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Reconstruction of the past in a 21st century landscape: Historic Preservation on the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts

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Reconstruction of the past in a 21st century landscape:
Historic Preservation on the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts

Alexis Helene Casale

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial
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Introduction

“What I cherish most is the precarious balance established between conservation of open spaces and development of mankind. The island’s finite resources are tested every day, but I am optimistic that future generations can enjoy what I have, if greed and ego are held at bay.” – Jim Dunlap from Nantucket Vanishing

Nantucket, a small island thirty miles off the coast of Cape Cod in Massachusetts, possesses an exceptional story of history exemplified through its preserved layers of architecture and landscape. The island encapsulates whole time periods of the past. The Quaker way of life that shaped the island from the 1760s to the 1830s in every aspect is still evident in the enduring homes. The wealth of the island at the height of the whaling industry is still evident today in the mid-nineteenth century houses built around the time of the fire that devastated much of the downtown area. The fine workmanship of these homes from skilled ship builders and craftsman has left a bounty of artifacts from the past. The island’s land was cultivated by the same people building the homes, learning to live with the island instead of on it has allowed for landscapes to maintain their distinct ecologies. The tiny island supports a diverse array of ecosystems from sand dunes to moors and woodlands to beaches. “This landscape’s timeless, often moody character changes with the shift of light.”1 (Fig. 1) The lasting remnants of the past have made the island a “gem, and for that, priceless in the eyes of the beholder.”2

Nantucket is recognized as a world leader during the whaling industry from the 1740s-1840s, and its town has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places and

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designated by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior as a National Landmark. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts enabling legislation, passed in 1955, provided the basis for establishment of the Nantucket Historic District. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, Nantucket’s century of economic struggle facilitated preservation with its lack of economy to support rebuilding or development.\(^3\) The late twentieth century brought rapid change and capital to the island through its increasing popularity as a summer vacation retreat. Threatened and in danger of losing its historical integrity, preservation became a vital component for the future of the island. This thesis will assess the current, well respected, scheme of the preservation of Nantucket Island. It will describe two major weaknesses, gut rehabs and changes in historic landscapes, in the island’s regime of preservation regulations, incentives and other tools, leading to recommendations for the correction of these failures.

\(^3\) Dunlap, Foreward.
Chapter One: Nantucket's Past

1.1 Introduction

The story of Nantucket, told through its architecture, town planning and landscape traditions, is still evident today. The island, sited just off the shores of mainland Massachusetts, has multiple significant time periods that are revealed through the built and natural environment. Nantucket has been acknowledged throughout its life as a refuge from the Puritan religion of the mainland, the whaling capital of the world, and a popular summer destination. The island was a very prosperous center for whaling, and then entered a long depression from the Civil War until the 1960s. Nantucket has been called “one of the best intact collections of late seventeenth to mid nineteenth century buildings in the United States.” It has supported more than three centuries of maritime living and approximately eight-hundred buildings dating from before the civil war. In 1955, the townspeople and the Massachusetts’ legislature created the National Historic District to recognize the notable heritage of the island. The town of Nantucket was also designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966 by the National Park Service and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The entire island is part of the historic district with two major concentrations of ‘Town’ and Siasconset. (Fig. 2)

Nantucket has a long history of care and commitment to preservation. However, preservation has been severely challenged in recent years. This is due to the national

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5 Lang and Stout, 7.
economic prosperity that created a building boom beginning in the 1980s. The people of Nantucket created a Historic District Commission (HDC) in 1956 to maintain the island’s historic integrity through a system of design review for: new projects, grant Certificates of Appropriateness so proposed work complies with HDC’s guidelines, and assume additional responsibilities as required. Although the process of insuring preservation of Nantucket’s historic architectural landscape heritage has been effective, serious challenges to the effectiveness of that process have arisen. In 2000, Nantucket was placed on the list of Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The cause for concern consisted of the rising seasonal population and large scale development on the island. The island had become too popular, raising development and redevelopment pressures on historic buildings, settlements and landscapes. The houses on Nantucket became primarily summer residences reducing commercial activity on the island to a seasonal event. ‘Teardowns’ and ‘gut rehabs’ became preservation issues. The new houses, built on a much larger scale, are too big for their building sites. These issues “are dramatically altering the heritage, cultural landscape and quality of community life on the island.”

