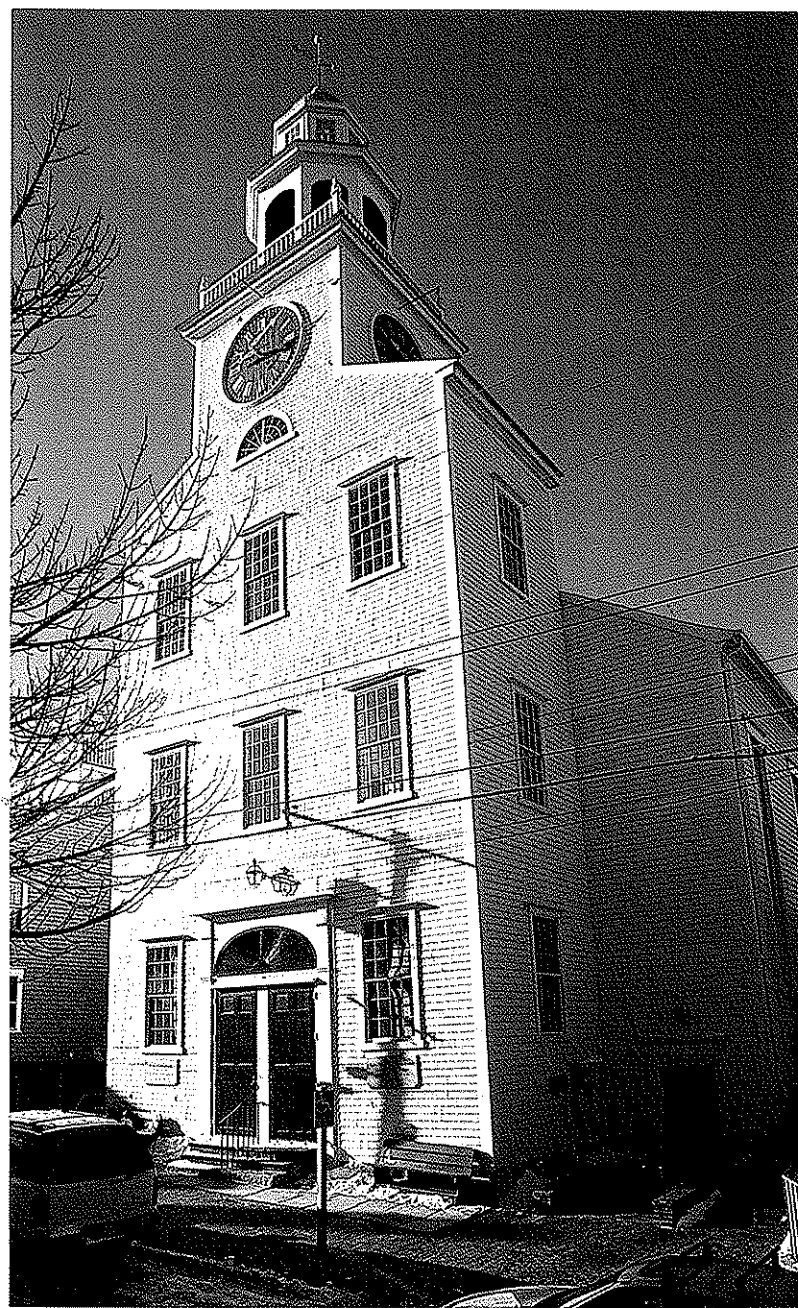


FIGURE 6: Unitarian Universalist Church, Built in 1809, 11 Orange Street (Also Known as South Tower and Second Congregational Meeting House).

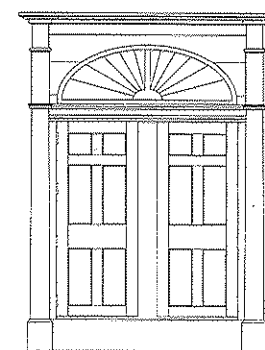


FIGURE 7: Double Doors, Unitarian Church, with Blind Fan Ornament in Greek Revival Door Surround. Illustration by Richard Valdes, 2003.

Bricks (FIGURE 4), as they are called today, constructed at 93, 95, and 97 Main Street for his sons William, Matthew, and George. These houses—imposing, five-bayed, classical, brick, center-entry masses, with stepped parapet end walls, square cupolas, and granite basements and steps—are regarded stylistically as transitional Federal-Greek Revival. In relation to the highly stylized classical designs being produced on the mainland at the time, these buildings reinforce the cultural restraint and time lag of architectural design on Nantucket, partly explained by the island's geographic isolation.

In the same year that Joseph Starbuck built the house at 4 New Dollar Lane, the present-day Unitarian Universalist Church at 11 Orange Street (FIGURE 6) was constructed as the Second Congregational Meeting House in 1809. Built by Elisha Ramsdell, the Orange Street church was erected in the Federal style, but there is no pictorial record of the original design.⁵ Historian Alexander Starbuck tells the story of the church's bell and how it came to Nantucket: "The bell with its remarkably silvery tones, which has charmed so many, was not added until 1815. It was purchased in Lisbon by Capt. Charles Clisby and brought to Nantucket in 1812 on the schooner *William and Nancy*, by Capt. Thomas Cary. It was one of a chime of six, designed for a convent, but had not been consecrated. It was purchased for the Unitarian Church in 1815."⁶ The first town clock was installed in the tower in 1823. The 1809 square tower, however, was not designed to sustain the weighty bell, and by 1830, oak beams were added for support and strength.

In 1844, the Unitarian congregation hired architect Frederick Brown Coleman to remodel the church's interior and exterior with classical elements. He designed the north and south facades' elegant windows, curved vestibule stairs, and decorative painting in the nave, executed by Carl Wendte, a Swiss artist who trained in Italy. The hierarchy of the symmetrical composition creates a compelling visual landmark, from the massive hand-carved blind fanlight above welcoming double doors (FIGURE 7), to the tower's orderly windows, elliptical decorative window, clock, and gold-domed lantern and weathervane. The church's simplicity of form and proportional beauty represents Nantucket's architectural aesthetic perfectly.

Forty-three years after the Rotch Counting House was built, the Pacific Bank (FIGURE 8) was erected in 1818, which, with its Federal-style geometry and curving forms, represented a far more refined aesthetic. In fact, architectural historian Clay Lancaster recognized the building as "the finest example of pure Federal-style architecture in Nantucket."⁷ A compelling focal point at the top of Main Street, the elegant two-story brick and brownstone facade with colonnaded Roman Ionic portico, and fanlight-defined entry, is further emphasized by flared brownstone steps, a granite foundation, and first-story round-top window panels. Following the custom requiring banking staff to live close to their business, the rear part of the building was designed as a residence. William Mitchell

(1791–1869), astronomer, farmer, and the Pacific Bank cashier from 1837 to 1861, lived in the bank with his family. It was from the bank's rooftop observatory in 1847 that his daughter Maria (1818–1889) discovered a comet that distinguished her forever; she later became the first woman invited into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a professor at Vassar College. Her legacy continues on Nantucket today through the Maria Mitchell Association.

Just as Thomas Jefferson had been inspired by the interpretative aesthetics of newly discovered classical Roman antiquities in France, in the nineteenth century the United States found inspiration from ancient Greece. British archeologists James Stuart and Nicholas Revett were the first scholars to document the monuments and temples of ancient Greece in their widely published work, *The Antiquities of Ancient Athens* (1762–1816). Across the emerging American states, these drawings were the source for practical design guides known as builders' companions. After the Greeks won the 1820 War of Independence from Turkey, American admiration for the Greek ideals of freedom and culture was unwavering. Initial late-eighteenth-century enthusiasm for the heavy-handed grandeur of Roman extravagance gave way to the order and simplicity of Greek temples.

The new national style spread from the colonial east to the Wild West, as entire new communities, houses, and public structures were built. Town squares and greens, High and Main streets all acquired temple-like, monumental public buildings of stone and masonry; in hamlets and villages, interpretations were made of wood and painted white, cream, and ochre to resemble those permanent materials of antiquity. State capitols, banks, churches, courthouses, schools, and libraries were surrounded with collections of white-painted frame houses that were smaller versions of the temple form.

With the rest of the nation, Nantucket hung up its humble gray colonial dress. The pre-Revolutionary remote island's Quaker-based way of life was transformed by its economic success in whaling and its introduction to foreign culture. Exuberant public buildings and residential applications of classical massing, form, and details remain throughout the



{ OPPOSITE }
 FIGURE 8: Pacific Bank,
 Built in 1818, and the
 Methodist Church, Both
 Survivors of the Great
 Fire in 1846.

