

Silas Gardner House
21 Milk Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-928

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MASS
10-NANT
47-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

SILAS GARDNER HOUSE

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Location: 21 Milk Street (on northeast corner of Milk Street and Copper Lane), Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owner: William Lee Wiley

Present Occupants: Wiley family

Present Use: Seasonal occupancy

Brief Statement of Significance: Example of a transitional architectural design between the lean-to type and the typical Nantucket style of four-bay front with off-center door and chimney.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

Not before 1780 -- Silas Gardner built house.

1797 -- Francis Paddock bought from Silas Gardner.

1815 -- Elisha Barnard bought from Mary Paddock, widow of Francis Paddock.

1819 -- Isaac M. Wiederhold bought from Elisha Barnard, sail-maker, for \$800, being "house in which I now live, which was built by Silas Gardner and now owned by me."

1820 -- Kimbal Starbuck bought from Isaac M. Wiederhold for \$950.

1833 -- Mary and Anna Coleman bought from Kimbel Starbuck for \$1100. At this time the property was known as the homestead of Anna Coleman, spinster, daughter of William Coleman. She died in 1859.

1859 -- Alexander Macy bought from Anna Coleman's heirs.

1875 -- Lydia S. Macy, wife of Alexander Macy, Jr., by deed from Alexander Macy, Sr., who was then eighty-three years of age.

1879 -- Patrick H. Roberts bought from Lydia S. Macy for \$500.

- 1923 -- Eleanor D. Melendy bought from heirs of
Patrick H. Roberts.
- 1946 -- Russel J. and Elizabeth E. Fosbinder bought
from Eleanor D. Melendy.
- 1962 -- Helen A. Grosshans bought from Fosbinders.
- 1964 -- to date -- William Lee Wiley purchased property.
(Abstract, Records Registry of Deeds, Nantucket,
Massachusetts, and Vital Statistics of Nantucket,
Massachusetts)

2. Date of erection: c. 1780. When the house was sold by
Elisha Barnard in 1819, the deed clearly reads, "house
in which I now live and which was built by Silas Gardner".
Silas Gardner was only nineteen years of age when he
married Susannah Folger in 1781, so he could not have
built the house much earlier. 1780 at the earliest seems
plausible. (Abstract, Vital Statistics, Nantucket)

An earlier date of 1740-50 has been claimed because of
the construction of the house and the fact that the oven
with an iron door is still at the back of the huge kitchen
fireplace instead of at the side as was common at the end
of the century. (Abstract, Old Houses on Nantucket by
Duprey)

3. Architect: Unknown
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: In the plan of the
house the lean-to was abandoned and it was built with two
stories front and back. The arrangement of the small entry
with steep stair against the chimney and a room on either
side of the front door is still used. The rooms however
are of different size, foreshadowing the off-center typical
Nantucket house which was to become so popular a little
later.

The timbers which may be seen in the corners of the rooms
are an example of ship's carpentry.

The kitchen has always been in the rear room, with a
buttery and a burning room on either side of it.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: The house now has
six fireplaces in use, three bedrooms, and two baths which
have been added inconspicuously and do not detract from
the appearance of age.

In the living room the large fireplace has been replaced
by a smaller one and a paneled wall. In the smaller room
on the left there is a paneled cradleboard.

The partitions dividing the burning room and buttery from the kitchen have been removed, making one large room across the back of the house, with kitchen at one end and the fireplace, with oven with iron door at the back, in the middle part of the wide room. Back stairs to the second floor sre accessible from this room. There is an ell at the back.

In general the plsn of the house remains as it was originally. (Abstract, Old Houses on Nantucket by Duprey)

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: John Willisms, a long-time occupant of the house kept a store at the junction of Milk and Mill Streets, across the street from his home. He eventuslly moved sway from the Island and the store was taken down.

The section where the house stands is that old part of Nantucket known then as Chicken Hill. Milk Street was at that time a main thoroughfare. The Town House was nearby on the corner of Milk and Msin Streets; there the Town Meetings and other important gatherings were held.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: View in Scrsbook Collections of Miss Grace Brown Gardner (microfilm in Nantucket Atheneum), Nantucket, Massachusetts; photogrsph in Ninety-Five Percent Perfect by Everett U. Crosby.

2. Bibliography:

Duprey, Kenneth. Old Houses on Nantucket. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1959.

Note: Very few photographs of this house have been found and very little data.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
June, 1966

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.