In response to the threat of the island’s architecture and character over the years, many organizations were created on Nantucket to assist in its preservation. Organizations that have been involved in the protection of the island’s history for centuries and decades are the Nantucket Historical Association, founded in 1894, and the Nantucket Conservation Foundation, founded in 1963 by both Walter Beinecke Jr. and many individuals who supported his preservation ideals for the island. Others were

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established in later years, such as the Nantucket Preservation Trust founded in 1998 and the Siasconset Trust founded in 1984. These nonprofit organizations are committed to preserving the island’s architectural exteriors, buildings’ historic interiors and their landscapes. Separate areas of the island each created their own civic league associations to aid in the preservation effort. The local government became involved in the preservation process through design guidelines enforced by the Historic District Commission and the institution of the 1972 island wide zoning. With the support of the island’s organizations, the State Commission and the National Trust, Nantucket has been able to move forward in its preservation as stated in the updated report, Eleven Most Endangered Places by the National Trust in 2003. However, there are still issues affecting the historic character of Nantucket today.

**1.2 History**

Nantucket’s original inhabitants, the Wampanoag Indians, remained on the island until around the 1640s when the English began to settle it. The island had been previously discovered by an Englishman, Bartholomew Gosnold in 1602 on his way to establish the first known white settlement in New England. Many years earlier the island had most likely been spotted by Leif Erickson in A.D. 1000 during his journey southward from Newfoundland. Prior to the white settlement of Nantucket, Christian missionaries established religious meetings on the island in 1642. The meetings were led by Thomas

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9 Forman, 5.
Mayhew, Jr., and his Indian convert, Hiaccomes, from Martha’s Vineyard.\(^{10}\) In 1659, on the day referred to as Black Monday, Thomas Mayhew, Sr. sold the island of Nantucket to the original ten purchasers, “paving the way for the English settlement of the Island.”\(^{11}\)

The settlers were intent on living in harmony with the Wampanoag, however as the settlement increased in earnest, the Indian population saw a drastic decline due to illness and alcohol. The Wampanoag eventually were lost to the evils of the English settlers, the same people who taught the white man offshore whaling, the industry that placed Nantucket on the world’s map.\(^{12}\)

The original proprietors began the settlement of Nantucket around the harbor of Capaum Pond, not in existence today, for its shelter in 1660. (Fig. 3) They named their settlement Sherburne. Toward the later part of the seventeenth century, a severe hurricane completely shut off the harbor with a sand bank closing the passage to open waters for ships. The settlement was moved to the Great Harbor around 1700, with its Main Street running up from the Straight Wharf, still evident today as it was first documented by Isaac Coffin in his 1799 map.\(^{13}\) (Fig. 4) Due to the lack of building materials on the island, the settlers not only moved their belongings to the new site, they also brought their houses with them. They called the new settlement, Nantucket, meaning “far away land” in Wampanoag.\(^{14}\)

During its settlement, Nantucket has experienced differing architectural periods of the times as seen in the differing styles of the island today. Quakerism took root on the

\(^{10}\) Forman, 9.
\(^{11}\) Forman, 16.
\(^{14}\) Dunlap, Foreward.
island in the eighteenth century with many structures built in the humble Quaker aesthetic. This style is known today on the island as a ‘typical Nantucket house.’ As the island increased its economic prosperity with the advent of whaling during the early nineteenth century, its architectural styles reflected a more affluent time. At the height of the whaling industry, a handful of families controlled the trade on the island and were considered extremely well-to-do. Nantucket at this time became a very desirable place for the wealthy to inhabit. The homes were designed in the Federal and Greek revival styles. The Flemish bonding, cupolas, elaborate details and painted facades of the houses were designed to show off their wealth. (Fig. 5) However, the industry declined in the 1840s, especially after a devastating fire that consumed much of the downtown area, and many residents left the island to join the search for riches in the west during the gold rush. The island remained somewhat desolate until the turn of the century when it was rediscovered as a summer vacation destination. Until this point, the houses were built for year-round use; the first summer home was built on the island in 1880.15 Nantucket’s relaxed summer style remained until the economic boom of the 1980s at which time, houses on the island began in earnest to be demolished and rebuilt extremely large, used for a couple of weeks throughout the summer. The current trend of building style on the island is to maintain the Nantucket vernacular, with the weathered gray shingles, as created by the Nantucket Historic District Commission’s regulations.16

Nantucket has not only experienced differing periods of architectural styles, but it has also experienced different periods of preservation. Early in its history, Nantucket was preserved through its remote location and lack of building materials. It was hard to