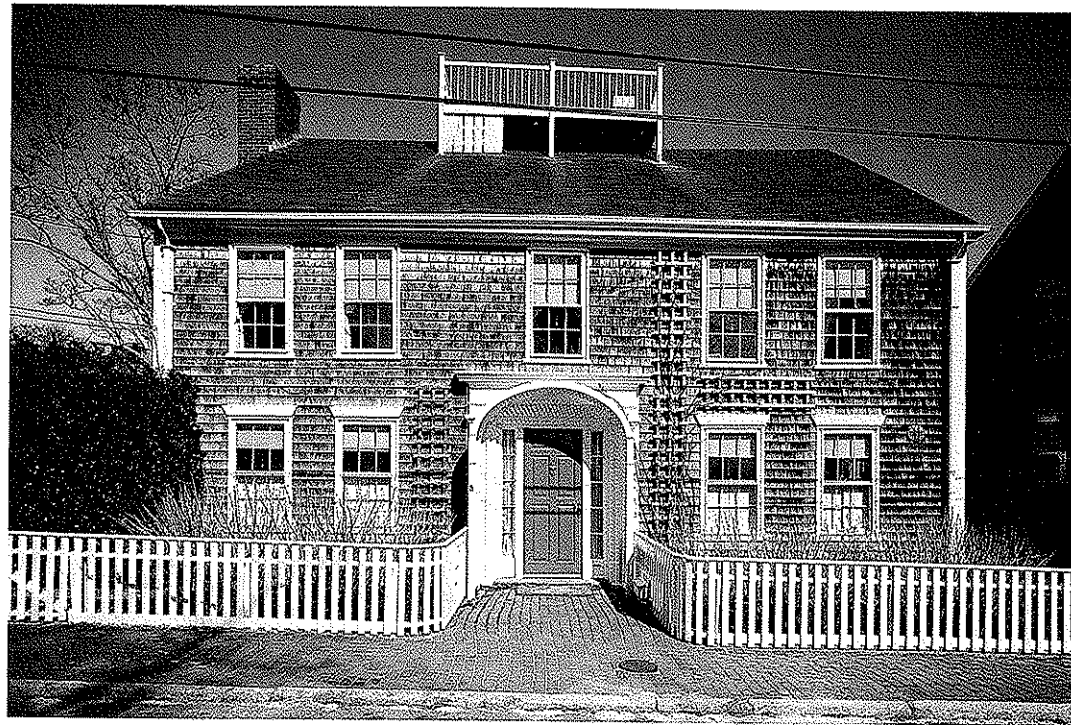


FIGURE 9: Detail of the Methodist Church, Built 1822–23, Renovated 1840, Centre Street. *Recent restoration of the columns revealed their construction was similar to that used in making barrels.*

Town of Nantucket, reminders of Nantucket's relationship with the national, cultural, political, and social consciousness of self-governance in the first half of the nineteenth century. Islanders took up the new fashion, but tempered it with the island's inherent Quaker aesthetic restraint, "using the traditional four-bay forms and typical roof pitches with innovative Greek details."⁸

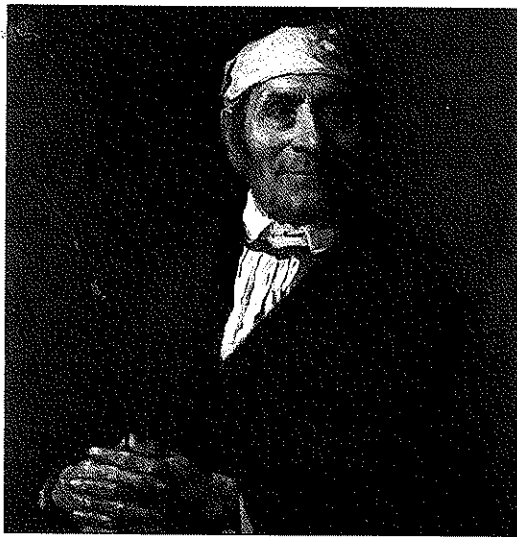
Frederick Brown Coleman is thought to have been responsible for the transformation of the Methodist church into a Greek temple. When built on Centre Street, in 1822–23, the church was an unremarkable wood building with a hip roof. Incredibly, the original hip roof remains intact under the massive 1840 timber-framed gable roof. The vast attic-story space created by the new roof profile is crisscrossed with huge twelve-by-twelve ship timbers up to sixty feet long, held together with traditional wood mortise-and-tenon joinery,⁹ a testament to the outstanding skills of Nantucket shipbuilders and housewrights. Coleman's 1840 redesign resulted in a full-blown Greek Revival Ionic portico with six columns (FIGURE 9) under a full entablature and street-facing pediment. Unlike the Unitarian church, which is entirely shingled and painted white, the street facade of the Methodist church was covered in flush boarding, while the side and rear elevations were shingled and left to weather. Significant interior alterations in 1840 included shifting the orientation of the altar from east to west, creating balcony seating, and adding new pews designed with a slight raise in grade, to provide the congregation with visual access to the front of the church.

During this period, many of the hearth-centered, earth-bound early houses that derived from the rural medieval building tradition, and those that the Quakers developed as the typical Nantucket house, were fitted with the new style. Door surrounds were expanded with sidelights, top-lights, and heavy pilasters; decorative interpretations of classic window trim included splayed lintels (sometimes still called "rabbit ears" on island); and "bull-nose," or half-round, molding that replaced early plank frames. Frequently, in the interest of thrift, builders/owners only had the public facade updated. In addition, center chimneys were removed and replaced by symmetrical end chimneys, to increase interior living spaces



{ ABOVE }

FIGURE 10: Nathaniel Hussey Homestead, Built in 1753, 5 Quince Street. Preservation restrictions provide for the protection of this home's historic interior and exterior elements in perpetuity. Photograph by Jeffrey Allen.



{ LEFT }

FIGURE 11: J. Eastman Johnson, Portrait of Robert Ratliff, 1879. Oil on canvas. The epitaph on Robert Ratliff's gravestone in the Old North Cemetery reads: "Honored for his integrity, respected for his uniform courtesy, and beloved for his kindness and generosity." Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association. Gift of Eastman Johnson, 00.134.1

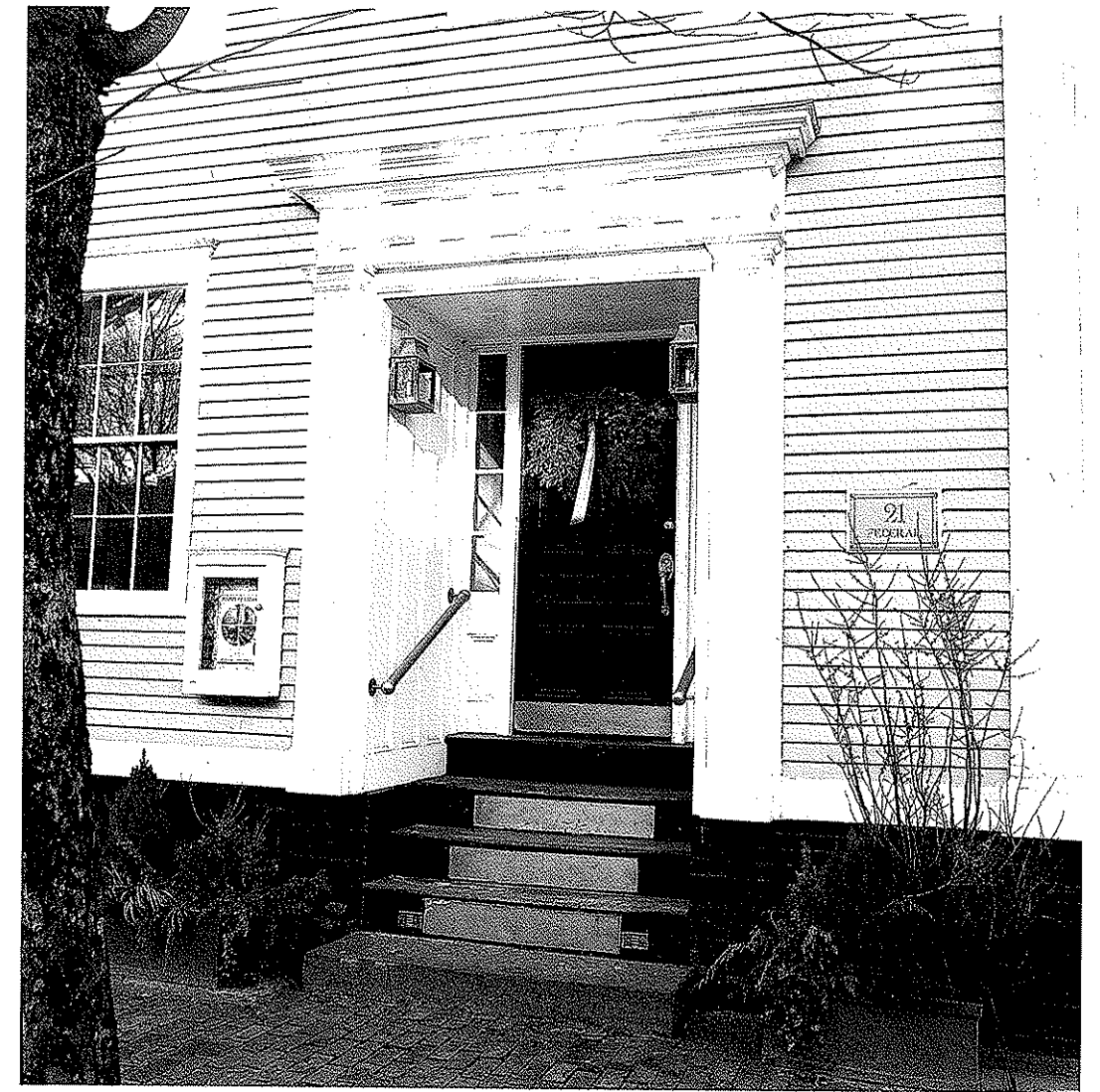
and open center halls, thus making room for gracious stairwells. In some cases, houses were raised above grade to accommodate basement and domestic activities, thus removing cooking heat and odors from living areas. Rough, unfinished, and colored surfaces were painted white to create the look of gleaming, ancient, carved, and chiseled stone.

The Nathaniel Hussey homestead at 5 Quince Street (FIGURE 10) was built by carpenter David Hussey in 1753 as a typical, timber-framed, center-chimney lean-to. An investigation of the attic revealed that the original center chimney was removed and an end chimney added. The house was then expanded to its present two-and-a-half-story, side-gabled, five-bay proportion. At the same time, the street-side windows and front entry were altered with classical details.

