

Nickels-Sortwell House
Northeast corner of Main (U.S. Route 1) and
Federal (State Route 218) Streets
Wiscasset
Lincoln County
Maine

HABS No. ME-102

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8-WISC
13 -

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

NICKELS-SORTWELL HOUSE

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Address: Northeast corner of Main (U.S. Route 1) and Federal (State Route 218) Streets, Wiscasset, Lincoln County, Maine.

Present Owner and Occupant: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 141 Cambridge Street, Boston 14, Massachusetts.

Present Use: Museum.

Brief Statement of Significance: This is one of the larger, more elaborate houses of the early 19th century on the Maine Coast, well furnished and open as a museum.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Original owner, Captain William Nickels. Sold c. 1820's to Cornelius Turner who operated it as Turner's Tavern. 1838--sold, still a tavern, called the Mansion House. Seaside Oracle (Wiscasset) April 1, 1870, "An important transfer in real estate has just been made. The old Mansion House on Main Street, the dilapidated condition of which has long been a source of regret to the community, has been sold to Captain William E. Wilcockson, who proposes to thoroughly repair it and open it as a first class hotel at an early date." Name changed in 1870 to Belle Haven. 1871 sold to Seth Patterson--name remained Belle Haven. Later in 1871, Samuel B. Erskine, proprietor. Later: J. B. Merrill proprietor. 1890 the proprietor, one Appleton, arrested for bootlegging rum in the Belle Haven. Called Wiscasset House in 1892 when purchased by William Guild Hubbard who ran it in connection with the Hilton House until 1900. 1900 to Alvin Foye Sortwell, Esq., of Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Sortwell family restored the house, and Miss Frances A. Sortwell willed the house to the present owners, The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

2. Date of erection: 1807-1812.

3. Original construction: Total cost of the house \$14,000.

4. Notes on alterations and additions: The house was restored and a rear porch added at the northeast side of the house by the Sortwells.

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5. Sources of information: Fannie S. Chase, Wiscasset in Pownalborough (Wiscasset, Maine, 1941), pp. 193-195, 561-562.

Federal Writers' Project, Maine, A Guide "Down East" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), p. 218.

Samuel M. Green, Exhibition of Maine Architecture from the 17th Century to the Civil War (Catalog of an exhibit arranged by the Art Department of Colby College, Waterville, Maine, 1945).

Lincoln County Pilgrimage, Guide booklet by the Lincoln County Bicentenary Committee and the Lincoln County Cultural and Historical Association, August 1960.

William Davis Patterson, Old Wiscasset, Revised by J. B. Doggett (Augusta, Maine: The Augusta Press, 1951).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: "The Sortwell house is a good illustration of many of the decorative characteristics of the American Adam style, overindulging as it does in their use,..." [Samuel M. Green, Exhibition of Maine Architecture]. The house is maintained as a museum and very well furnished with a wide variety of pieces.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: Three-story main block facing south, five bays about 42' wide, large wing to the rear at the northwest.

2. Foundations: Large blocks of cut granite.

3. Wall construction: Heavy timber frame, clapboard sides and rear. Elaborately decorated facade with flush siding. Center three bays projected slightly with attenuated Corinthian Colonial pilasters treatment on upper two stories and basement on lower level.

4. Porches: Elaborate entrance porch, one story, at the center bay of house, two fluted Corinthian columns at each front corner, elaborate entablature with molded and drilled ornament.

5. Chimneys: Brick chimneys in outside end walls.

6. Openings:

a. Doors and doorways: Six-panel main door in entrance porch, flat panels, small moldings, side lights and elliptical top light with elaborate mullions. Surrounding doorway surfaces decorated with carving, gouging, and reeding.

b. Windows: Double hung windows, six over six light on first and second floors, six over three light on third floor.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Low hip roof on main block, shingled.

b. Cornice: Molded cornice with large drilled ovolo and doubled fret bed mold.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Central-hall, two-room plan in main block, dining room and service rooms in rear wing, later sun porch added in northeast corner, similar arrangement on upper floors.

2. Stairways: Open well, oval stairway from first to third floor with skylight in central hall, open string, delicately scaled ornament with rectangular balusters, continuous molded handrail, and sawn scroll step end ornaments.

3. Flooring: Wood.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster; papered or painted.

5. Doors and doorways: Six-panel doors, flat panels with small moldings, molded doorways, with cornices on principal doors.

6. Trim: Molded ceiling cornices, carved rope molding on edges of projecting elaborately carved archways.

7. Hardware: Butt hinges, mortised locks with small brass knobs.

8. Lighting: Old fixtures wired for electricity.

9. Heating: Central heat. Fireplaces in most rooms, one-story wood mantels, molded trim. Mantels in principal rooms have pilasters or colonettes.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Faces south on a small corner lot with garden to north and east.

2. Enclosures: Wood balustrade at the front, higher wood fence at the rear with posts surmounted by urns.

3. Walks: Brick walks, granite steps.

4. Landscaping: Informal yard, with lawn, trees, flowers, and shrubs.

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Data pages 1 through 3 were previously transmitted to the Library of Congress. This is data page 4.

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FRONT ELEVATION

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FRONT ELEVATION

Left and right overlap: 75%

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