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15 Tyler, 41.
reach the island and wood and brick were re-used constantly. If a person moved, the
house went with them or the materials to construct a new one. In the mid-twentieth
century, Nantucket was at a stand still in its economic growth. It had its residents and a
limited commercial industry but buildings on the main Straight Warf were vacant or run-
down. The 1960s saw a push forward to rehabilitate the dilapidated structures of the
waterfront and bring back the economic assets that the island offered. Walter Beinecke
Jr. was the driving force during this movement with his keen business sense and his
awakening for a forward preservation movement. “He ploughed money into the place,
virtually fixing up the whole of the waterfront, building by building.” 17 He became
heavily influential in the governmental processes, preventing the building of high rises
and establishing a code that controlled the look of all structures.18 The third preservation
movement began in response to the threat to the island’s built and natural environment in
the late twentieth century. The structures were being completely altered or destroyed and
natural landscapes gobbled up by hungry developers. In response to these actions,
Nantucket decided to take a proactive role in its preservation. Many organizations were
established for advocacy and protection of the remaining historic structures and open
land. Stricter guidelines were instated for all construction on the island and easements
for buildings and deed restrictions for land were instated.

Chapter Two: Preservation Techniques

2.1 Introduction

The town of Nantucket is a nationally recognized Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The simple recognition by the National Park Service and listing of a site does not secure its preservation. The NRHP status does not place any constraints on properties where owners use private funding, nor is the NRHP considered a design review process.19 The protection of historic resources on the island requires solid preservation techniques such as: continued education, advocacy and regulation. Currently the island’s historic built and natural environments are preserved through public and private organizations, as well as individuals. These parties consist of: regulatory bodies that oversee construction, organizations concerned with the preservation of buildings’ exteriors and interiors, and groups maintaining and conserving the open space of Nantucket. The numerous organizations established for the preservation of the island work hard to retain its historic integrity, however, it is also a major responsibility of the property owners and residents to be stewards of their land. The preservation efforts on the island need to be executed in joint collaboration by all parties.

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2.2 State

Nantucket is located in the state of Massachusetts for which the Massachusetts Historic Commission (MHC) administers all the state’s preservation programs as well as holds the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer. The Commission was created in 1963 to “preserve the heritage of the Commonwealth, through the identification, evaluation and protection of its historical and archaeological assets.”\(^{20}\) Massachusetts initiated a State Register of Historic Places (SRHP), in which Nantucket is listed, to serve as a master list of the historic properties and to add more protection to the sites. The SRHP serves as a guide for developers and state agencies interested in state funded, permitted, or licensed projects that affect the historic properties. Being listed on the SRHP also enables eligibility of a site for the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF), which is a “state funded fifty percent reimbursable matching grant program established in 1984 to support the preservation.”\(^{21}\) The MHC has a Preservation Planning division that “is responsible for assisting and encouraging local groups to become strong advocates for historic preservation planning.” This division deems it necessary to keep a state wide inventory of all the historic resources for the complete preservation of the state. The survey remains current and states that the cultural inventory of Nantucket needs to be updated to include the twentieth century resources.\(^{22}\)

\(^{20}\)Massachusetts Historical Commission. &lt;http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhchpp/hppidx.htm&gt; (25 January 2007).
\(^{21}\) Massachusetts Historical Commission. &lt;http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhchpp/hppidx.htm&gt; (25 January 2007).
2.3 Local Town Departments

There are city departments of Nantucket within the local government that work towards preservation. The differing divisions control construction, zoning and planning necessary to maintain the island.

2.3.1 Historic District Commission

The Nantucket Historic District Commission (HDC) was established in 1955 by the townspeople who recognized the island as a Historic District. The commission, by (ACT 1970 CHAP 395 with amendments), “will consist of five unpaid members who are resident taxpayers of the town of Nantucket.”23 The members have staggering terms for serving. There are also currently three associate members and three staff comprising the HDC. The purpose of this town department is to review all exterior construction for appropriateness. The HDC is the major regulatory body on the island, governing the design and materials of the built environment whether it is new construction, renovations or additions to existing structures.

The HDC released a set of guidelines in 1995, Building with Nantucket in Mind: Guidelines for Protecting the Historic Architecture and Landscape of Nantucket Island, in response to the growing concerns of the building boom on the island during the 1980s. The designs and plans for exteriors and public views are first reviewed by the Commission and if the guidelines are met, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be awarded, dated and signed by the Chairman. Approval must also be obtained for any

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23 Lang and Stout, 155.
structures that are intended to be razed. The Historic District Commission can deny an application, but will provide reasons stated in writing with recommendations. No building permits will be issued by the Building Inspector until the application has first obtained the Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission.\textsuperscript{24}