The changes most likely took place during the time British master rigger Robert Ratliff (1794–1882) occupied the house in the nineteenth century. Ratliff (FIGURE 11) was a seaman on the British ship *Northumberland*, which brought Napoleon Bonaparte to St. Helena in 1815. In 1820 Ratliff was shipwrecked on Nantucket, which remained his home until his death.¹⁰ The house was further distinguished with architectural modifications made by its twentieth-century occupants, including Austin Strong (1881–1952), who first came to Nantucket in 1903 with his fiancée, Mary Holbrook Wilson. Strong was the step-grandson of Robert Louis Stevenson and was known on Nantucket as a successful New York playwright and artist, and for his association with the Nantucket Yacht Club as commodore and as the creator of the Rainbow Fleet. After purchasing the house in 1913, the Strongs added twentieth-century amenities, including finely crafted built-in closets, bookshelves, and bathrooms, while leaving the original eighteenth-century timber frame, hand-beaded beams, mitered gunstock posts,¹¹ and nineteenth-century classical details intact.¹²

Adapting to, and adopting, the Greek Revival style did not demand a completely new island building culture. Many of the components of the classic vocabulary—simplicity, order, restraint, and craftsmanship—related to Nantucket's Quaker building tradition. The most striking departure from Quaker architecture is easily described. Instead of facing the side of each lot, the roof gable was turned to face the street (FIGURE 12). The second and perhaps more obvious difference is the application of decorative classical elements. The facade of the house is topped by a triangular element, or pediment, in the attic-story gable, usually defined by heavily layered trim boards, and typically containing a decorative geometric or elliptical window. Entries became important visually, some because they were reached by stairs (the building was raised above grade level on a high basement), and also because great attention was given to finely carved detailing of door surrounds, porches, and columns. Corner pilasters framing the facade further defined the composition.

Recessed entries of Greek Revival homes were finished with elegant paneling (FIGURE 13) and corner quoins were carved to look like chiseled stonework. Geometric frieze and cornice decoration

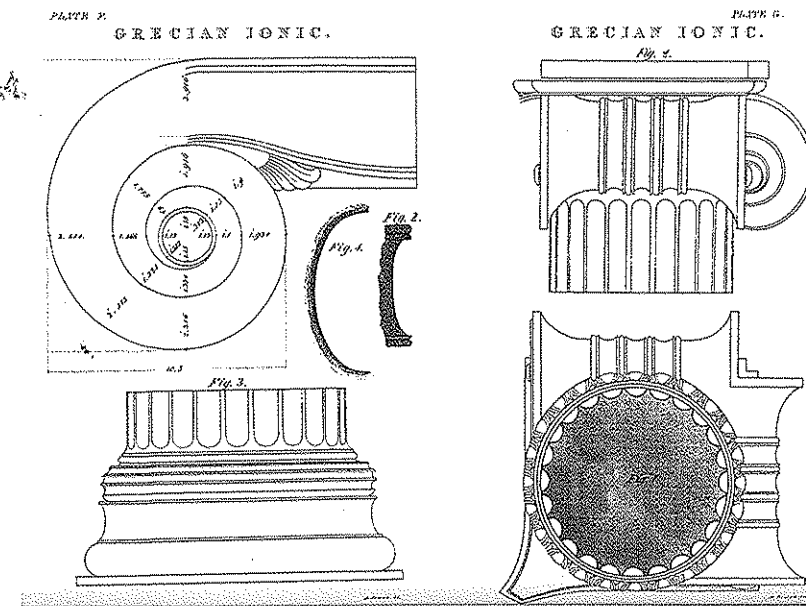
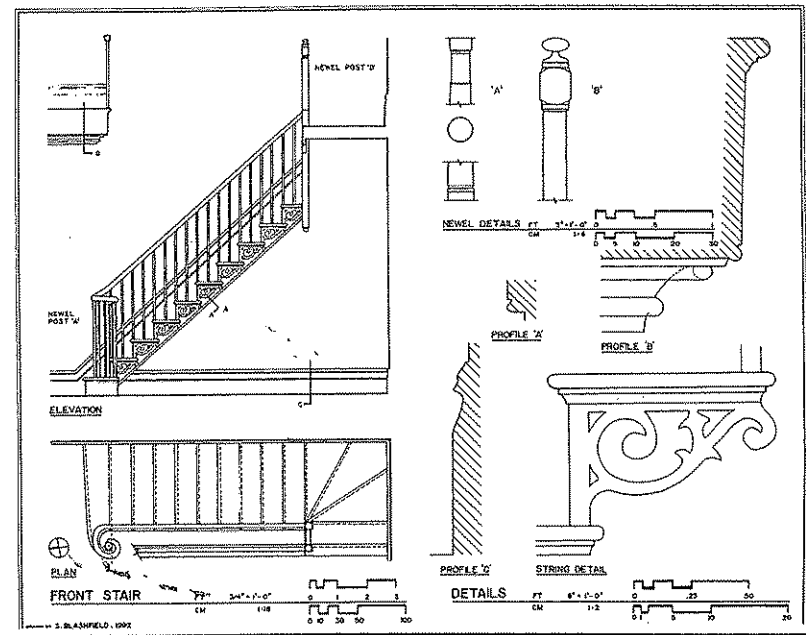


{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 12: Facade, 6 Pine Street. *We see here the simplicity of a 19th-century Greek Revival cottage in the Fish Lots.*

{ ABOVE }

FIGURE 13: Recessed Entry, 21 Federal Street, with Paneling and Details Equal to Interior Finish Work.



{ TOP }
 FIGURE 14: Stairway at 22 Hussey Street, Dating to 1836. Illustration by Steve Blashfield. Detailed carving on the stair risers was uniquely applied by Nantucket's wood-carvers.

{ BOTTOM }
 FIGURE 15: Grecian Ionic Column Detail. From Asher Benjamin, *The American Builder's Companion* (1827, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., reprinted in 1969). Precise geometric forms that guided America's carpenters were found in builder's companions.

on the facade included the "Greek key," dentil, swirl, volute, fillet, flute, and egg-and-dart patterns that were skillfully interpreted by Nantucket's housewrights. Interior details were equally elegant, as seen in the elevation and detail drawing of the front stair of the house built by William Andrews in 1836 at 22 Hussey Street (FIGURE 14).

Nantucket's conservative "shipbuilder-carpenter-contractor-architect"¹³ depended on illustrated pattern books for inspiration and direction. Asher Benjamin's 1827 *The American Builder's Companion, or, a System of Architecture Particularly Adapted to the Present Style of Building*, was a primary resource in spreading classic design principles throughout the United States in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ The popular book made available precise formulas and beautifully drawn designs, patterns, and details (FIGURE 15). Comparing the more elaborate Roman Doric aesthetic to the Grecian, Asher Benjamin writes, "the boldness of the Grecian Doric attracts the attention of the spectator by the grandeur and fine proportion of its parts, the form of its mouldings, and the beautiful variety of light and shade on their surfaces, which greatly relieves them from each other, and renders their contour distinct to the eye."¹⁵ A footnote advises, "The small parts of every object ought to appear distinct to the eye at a reasonable distance from the building; for if this be not the case, it will be labour in vain, and will greatly diminish the beauty of the building."¹⁶ Abundant examples throughout Nantucket Town prove that Asher's advice was followed, with local interpretation.¹⁷

Housewright Henry Macy built the handsome William H. Crosby house at 1 Pleasant Street in 1837 (FIGURE 16). Crosby (1815-1896) came to Nantucket from Boston to be a whale oil merchant. He was twenty years old when he married Elizabeth Pinkham, daughter of Nantucket whaleship Captain Seth Pinkham, on Christmas Day, in 1834. Crosby's financial position and sophisticated urbanity are reflected in the elegant design of his house, skillfully executed by a descendant of one of Nantucket's original founding families. At 1 Pleasant Street the Greek Revival style's cool geometric formality, strict use of proportion and order, and highly finished, almost polished, materials display a sharp contrast to the comfortably weathered Quaker houses that were built before the first half of the nineteenth century.

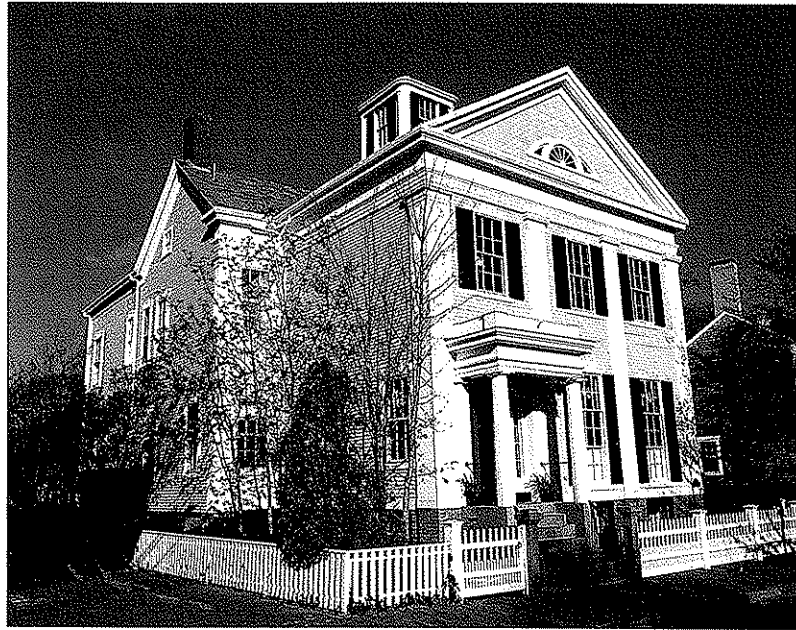


FIGURE 16: William H. Crosby House, Built in 1837, 1 Pleasant Street. *The Greek Revival style, with Boston influence, is evident in this building.*

Nantucket's Greek Revival houses, like 1 Pleasant Street, display endlessly exuberant variations of classic decorative elements. Greek key-patterned door surrounds; hefty columns topped with hand-carved volutes; small blocks of wood, called dentils, underlining an attic story; and wood quoins scored to look like blocks of stone survive on beautifully proportioned elevations. The architectural vocabulary is rich, and once learned, rewards the viewer with new discoveries all around Nantucket Town and in outlying areas, including on tiny Tuckernuck Island, where several cupola-topped farmhouses were built before the Civil War.

