

The Jared Coffin House  
formerly known as the Ocean House  
Nantucket  
Nantucket County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-918

HABS  
MASS  
10-NANT  
39-

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

THE JARED COFFIN HOUSE  
formerly known as the Ocean House

HABS  
MASS  
10-NANT  
39-

Location: 29 Broad Street (on north side), at corner of  
Centre Street, Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owner: Nantucket Historical Trust

Present Occupant: Jared Coffin House, a small, completely modern  
Inn.

Present Use: Inn

Brief Statement  
of Significance:

One of the large houses built during Nantucket's  
most prosperous period of whaling, it was occupied  
as such for less than one year; since then has been  
the best known hotel on Nantucket.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Jared Coffin built the house for his wife when she decided that "Moor's End", 19 Pleasant Street (HABS No. MASS-917), the lovely home he had built for her in 1830, was "too far out of town." After living in the new house less than one year, Mrs. Coffin decided that she wanted to move to Boston, and the house was placed on the market in the early spring of 1846.

In April, 1847, the Nantucket Steamboat Company purchased the Jared Coffin House for less than one-half its original cost, and opened a "public house", leasing it to its first managers, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Parker. At this time it was named the Ocean House.

In 1857 the Ocean House, complete with a twelve-horse stable and furniture, was purchased by Eben W. Allen for \$5,000. By 1872 the Ocean House was entertaining as many as 1,700 guests during a season.

The property changed hands several times during the succeeding decades, and except for the years during World War II when it was taken over by the U. S. Coast Guard, it was operated as a resort hotel.

The name Ocean House was retained until 1961 when the property was purchased by the Nantucket Historical Trust for re-orientation.

2. Date of erection: 1845
3. Architect: Unknown (For the 1962 restoration the architect was H. Errol Coffin of Nantucket, Mass.)
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The Jared Coffin House varies from the large houses built in the 1830's and 1840's on Main Street in that it has an additional story. The roof of the house is of sawn slate imported from Wales. Exterior walls are of face brick purchased from John Page, Danvers, Massachusetts. The first floor plan contains a stairhall with two rooms on either side connected by large openings and sliding doors.

When the residence was built it had a wooden roof parapet or balustrade. This was later removed. At the time of restoration stubs of the parapet braces were still visible, and by studying early photographs, it was possible to restore the parapet.

In 1916 the following quote appeared in The American Architect, written by J. A. Schweinfurth, "The front door of the Ocean House is remarkable for its Greek feeling of design and the rich effect of its simple flat mouldings about the panels, heightened by an incised line in the panel itself, and its curious carved panel in the Greek feeling." The same door has been retained in the restoration.

5. The two-story Allen addition made in 1857 is of unique construction. There are no columns or girders in the first floor (now the diningroom). This was accomplished by hanging the floors from above by means of iron rods concealed in the partition and suspended from heavy wooden roof trusses. This addition comprised the large diningroom and kitchen on the first floor and two floors of bedrooms above. The next year gas was installed in the parlors, halls, diningroom and principal chambers.

Over the years changes were made in the exterior facade to accommodate new entrances, porches and sun parlors. During the 1962 restoration major exterior repairs were necessary, but every effort was made to restore the original details. The architect for this restoration was H. Errol Coffin of Nantucket.

The simple iron railing on either side of the main entrance has been replaced, extending up to the columns, and from columns to pilasters at the wall. An iron balcony over the front door has also been replaced. There is now a side entrance on the east, opening into a tap room.

The first floor of the original house has been changed very little. The rooms to the right of the central stairhall

have been retined as offices and a small reception room. A larger reception room and library are at the left of the stairway. The diningroom remains in its original position at the back of the house. On the second and third floors there is a total of twenty-six bedrooms.

The only major architectural alteration in the guest rooms of the original house has been the installation of modern tiled baths and ceiling radiant heat in each room.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The Great Fire of 1846 destroyed all but a few brick buildings in the center of town. The Jared Coffin House, situated somewhat closer to the center of town than Nantucket's Main Street mansions, was also spared. Its brick walls and slate roof withstood and helped stop the fire. The Episcopal Church adjoining to the east was completely burned to the ground, its steeple toppling nearby. (Abstract, Records Nantucket Historical Association).

Over the years distinguished guests visited the Ocean House, the most memorable event being the visit of President and Mrs. Ulyssess S. Grant on August 27, 1874. Today the guest room occupied by President and Mrs. Grant during their stay there has been authentically restored in keeping with that period in American history. Of special interest is an actual doument of "Leave and Permission" for the ship Ohio from Ulyssess S. Grant, President of the United States of America, dated July 3, 1875.

According to Editor Samuel H. Jenks in The Inquirer, it was Jared Coffin, Esquire, who met and entertained in 1829 Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin on his second visit to Nantucket when he returned to see the result of his plans made in 1826 for the Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin's Lancastrian School.

- C. Sources of Information:

Coffin, H. Errol. "Jared Coffin House," Historic Nantucket, April 1962. (includes complete story of the Jared Coffin House with photographs and architectural drawings)

Farnham, Joseph Ellis Coffee. Brief Historical Data and Memories of My Boyhood Days in Nantucket. Providence: Snow and Farnham Co., 1915. (includes 1914 photograph)

Murphy, John F. Fifty Glimpses of Nantucket Island. Boston: J. F. Murphy and New York and Chicago: Rand McNally, 1897. (includes old view)

Witteman, A. Nantucket Illustrated. New York: The Albertype Co., 1888. (includes old photograph)

Historic Nantucket: Quarterly of Nantucket Historical Association.  
Nantucket: Nantucket Historical Association, January 1963.  
(includes photograph of erection of fire-escape during the  
1962 restoration).

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin  
Nantucket, Massachusetts  
November, 1965

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is 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 Jack E. Boucher, Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, July 1971.