To regulate the historic architecture and landscapes of Nantucket the Commission has the power to “investigate and enforce violations of those parties that do not follow the guidelines and implement their own strategies for building.” A violation, in which a person constructs or alters a building without or not in agreement with the Certificate of Appropriateness, will receive a penalty. “If the party is found guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction, will be fined no less than ten dollars and no more than five-hundred dollars which is forfeited to the use of the town. If the penalty is not paid, the violation will constitute a separate offense.”\textsuperscript{25}

\subsection*{2.3.2 Land Bank}

Many of the island’s organizations are dedicated to the preservation and protection of the built environment and their landscapes, The Nantucket Land Bank, in existence for over twenty years, is dedicated only to the protection of the island’s endangered landscapes. Nantucket’s Land Bank was the “first land acquisition program of its kind in the nation”, created by Nantucket’s Planning Commission, adopted by Nantucket’s voters, and established by a special act of the Massachusetts Legislature (Chapter 669 of the Act of 1983, as amended) in 1983. The Commissioners of the Land Bank consist of five elected who serve without compensation and four full-time staff, to

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Lang and Stout, 156.
\item Lang and Stout, 156.
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administer the Land Bank Act, land acquisition, and property management programs. The Bank can acquire beaches, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, moorlands, heath lands, and other significant lands which protect areas containing species habitat, drinking water and recreation.\textsuperscript{26}

The Land Bank on Nantucket “imposes a two percent real estate transfer fee which is levied against the purchase price on most real estate transfers.”\textsuperscript{27} The money received has allowed the Land Bank to hold over two-thousand acres of land and have over one-hundred acres permanently protected by conservation restrictions. The year 2005 had transfer fees reaching $23,082,799 in which the Land Bank purchased a little more than one-hundred acres costing $12,475,100.\textsuperscript{28} As stated by town planner, Bill Kline,

“The real estate transfer fee is a way to capitalize on the development taking place on the island. In retrospect, new homeowners are not only purchasing a part of the new development, but are also purchasing the protection of open space on the island. No one has a problem with this since they want to protect not only their newly acquired view, but also the future for their children.”\textsuperscript{29}

The notion of protecting the historic landscapes and open spaces of the island is not a new one. “But, then, land preservation on Nantucket had always been regarded as only for those who could afford it; a socially acceptable, tax-deductible gesture one made to assure an unobstructed view beyond the privet hedge.”\textsuperscript{30} The fight to protect the ten-thousand acres left undeveloped on the island is a current battle being

\textsuperscript{29} Stolz, “Preserving Open Land, Nantucket Style,” 25.
\textsuperscript{30} Stolz, “Preserving Open Land, Nantucket Style,” 27.
waged by the Land Bank. The initiation of land protection started in the 1960s and continues today. The Land Bank makes it possible for all to contribute to the conservation, not just the socially elite. It is now just a race to gather up the last of the remaining open space.

2.4 Organizations

Numerous organizations over the years have been formed to aid in the preservation of Nantucket’s historic buildings and landscape. The Nantucket Preservation Alliance has differing organizations as members, supported by grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, to create a goal oriented master group to tackle the issues on the island. These organizations consist of: African Meeting House, Egan Institute of Maritime Studies, Maria Mitchell Association, Nantucket Architects Association, Nantucket Garden Club, Nantucket Historic District Commission, Nantucket Historical Association, Nantucket Landscape Association, Nantucket Life Saving Museum, Nantucket Preservation Trust, Norton Preservation Trust, Preservation Institute: Nantucket, ‘Sconset Trust and Two Centre Street Restoration Project.31

2.5 Non-Profits

2.5.1 Nantucket Preservation Trust

One non-profit organization on the island is the Nantucket Preservation Trust (NPT), which was created in 1998. It is organized under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Tax Code. The Trust was formed to not only protect Nantucket’s

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31 Nantucket Preservation Alliance Pamphlet.
historic buildings’ exteriors but the interiors, gardens and streetscapes. One major reason the trust was established was due to the lack of regulations involving the historic interiors of structures and the loss of such interiors became alarming toward the later part of the twentieth century. NPT works with the community to enrich its education and advocacy for preservation. The organization provides tours, lectures and events to educate the public and home-owners on the historic integrity of the island. To involve the younger generations, the current executive director, Michael May, is applying for a grant to provide local school teachers with training and comprehensive resource materials to teach students educational units on the preservation of Nantucket. NPT will also work with homeowners to educate them on the historic fabric of their homes and educate them on proper renovation designs and styles to maintain the historic authenticity of their property.32

A critical role that NPT plays in the preservation on the island is their holding of easements. “An historic preservation easement is a legal agreement between the owner of an historic house and a preservation organization, such as NPT.”33 An easement can protect important architectural features from alterations or neglect for generations to come. A positive factor for purchasing an easement is that it can be considered “a tax-deductible charitable contribution, based on the value of the development rights relinquished, as determined by an independent appraiser. In addition to the income’s tax benefits, the contribution may also reduce one’s estate tax liability.”34 Currently, there