The style's most significant departure from earlier house types is dramatic. As mentioned previously, instead of gable ends facing the side yard, stretching the house across its lot, focusing on horizontal massing and lines, the narrow gable end faces directly on the street. Now, imitating the temple, verticality is emphasized. A good example of this style can be seen at 1 Pleasant Street (FIGURE 16), where soaring colossal-order pilasters rise above a high brick basement to visually support a pediment with a fan window in an elliptical outside frame. Topping off the two-and-a-half-story yellow clap-



FIGURE 17: Greek Key Pattern in the Window Frame, 1 Pleasant Street.

board facade is a square belvedere (from the Italian "fine view") best seen from Summer Street, as it is set back on the ridge of the slate roof. Enclosed belvederes and cupolas were typical during this period, replacing the early island practice of exposed, primitive walks—just one of the many features in the architectural evolution from the purely functional to highly decorative design elements influenced by classical forms.

On the left side of the thirty-foot-wide facade at 1 Pleasant Street, granite stairs set directly on the sidewalk are graced by a curved iron railing (an extension of the wrought-iron fence that defined the public sidewalk from private space). The steps lead up to a portico entry, framed by two fluted Doric columns supporting a decorative balustrade. Sidelights flank the paneled front door. The house originally included a very uncharacteristic, urban feature for Nantucket: an iron balcony across the front windows.

All the windows at 1 Pleasant Street are detailed with the Greek key, also known as the "meander pattern," in the upper head casing (FIGURE 17). The first-story double parlors' floor-to-ceiling triple-hung windows are also unique on Nantucket, an innovation known from Thomas Jefferson's house drawings, and can be seen at his own beloved Monticello. The second story's three bays hold six-over-six paned windows, protected from wind and rain by dark green or black shutters, also called blinds, introduced early in the nineteenth century on Nantucket.

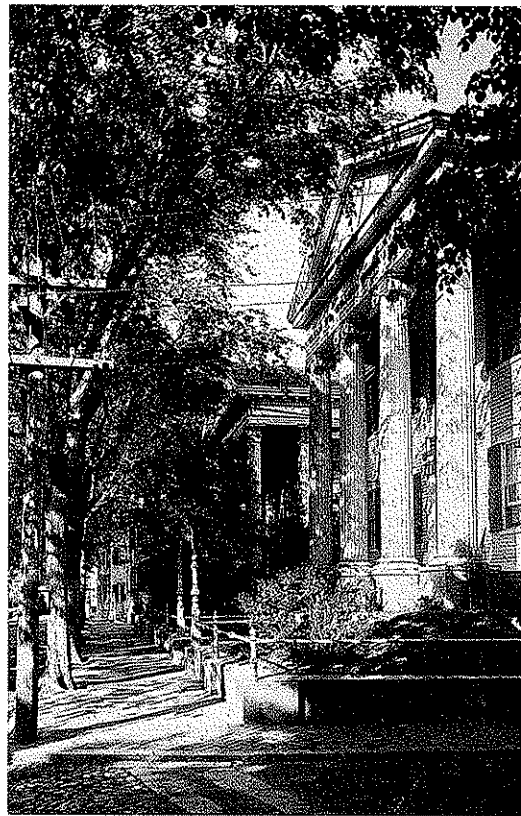
The interior plan of 1 Pleasant Street is that of a formal city house, with dining room and kitchen located in the fenestrated basement. Nineteenth-century appreciation for the classical and aesthetic use of space is realized in the luxurious entry hall with a graceful three-story open stairwell. Records and letters from the time describe the twin parlors with marble mantelpieces on the first floor frequently filled with festive gatherings, including one at which frozen mousse was served for the first time on the island. Unfortunately, in addition to the loss of one whaling ship, and several other Crosby ships' poor voyages, the young family's financial stability finally crumbled when their warehouse, filled with oil, burned to the ground in Nantucket's Great Fire in 1846. A decade after the young family moved to 1 Pleasant Street, they were forced to sell the house.

The Crosby house design was undoubtedly taken from 54 Orange Street, built for Henry Field two years earlier, circa 1835, by house carpenter William Macy. Field owned a foundry in Providence that furnished the copper nails used in this construction. The Orange Street house is simpler in detail and execution, having no cupola and less ornate window frames.

One Pleasant Street follows the character and tradition of Nantucket buildings. The house remains simple and restrained, and it takes its place on the street without overt ostentation, despite its elevated foundation, innovative plan, and fine classical details. Compare the Crosby House to those houses built by William Hadwen (1791–1862), with backyards just across the street. Hadwen resided at 96 Main Street and built 94 Main Street for his wife's niece, Mary (Swain) Wright, whom he had adopted. Nantucket's most elaborate Greek Revival statements, sometimes called the "Two Greeks" (FIGURE 18), these mansions were designed by Frederick Brown Coleman and constructed circa 1844–45. Both display a cultural sophistication that Hadwen brought to Nantucket from his Newport, Rhode Island, background. While compelling in form and execution of detail, the "Two Greeks" depart from Nantucket's typically restrained response to mainland architectural influences.

Charming variations of one-, one-and-a-half-, and one-and-three-quarter-story Greek Revival cottages are sprinkled throughout the area known as the "Fish Lots," which once stretched from Union Street to Pine Street. In 1717, the area was subdivided for house lots, having first been used for drying codfish on wood racks, thus its name. Once it was subdivided, Quaker families built houses, shops, sheds, barns, necessities, and other outbuildings behind the dwelling. Rough board fences contained the family's pigs and chickens.

At the corner of Pine and Darling streets stands a charming cottage (FIGURE 19). A high degree of craftsmanship and creativity resulted in this smaller version of a Greek Revival house type. Characteristic six-over-six windows are appropriately scaled to be smaller on these cottages, with half-round trim, also called "bull-nose" molding, and splayed lintels, or "rabbit ears," for the upper head casing. Front-facing pediments are



{ ABOVE }
FIGURE 18: "The Two Greeks," High Style Classical Residences at 94 and 96 Main Street, Built ca. 1844–45. Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.

{ OPPOSITE }
FIGURE 19: Greek Revival Cottage at the Corner of Pine and Darling Streets, One of Two Similar Houses on Darling.

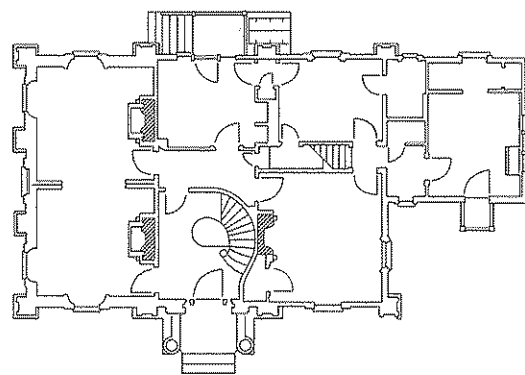


heavily trimmed out, with wide entablature and rake boards, and are always painted white.

The individual expression and expertise of the Nantucket housewright combined interpretations of Greek elements with strong maritime influences. At 26 Pine Street the distinctive wood stars applied to the facade came from the steam-sail Civil War battleship *Lancaster*.¹⁸