32 Michael May, interview by Alexis Casale, Nantucket Preservation Trust. 20 December 2006.  
are eleven easements held by NPT on the island. This is a low percentage considering the large number of historic structures. Homeowners are uneasy to purchase easements because they do not want them to reduce the price of their property. There are other easements held on the island with various organizations such as the Historic District Commission, the ‘Sconset Trust, and Historic New England; however the majority of these easements are for the exterior elements of buildings while the NPT holds easements for interior elements.35 The ultimate goal of NPT is to purchase the historic homes, place easements and then resell the protected home with valuable information regarding the history to the new property owner.36

The Nantucket Preservation Trust recently received a grant to begin the survey for the twentieth century buildings on the island. This survey is to begin summer of 2007 and will aid in updating the list of the resources for the state.

2.5.2 ‘Sconset Trust

The Nantucket Preservation Trust is a non-profit organization encompassing the entire island, while the ‘Sconset Trust is a non-profit organization focused on the preservation of the built exteriors, interiors, gardens, landscapes and open space in the other historic core area of the island, Siasconset (‘Sconset) Village founded in 1984.37

35 Michael May, interview by Alexis Casale, Nantucket Preservation Trust. 20 December 2006.
36 Michael May, interview by Alexis Casale, Nantucket Preservation Trust. 20 December 2006.
2.6 Private Citizens and Professionals

Nantucket has regulatory bodies and non-profit organizations dedicated to the preservation of the historic architecture and landscapes. However, a strong commitment from third parties is essential to maintain all preservation efforts. The property-owners, architects, builders, real estate agents, developers, visitors and residents are all part of the preservation process.

2.6.1 Architects

There are numerous architects and their firms working on Nantucket as well as architects from off-island. It is the responsibility of the architect to work for the client to create designs and plans that will receive approval from the Historic District Commission. Many of the architects on the island have experience with the guidelines and designing with them. Keith Kirley, working for Milton Rowland and Associates, stated that, “usually it is easy to get a design passed once you understand what the commission will and will not agree with.” He also said, “old decrepit houses on the island, his firm usually guts them with no counter responses.”38 It is part of the architect’s job to bridge the understanding between the owner’s wants and the island’s criteria.

2.6.2 Builders

There are many builders on Nantucket, because the island provides constant job opportunities for both native islanders and foreigners. The builders work on various structures all over the island from new construction to complete renovations. Many of

the crew members, with no knowledge of preservation, learn the trade rather quickly and by the next season are beginning their own business with their own new crew. This cycle does not pass on preservation skills or knowledge to new employees, because none are initially instilled.\textsuperscript{39} The current thought shared among builders on the island is that most of the buildings’ materials are old and rotted and should be completely removed and replaced. They fear the homes will fall down if action is not taken and that it is not worth-while to save the materials in good shape.\textsuperscript{40} However, there are builders on the island that are very committed to the preservation of the island that execute diligent work. It is these companies that remain quiet on the island.\textsuperscript{41}

\subsection*{2.6.3 Homeowners}

Key preservation players on Nantucket are the homeowners. It is their responsibility to understand, educate and execute correct preservation practices for their homes and sites. Many owners have bought their homes on the island because of its unique historic quality and are wonderful stewards of their properties and try to educate others on the correct and plausible ways to decorate and renovate historic homes. There are other owners who have no concern for the past reflected in their homes and will tear them out from the inside. It is a small community that can work together towards a goal of understanding.

\textsuperscript{39} Aaron Marcavitch and Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Nantucket Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.  
\textsuperscript{40} Anonymous Builders, interview by Alexis Casale. Nantucket. Summer/Fall 2006.  
\textsuperscript{41} Aaron Marcavitch and Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Nantucket Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.
Chapter Three: Loss of a House’s Historic Interiors

3.1 Introduction

The historic architecture and landscapes of Nantucket have numerous individuals and groups concerned with their continued prominence. While the Nantucket Preservation Alliance consists of over a dozen contributing organizations, some work together, however, many of them do not communicate focusing on specific individual problem areas. The differing town departments that oversee the building and planning of the island look at individual issues as well. For example, the HDC will review applications for a single property and the planning department will review one area for a proposed development, not taking into consideration the ramifications to the entire island. The lack of communication among all preservation groups to foresee the consequences to the island as a whole has let certain preservation concerns slide by. There is also a lack of communication between the designers and builders and the preservation professionals. There is no principle of working towards a common goal and misunderstandings occur at all levels for standards in buildings and the landscapes. Allowing the issues to slip through has ultimately led to the loss of historic interiors and the alteration to historic townscapes and landscapes that are the contributing factors of extraordinary aspects that comprise Nantucket’s integrity.
3.2. “Gut Rehabs”