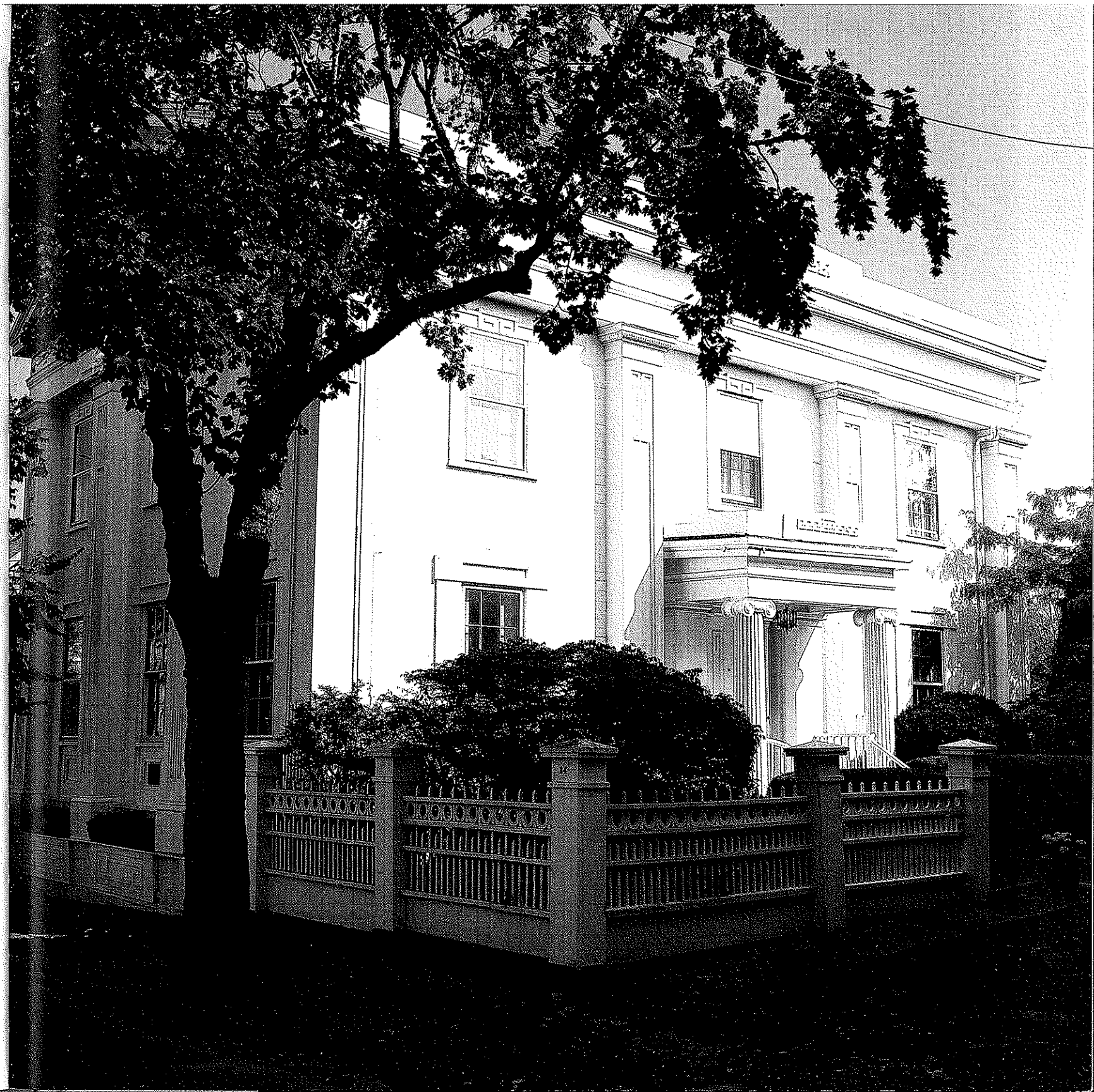
Respected architectural historian Clay Lancaster (1917–2000) described Captain Levi Starbuck's (1769–1849) house at 14 Orange Street as the "most masculine residence in Nantucket."¹⁹ Indeed, every aspect of the house—elevation, plan, massing, facade, and detail—exhibits geometrical solidity and strength (FIGURE 20). Housewright William M. Andrews was twenty-seven years old in 1836 when he purchased the Orange Street site for \$1,850. Earlier that year Andrews had completed 22 Hussey Street (FIGURE 21). It is interesting to contrast the two structures' main facades: both have gable ends facing the street, and are set directly on the public right-of-way. The 22 Hussey Street house is decorated with a variety of delicate classical details applied to a three-bay facade set directly on grade. The width and height of the house and the off-center placement of the front entry relate to earlier Nantucket Quaker house types. However, the strict symmetry of the Levi Starbuck house is a more confident Greek Revival design. Appropriately lifted above grade by an added basement level, and with the main entry facing south, the street facade becomes monumental, a truer temple interpretation. Pedestrian-scaled elements including window boxes and an elegant fence design soften the effect. When you consider the simple classical details of the Starbuck house, including Doric pilasters, fluted Ionic columns, Greek key pattern, and the exterior's cream and white palette, it is no wonder that the structure is one of Nantucket's finest examples of Greek Revival architecture.

The interior of the Levi Starbuck house is equally distinctive. The entry opens onto a curving, two-story, elegantly designed stair hall, which is ingeniously lighted by an oculus in the attic floor, under a roof skylight. An unusually elaborate grapevine design plaster cornice (FIGURE 22) in the double front parlor is based on an English pattern book discovered in the attic.²⁰



{ OPPOSITE AND ABOVE }

FIGURE 20: Captain Levi Starbuck House, Built in 1836, 14 Orange Street. At one time 134 whaling captains lived on Orange Street. Illustration by Branislav Bogdanovic, 2003.





{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 21: 22 Hussey Street, Built by Nantucket Housewright William M. Andrews in 1835.

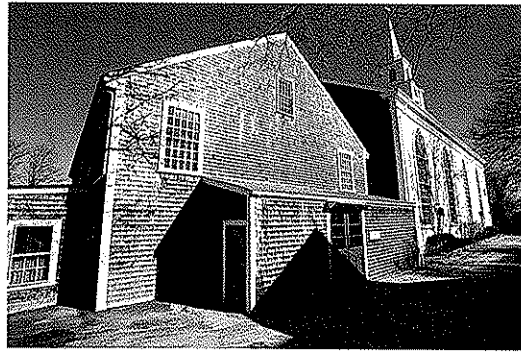
{ ABOVE }

FIGURE 22: Grapevine Plaster Cornice Design, Levi Starbuck House.

Historic streets and neighborhoods are often associated with the community's social hierarchy. Orange Street was, and still is, known as the street where, over time, 134 wealthy sea captains once lived.²¹ The idea that housewright William Andrews built 14 Orange Street as a speculative venture conflicts with public notices placed in the October 10 and 17, 1838, editions of the *Nantucket Mirror*, the first declaring Andrews's insolvency and the second, submitted by Andrews, stating that 14 Orange Street had "been intended for his own family residence. . . . Persons desirous of procuring a valuable and commodious dwelling can obtain a bargain in the premises by applying early to WM M ANDREWS."²² Master mariner and Captain James Codd bought the house at 14 Orange Street from the heirs of Levi Starbuck in 1854. The price was \$2,200, less than half its worth in 1838, indicating Nantucket's severe economic decline following the demise of the whaling industry. Subsequent owners have continued the remarkable care shown at 14 Orange Street throughout its history, so that this house truly retains the aura of oldness, the worn patina of many seasons, and the marks of hand tools on original wood members.

A history of the First Congregational Church (FIGURE 23) begins with the North Shore Meeting House, described by Alexander Starbuck as having been "removed from its original location near No Bottom Pond to Beacon Hill" in 1765. The building that was moved in 1765 is now called North Vestry and is the oldest continuing house of worship on Nantucket, still used for winter services and weddings. Beacon Hill is now called Academy Hill. The first Congregational Meeting House was built in Sherburne circa 1725, some sixty years after the island was settled by non-conformists who rejected the primacy of the Puritan ethos in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and had no interest in establishing an organized church. The Quakers built their first house of worship in 1711, and before then held meetings in private houses such as the Nathaniel and Mary Starbuck homestead.²³

When the new First Congregational Church structure was built in 1834, the North Shore Meeting House was moved to the back of the site (FIGURE 24). By then, the interior had been altered many times, but the original timber-frame construction remained exposed, and the building

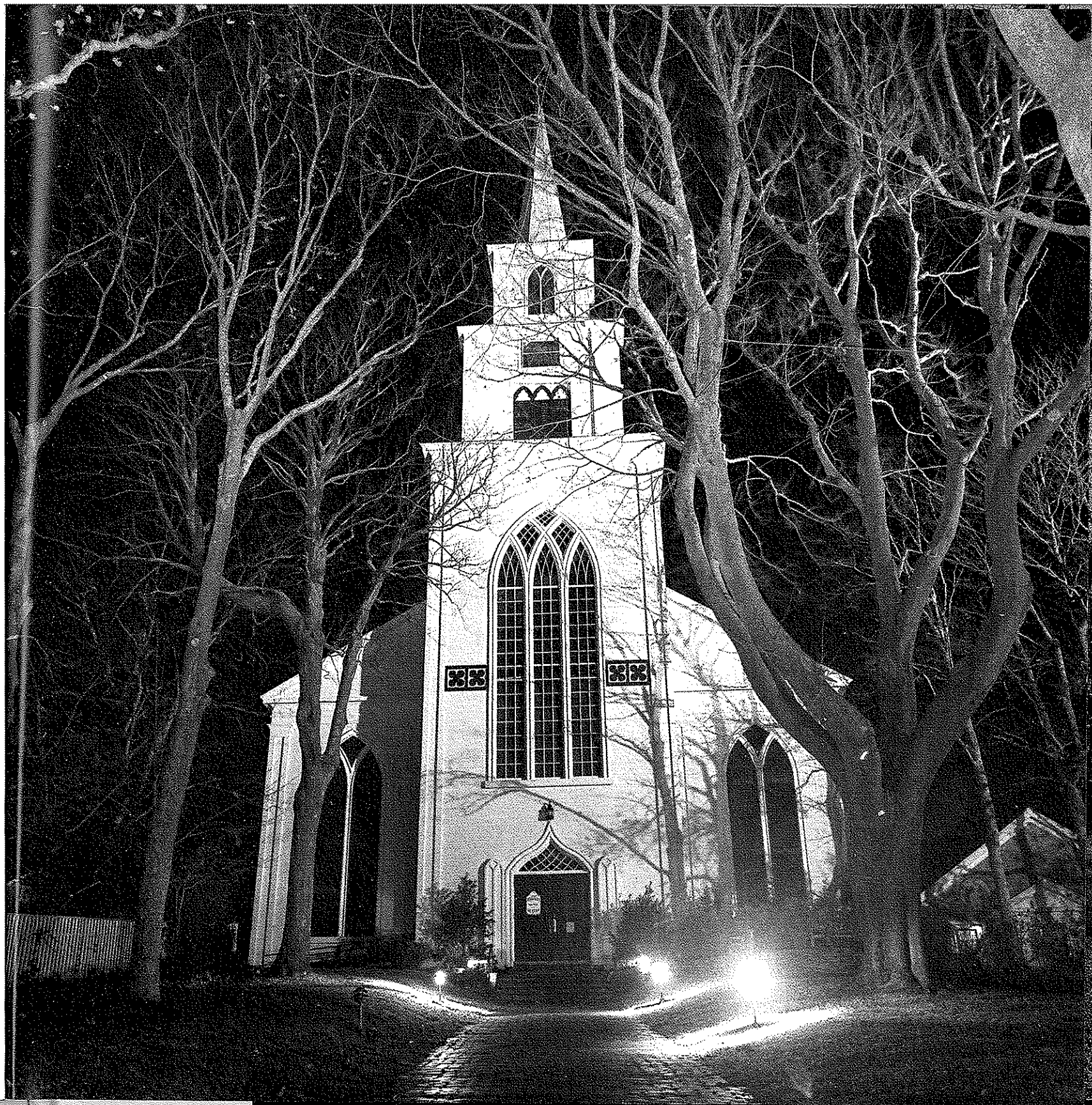


{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 23: First Congregational Church, Designed by Samuel Waldron, Built in 1834. Photograph by Gregory Spaid.