Nantucket’s buildings have been labeled original because of the abundance of the historic fabric existing from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. This puts the island in its own category of preservation, differing from historic recreations of such places as Williamsburg, Va. ⁴² For many, there is an assumed sense of assurance that the original building materials will remain intact with the regulations and the review process set forth by its Historic District Commission and other preservation minded organizations, that increased fervor after the listing on the Endangered List in 2000 with all the tear downs and ‘gut rehabs’ reaping the island’s buildings. A ‘gut rehab’ is the term applied to the process of tearing out the interiors of historic buildings while keeping necessary exterior elements intact. Even with the renewed interest in saving the very part of Nantucket that makes it so valuable to residents and visitors, its history; these glimpses of the past are still being removed to the island’s garbage dump, and replaced with modern open floor plans, new materials finished to appear old and adorned with coffee table books describing the historic structures of the island.

The stricter guidelines and increased education, while seeming to quiet most of the destructive practices, have not yet quelled the loss of historic buildings through the inside out. The year 2006 gave way to a ‘gut rehab’ that touched many residents and vacationers. The complete renovation of 105 Main Street resulted in the loss of historic fabric from one of the oldest houses on the island. This house, prominently located at the top of Main Street in front of the civil war monument, is dear to many people, shown

through the numerous paintings and photographs associated with the house.\textsuperscript{43} (Fig. 6) Work on the house, so visible to the public because of its location, stirred up many emotions and the awareness that destructive preservation practices are still occurring right in the historic core. It is necessary to understand the process of the ‘gut rehab’ and provide recommendations in order to stop the trend.

3.3 The Loss of a Historic Interior at 105 Main Street: The Starbuck-Kilvert House

3.3.1 History

The house situated at 105 Main Street has had a long and outstanding history. This once described “ultimate lean-to” house is believed to have moved from the first settlement, Sherburne, by one of the original families on the island, the Starbucks. The house remained in their family until the 1920s.\textsuperscript{44} The scarcity of trees on the island, and the high cost to import lumber from the mainland necessitated the need to move. The oldest part of the house was constructed around 1690 by Christopher Starbuck. It moved to its current location around 1700 on the corner of Main and Gardner Streets. As the Starbuck family grew, so did the house. It is believed that the original portion of the house moved from Sherburne created the east section. The subsequent addition sits as the west section of the house which created almost two separate houses. The addition is


\textsuperscript{44} Marie M. Coffin. Historic American Building Survey, 105 Main Street, Nantucket, MA. (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, 1965)
believed to be built between 1729 and 1757 with the later date discovered on the wall of an upstairs closet.\textsuperscript{45}

The resulting side-gabled house runs along Main Street, once referred to as the highway of Nantucket.\textsuperscript{46} The house pre-dates the now famous cobblestones of Main Street which stabilized its path in the 1850s. After the road’s course was finalized, houses were constructed flush with the street, however 105 Main Street faces due south, with its long roof facing north to cast off the strong winter winds from reaching the interior of the house providing an example of building history on Nantucket.

3.3.2 Description of House Pre-2006 Renovations

The house of 105 Main Street transformed to the lean-to style resulted from the necessity for growth, just as many houses on the island have endured many additions to fit families. The original east section of timber frame construction enveloped two rooms on top of each other. The great room of the house was located under the chamber with a "massive chimney and flue anchoring the west wall of the house."\textsuperscript{47} The fireplace on the first floor of the east section had an oven in the back suggesting that the room was used as a kitchen as well.\textsuperscript{48} The addition on the west consisted of more rooms on the first and second floors. Finally a shed was added to the rear of the house to create the "distinctive 1:3 lean-to roof profile."\textsuperscript{49} (Fig. 7)

The house at 105 Main Street with its differing building stages can provide a glimpse of the past. Many of the elements of the building hint at the distinctive building