{ ABOVE }

FIGURE 24: North Shore Meeting House, First Congregational Church, Built ca. 1725.

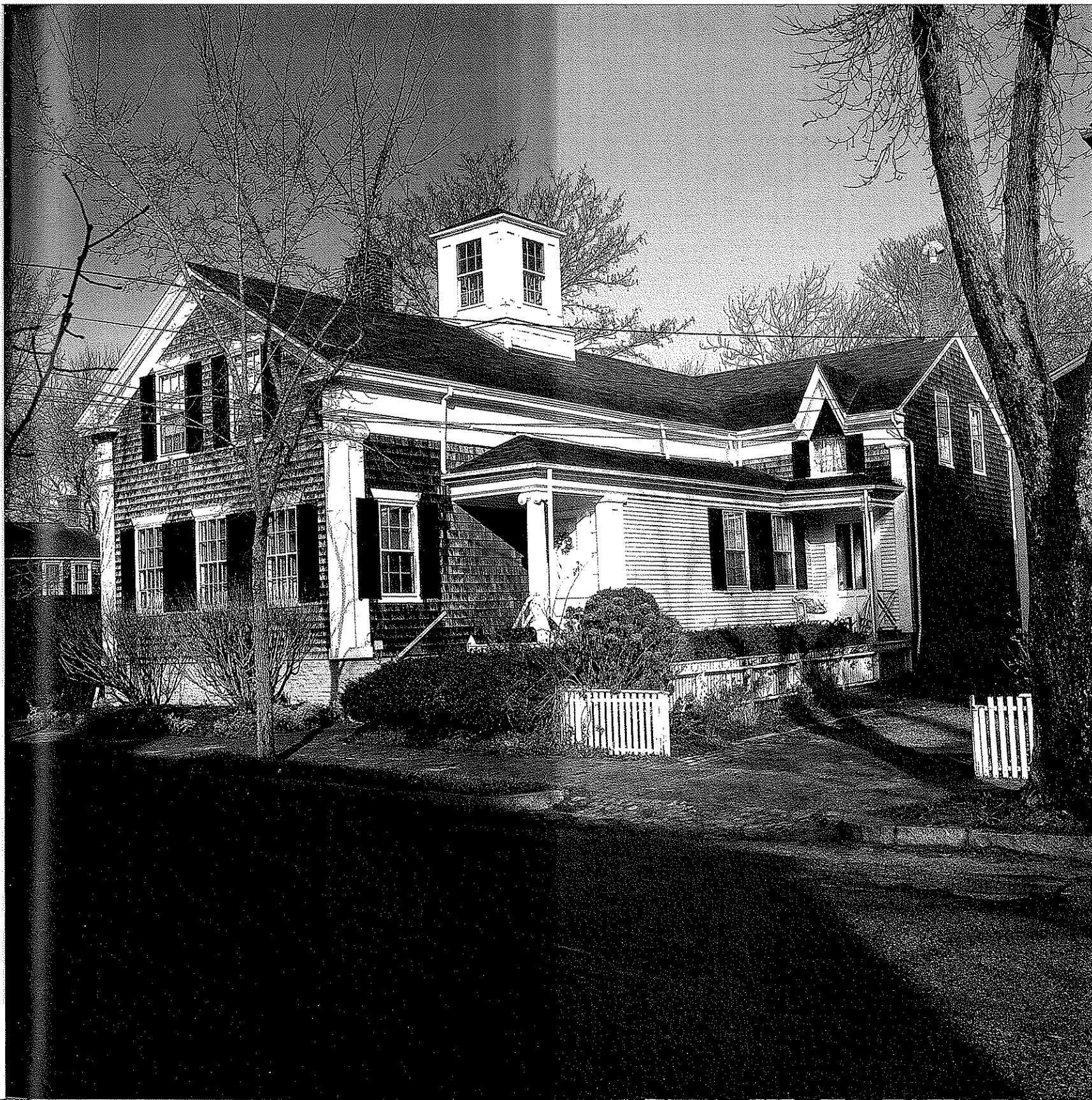


still provides important evidence of post-and-lintel, mortise-and-tenon joinery. A tower was added to the meeting house in 1795, and a one-thousand-pound bell installed in 1800, when the town voted to have the bell “rung at Sun rise in the morning, 12 at noon and 9 at night.”²⁴ This tradition was taken up in 1849 by South Church (Unitarian) on Orange Street, where the bell rings each morning at seven instead of at sunrise, but maintains the noon and nine o’clock schedule, when it rings fifty-two times after the hour is struck.

The 1834 design by Boston housewright Samuel Waldron²⁵ for the main Congregational church was unlike any public building design on Nantucket before or since (FIGURE 23). Interpreting the stone cathedrals of medieval Gothic architecture in wood, Waldron introduced curving ornament, verticality, and an emphasis on fenestration to an island architecture more practiced in elementary rectangular shapes. Architectural historians Calder Loth and Julius Trousdale Sadler Jr. consider the church “an excellent illustration of the conflict between Carpenters Classic and Carpenters Gothic.”²⁶ On the facade, the exotic ogee arch over the front door, pointed arch windows with tracery, and decorative panels with four-lobed clover forms are applied to a traditional church tower. In 1840 the church nave was enlarged by one bay, and four additional pointed arch windows were placed on the north and south walls. At the same time, the original high octagonal steeple was removed and replaced by four minarets at the corners of the stepped belfry. A helicopter positioned the present steeple in 1968, when the building’s exterior and interior were restored. In the summer, many visitors climb the ninety-four steps to the tower room to enjoy the 360-degree view of the town.

More discreet Carpenter Gothic details were applied to Greek Revival houses in Nantucket Town. The 1840 George Wendell Macy house on Main Street (FIGURE 25) is one of less than a dozen Greek Revival houses that also have Gothic details. Steeply pitched roofs and pointed arches, some with tracery, distinguish three houses built after the Great Fire on Whalers Lane and North Water Street. Situated on upper Main Street, just beyond three typical Nantucket houses, the George Macy house had a front gabled entry that was moved to the side under an engaged portico with a single Ionic column. A steeply pitched Gothic dormer window, placed above a secondary entry in the back ell facing the street, introduces intriguing and charming detail. A nearly identical design was built seven years later at 17 Pleasant Street.²⁷ George Wendell Macy (?–1889) served with great honor in the Civil War, one of 213 army and 126 navy volunteers from Nantucket. In fact, Nantucket enthusiastically exceeded its recommended quota for recruits and was named one of the Commonwealth’s “banner-towns.”²⁸

Nantucket’s remarkable architectural record is most often characterized as Quaker, yet the core historic and commercial district is largely Greek Revival in style. In his book, *Greek Revival Architecture in America*, Talbot Hamlin wrote about the impact of the Greek Revival style in New

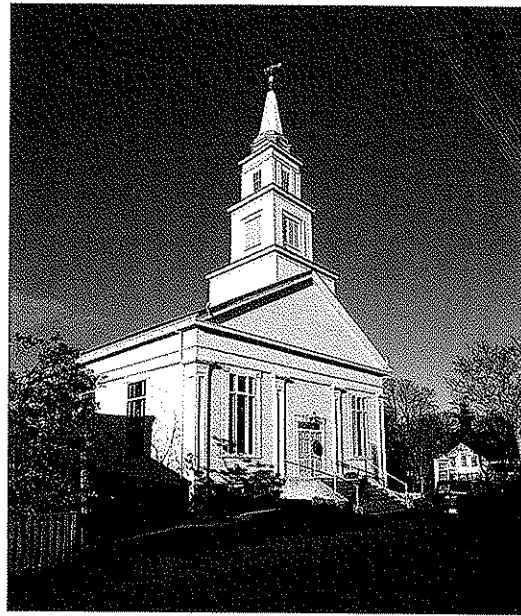


{ OPPOSITE }
 FIGURE 25: George Wendell Macy House, Built in 1840. This house is notable for its Greek Revival main massing and Gothic Revival dormer detail.