\textsuperscript{45} Coffin. Historic American Building Survey
\textsuperscript{46} Coffin. Historic American Building Survey
\textsuperscript{47} Butler. "A Look Inside One of Nantucket’s Architectural Treasures," 23.
\textsuperscript{48} Coffin. Historic American Building Survey
\textsuperscript{49} Butler. "A Look Inside One of Nantucket’s Architectural Treasures," 23.
trends of the times. The planked front door is slightly off-center from the chimney revealing a sign of early timber framing.\(^{50}\) (Fig. 8) The massive chimney reveals the way of life centered on the hearth. It also functionally served as “a backbone for the hand-hewn, mortise-and-tenon timbers that were hung off its solid masonry.”\(^{51}\) The twelve-over-twelve double sash windows replaced many of the original diamond-shaped casement windows typical of the early houses on the island.\(^{52}\) The interior of the house reflected a way of past life in which families lived close to each other. The circular floor plan, connecting all rooms, is a typical Nantucket Quaker style that allows for light and space. Each of the interior rooms included a fireplace with a narrow closet or bake oven, paneling, mantel and red hand-made brickwork. The front hall houses a steep winding staircase with an abundance of old-wood and hand-smoothed plaster.\(^{53}\) (Fig. 9)

### 3.3.3. Preservation of the House

The significance of the house located at 105 Main Street, is substantiated in the fact that it was one of the few surviving late seventeenth century lean-to houses, with the original section being moved from the first settlement of Nantucket and relatively unaltered.\(^{54}\) The achievement of this house to maintain its historic fabric throughout the years is highly a factor of the stewardship of its owners. The original owners, the Starbuck’s with numerous generations, valued the worth of the house and maintained it for years until the 1920s, were it briefly changed hands twice before resting with

\(^{50}\) Coffin. *Historic American Building Survey*

\(^{51}\) Butler. “A Look Inside One of Nantucket’s Architectural Treasures,” 19.

\(^{52}\) Coffin. *Historic American Building Survey*

\(^{53}\) Butler. “A Look Inside One of Nantucket’s Architectural Treasures,” 19.

\(^{54}\) Coffin. *Historic American Building Survey*
generations of the Kilvert family until the very early twenty-first century. The Kilverts raised many children, grandchildren and neighborhood friends in the house. They all have found memories of the house and the history of the island that it instilled. One member, Lilly stated, “Our house served as a reminder of what made America great. The tenacity, the backbone, the bravery of all the great Nantucket families, all great American families were alive in that house. Nantucket takes great pride in the history of the island and our house evoked that.”

The house has experienced minor renovations, until recently, to its structure over past years with simple updates for rotted wood, incorporation of appliances and plumbing, and stylistic alterations. Modern paper and plaster were put onto the interior sections as styles changed throughout the years. The preservation of the house began out of necessity with the lack and high cost of materials. In the 1920’s the house was restored in which only the sills had to be replaced. This is due to the fact that in the earliest houses, sills were laid directly into the ground and were therefore the first part of the framing to rot. At the same time, the oak beams, girts, corner posts, fireplaces with their mantles, and the wide pine floor boards were all restored to their original condition.

The Kilverts, who occupied the house for decades and preserved it fully, finally decided to leave the house, at which time it was left uninhabited for some years. The recognition of its careful preservation throughout the centuries was duly noted, and the residents of the island wanted to share it with the public. The Nantucket Preservation

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55 Coffin. Historic American Building Survey
56 Lilly Kilvert. “Obituary for 105 Main Street” The Inquirer and Mirror, July 2006.
57 Coffin. Historic American Building Survey
Trust was asked to use the house as their preservation show-case. “The quality of its architecture and the promise seen in old photos of the gardens, coupled with the vast quantity of archival documents and historical records and the undeniable vulnerability of one of the island’s most respected structures, made the decision and easy one.”58 It took careful and thoughtful work to bring the property back to its former condition, before it was vacated, and the Starbuck-Kilvert house was opened as a showcase in the summer of 2003. It provided examples and educational ways to work with historic interiors of homes rather than to rip them out. The NPT believes strongly that the reason interiors do reside in landfills and because owners destroy the history is for the lack of knowledge.59 NPT wanted to illustrate through the showcase house that historic structures can adapt to the twenty-first century.

3.3.4. Transfer of the House

The house at 105 Main Street had many gracious owners, especially the recent Kilvert family. Their invested interest and time made the home part of everyone’s heart on the island. With a strong trend of gutting historic interiors, it was a symbol of preservation right at the heart of the island, at the top of Main Street. Visitors and residents pass the house almost daily, knowing that the inside of the home holds a true part of history of the island. The last Kilvert to own the house, Charles Kilvert, passed away. His children were not financially able to retain the residence after his death.60 The children wanted to preserve the home and were approached by many real estate agents who suggested they