England, and noted that “Nantucket is especially interesting as showing the ideal the town builders of these prosperous towns were seeking to realize.”²⁹ Main Street’s classic Greek Revival building designs of brick and brownstone insert a sophisticated urbanity to the surrounding settlement composed of hundreds of typical Quaker dwellings. The reason for this juxtaposition is based on a catastrophe. On July 13, 1846, thirty-six acres of the town burned to the ground in a wind-swept fire that began at Geary’s Hat Store, on the south side of Main Street. Hundreds of wood buildings that had served as the whaling port’s shops, warehouses, banks, and offices were destroyed. Samuel H. Jenks Jr. drew a map of the area destroyed by fire that depicts the extent of the community’s devastating loss and provides a blueprint for the study of Greek Revival architecture on Nantucket.

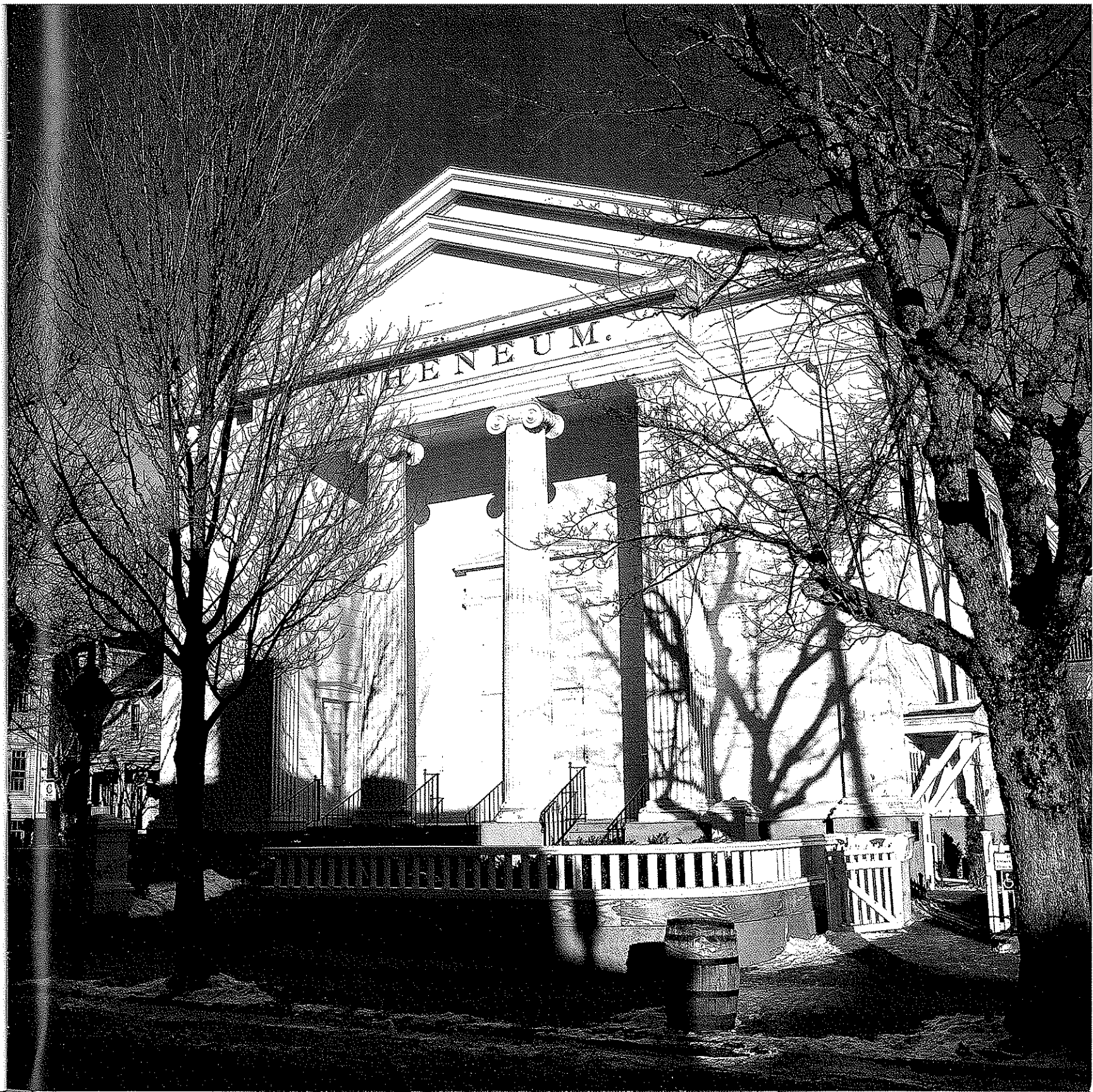
At the time of the Great Fire, Nantucket was brimming with the riches derived from its successful leadership in the world’s whaling industry. Four banks, including the Pacific, Manufacturers and Mechanics, Citizens, and Institution for Savings, were operating. A highly sophisticated and diverse community of ten thousand islanders included professional tradesmen, specialized craftsmen, business speculators, and shipping masters. Because there are no records identifying the master planner(s) involved in the rebuilding of the burned-out area, speculation is that Frederick Brown Coleman played a significant role in the reconstruction. Coleman’s previous work on Nantucket included the Methodist Church (FIGURES 8, 9) redesign in 1840; the Baptist Church (FIGURE 26) designed the same year; and the redesign of the Second Congregational Meeting House (FIGURE 6) in 1844.

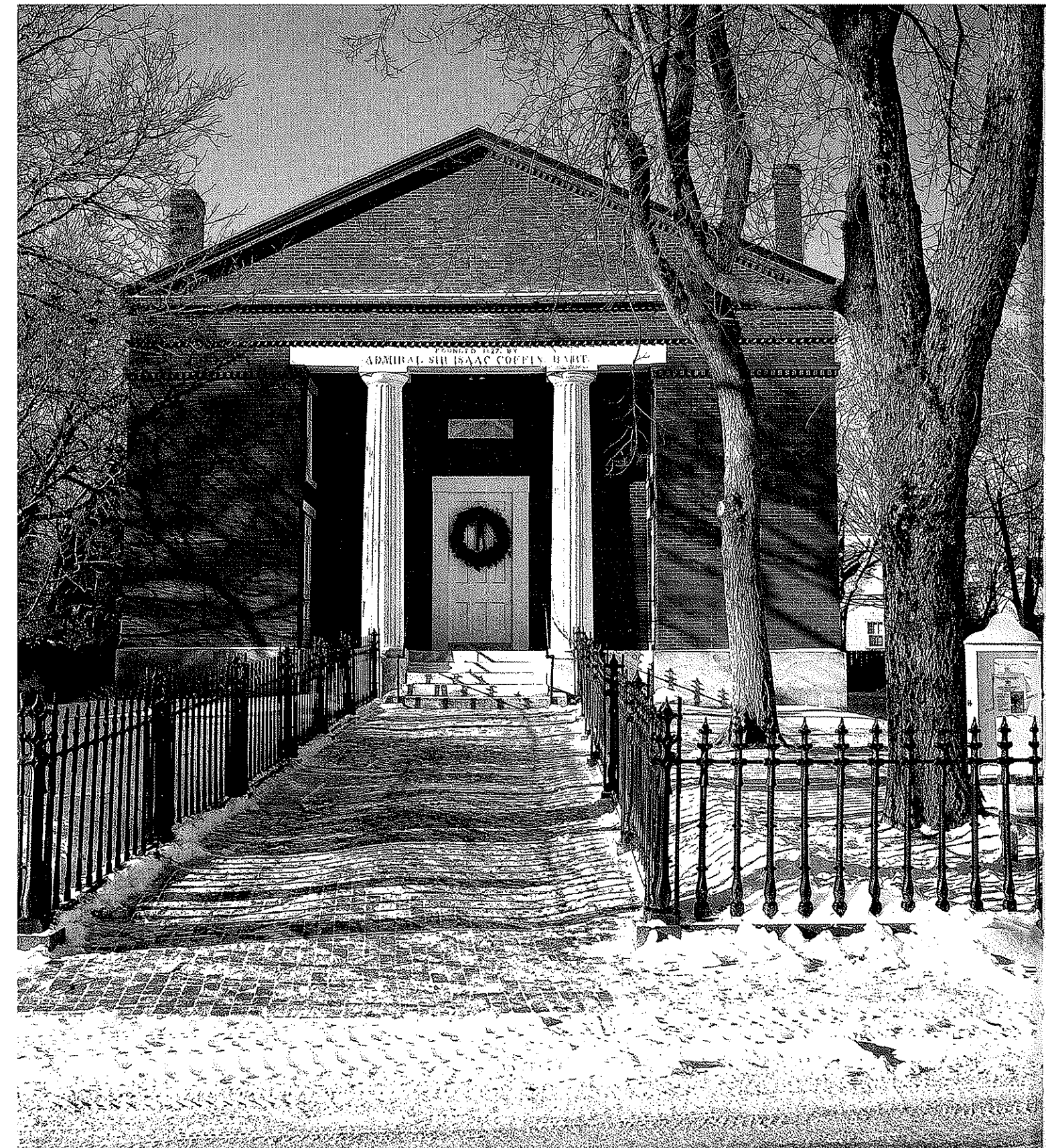
The community of ten thousand, equal to the island’s population in 2003, wasted no time in borrowing on its equity in order to reconstruct the burned streets, wharves, and structures that were essential to its economic and social well-being. Coleman’s design for the Atheneum library (FIGURE 27) was realized just six months after the fire, an astonishing accomplishment, reflective of the Atheneum’s importance. The two hundred commercial, public, and private Greek Revival structures that continue to grace the town today reveal the commitment, resources, energy, and most of all, the spirit of rebirth that surely inspired islanders more than 150 years ago.



{ ABOVE }
FIGURE 26: Baptist Church, Designed by Frederick Brown Coleman, 1840.

{ OPPOSITE }
FIGURE 27: Atheneum, Designed by Frederick Brown Coleman, 1847. *The Atheneum library was the first building to be erected after the Great Fire of 1846.*





{ OPPOSITE }

FIGURE 28: Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin Lancasterian School, Built in 1852–54, 4 Winter Street. *Despite an economic depression on the island, the trustees of the Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin Lancasterian School were able to build this magnificent schoolhouse in the popular Greek Revival style. The facade, with its dominant pediment and massive Doric columns, is modeled after a Greek temple.*

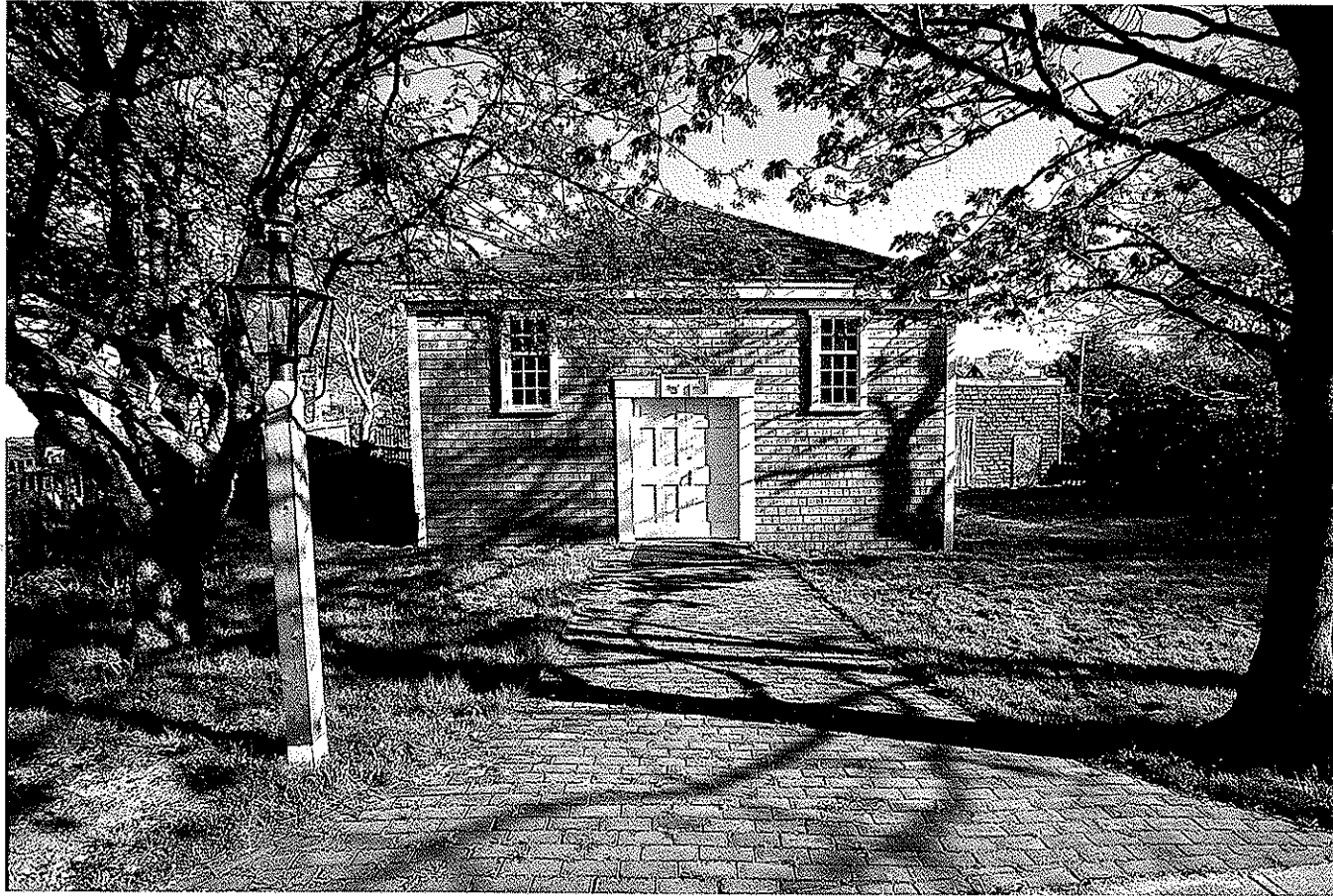
One particularly fine example of the Greek Revival style and the island's commitment to rebuilding the town is the Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin Lancasterian Schoolhouse, built in 1852–54 at 4 Winter Street (FIGURE 28).³⁰ Originally founded in 1827 by the Boston-born Englishman Sir Isaac Coffin, the school's second home was built for eight thousand dollars.³¹ Constructed of brick, the building's elegant facade is distinguished by a series of marble steps leading up to a recessed portico framed by two white, fluted, Doric columns of wood. When designing the school, builders Benjamin Robinson, James Thompson, and Edward Easton³² more than likely consulted Henry Barnard's 1848 pattern book *School Architecture*, which includes a facade design remarkably similar to the Coffin School.³³ Barnard recommended that schools be built in the Greek Revival style: "Every school house should be a temple, consecrated in prayer to the physical, intellectual, and moral culture of every child in the community, and be associated in every heart with the earliest and strongest impressions of truth, justice, patriotism and religion."³⁴ The building also reflects the taste of the wealthy trustees of the school, who lived in grand Federal-style and Greek Revival-style homes in town.

In spite of the heroic rebuilding of the business district after the Great Fire in 1846, a combination of nearly concurrent devastating events resulted in a deep economic depression that lasted until the 1870s. The discovery of first camphene, then lard oil, and finally kerosene removed the world's dependence on whale oil for lighting. In 1869, the *Oak* was the last whaleship to leave Nantucket Harbor.³⁵ The island's once-essential product was no longer needed. Beginning in 1849, more than five hundred men left Nantucket to seek fortunes in the California Gold Rush,³⁶ while more than forty-two whaleships were refitted to bring the adventurers around Cape Horn to California. The exodus, according to Alexander Starbuck, "carried away the bone and sinew of the Island and made a heavy draft on its recuperative energies."³⁷ Finally, the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Upper Main Street reminds us that Nantucket lost seventy-three men who served in the Civil War.³⁸ Until Nantucket began to gain economic strength through the summer vacation industry in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the town's houses were reportedly abandoned. There were numerous newspaper reports of houses being moved off island—to Cape Cod, New Bedford, and even one house was taken by ship to Monterey, California. Moving buildings had been customary throughout New England and common on Nantucket since the closing of the harbor at Capaum.

It is true that Nantucket's architecture was kept safe by the historic episodes that began in 1846. Each event further diminished the town's vitality until its economy was completely depressed. Unlike other towns and cities that recovered and developed after the Civil War, as a result of the economic impact of the Industrial Revolution, Nantucket and its people were suspended, without the means to change or replace the old structures, our architectural inheritance.

Restoration of the African Meeting House

JOHN A. JAMES



The African Meeting House on Nantucket, Built in mid-1820s.

THE AFRICAN MEETING HOUSE is an important reminder of the role African Americans played in the history of Nantucket and coastal New England. A study done by Nantucket teacher and historian Barbara Linebaugh indicates that the building, originally constructed in the mid-1820s, was initially built as a school and church. It served as a school for black children until Nantucket integrated its schools in the 1840s. The building continued to function as a meeting house through the end of the nineteenth century.

In the early twentieth century, the structure was sold by the congregation, which prompted its use for other purposes as well as its eventual deterioration. The building was saved by a few dedicated Nantucketers and eventually purchased in 1989 by the Museum of Afro American History in Boston. The following year the John A. James architectural firm was hired to begin the ambitious task of restoring the building as faithfully as possible. Matching grants from the Massachusetts Historical Commission facilitated the restoration, and the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities completed a Historical Structures Report.

This building represents a rare example of Nantucket architecture because of its hip roof and cove-shaped wall and ceiling. It is its spatial concept, and not its decoration, that dominates the interior, which consists of a single room of two materials, plaster and wood. The decorative treatment of the wood is limited to beading along the edges of the trim work and wainscoting. The finished floor is wide-board pine.

In restoring a structure that had so badly deteriorated and about which there was so little documentation, the architects relied heavily on the physical evidence of the building itself. There were portions of the flooring, wainscoting,

plaster cove ceiling, casings of posts, and window sash that were preserved and used as models for replication. Although the entry facade had been removed and a rolling door installed, with the aid of a photograph dated 1880 in the collection of the Nantucket Historical Association, the team was able to design doors and windows that are very close to the original.

Further evidence that the entry facade had been modified over the decades was found. The earlier configuration showed a single door in the center and two windows of the size and position of the side windows. This was the original facade when the building first served as a school. The facade, as restored, with the double doors and high windows, and Greek key pattern over the doors (typical of the Greek Revival style) probably represents changes that were made when the building began to serve primarily as a meeting house, in the late 1840s or early 1850s.

For the interior, new pews were designed based on evidence from an imprint on the wainscoting and a pew door that was owned by the Historical Association. The pew "shadows" on the wainscoting and paint markings on the original floor provided the exact lengths and locations of the pews.

The goal for this project was to preserve and reuse as much of the original building fabric as possible. Where new construction was involved attempts were made to be faithful to the original materials and construction techniques. In the end the restored structure is in keeping with the original spirit, but usable for the new purposes defined by the Museum of Afro American History and the Friends of the Meeting House.