58 Butler. “A Look Inside One of Nantucket’s Architectural Treasures,” 23.
subdivide the property or gut it, because it would be a wise financial decision and give them a great deal of money. They did not want this; however they did want to forever protect the historic authenticity that the house had to offer from the inside out by placing easements. Unfortunately, they could not afford the easements before putting the house on the market. “The Kilvert children also did not think the house would live on with restrictions.”61 They wanted a family to purchase the house and be a steward of the property the way all the generations before had done. “They strongly believed that preserving a home did not involve turning it into a museum.”62 With such a strong market on the island, the house was put up for sale and left uninhabited for many years, but was in proper shape after the NPT restored it in 2003. The property was divided and sold separately, an open piece of property with its outbuilding moved to the lot with the house. In 2004, with no easements or deed restrictions, the house at 105 Main Street was sold to a retired couple for an amount exceedingly less than the adjacent open lot.63

3.3.5 Chronology of Rehabilitation Events

Edward and Wanda DeSeta decided to buy a home on Nantucket to retire after vacationing on the island for many years. They purchased the house for $2,100,000 in October, 2004, and split their time between Nantucket, Palm Beach, Florida, and Charleston, South Carolina.64 As many owners, there are different aspects of the island that draw people to it; be it the beaches, the history, or the quite winter months. The

61 Brace. ““HDC Issues Second Stop Work Order for 105 Main St.”
63 Michael May, interview by Alexis Casale, Nantucket Preservation Trust. 20 December 2006.
DeSetas bought the house at 105 Main Street. The new owners felt work must be done to the house in order to live in it. There are quotes stating that the structure was barely being held up however, it is fact that the house was renovated in the 1930s to stabilize and it was again in 2003 for the Nantucket Preservation Trust’s Showcase. Edward DeSeta stated in an interview that he was told the house was in good shape; however he believed that house was literally going to fall down if nothing was done. The DeSetas needed to do some interior and exterior work to the house and asked different designers to work with them. The first designer they approached walked the house with the new owners and believed that they completely wanted to gut the house. He did the work on the cottage for the DeSetas located behind the house and did not continue with them after that for the rehabilitation project. However, DeSeta stated that he understood the history of the house and only planned to change what was necessary.

The DeSetas lived in the house during the summer of 2005 while the cottage was being rebuilt. During this stay, they believed they understood what was needed to be done to the house. The DeSetas planned to fix up the bathrooms and kitchen, put in air conditioning, replace the electrical wiring inside the walls, replace some plumbing that was lead piping, replace part of the chimney, and replace the windows with correct sashes and authentic antique glass where the frames and sills were rotted out. The DeSetas also planned to put in a basement for the house. Mr. DeSeta stated “We’re going to make it

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65 Brace, “HDC Issues Second Stop Work Order for 105 Main St.”
67 Brace, “Christopher Starbuck House Undergoes Restoration.”
look like it’s never been touched.”\textsuperscript{68} He removed all the floorboards stating he would reuse them; however he never did.\textsuperscript{69}

The DeSetas worked with their architect, Rex Ingram, and had approval to lay a foundation and make alterations to the exterior, such as the replacement of windows and shingles, and partial replacement of the chimney. Since there is no regulation on the island for the interior of houses, the owners did not need approval for any work done on the inside of the house. According to Rex Ingram, they wanted to alter parts of the interior to foster their life for retirement, such as replacing the narrow slanted staircase to the upper floor.\textsuperscript{70}

The work began in the winter of 2006 and it was hard not to miss the “raised house on cribbing held up by I-Beams so that Toscana Corp could prepare the ground underneath for a new foundation.”\textsuperscript{71} The HDC and numerous residents were extremely concerned and apprehensive about the work on the house. The house was lowered to its foundation in May, 2006 to a height approximately one foot taller than was approved.\textsuperscript{72} The HDC had approved a rounded-stone appearance for the foundation; however there were angled cut stones for the exposed concrete basement foundation. This caused the change in height.\textsuperscript{73} The disregard for the appropriate height and stone use caused the HDC to issue a stop work order. Nantucket’s regulations require a stop work order when violations to Certificates of Appropriateness become apparent. The work on the structure

\textsuperscript{68} Brace, “Christopher Starbuck House Undergoes Restoration.”
\textsuperscript{69} Brace, “Christopher Starbuck House Undergoes Restoration.”
\textsuperscript{70} Rex Ingram, interview by Alexis Casale. Ingram Architects. 26 January 2007.
\textsuperscript{71} Brace, “Christopher Starbuck House Undergoes Restoration.”
\textsuperscript{72} Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.
\textsuperscript{73} Brace “HDC Confronts Alleged Violations at 105 Main.”
cannot continue until the violations have been resolved.\textsuperscript{74} The order was issued by HDC Chairman Dirk Roggeveen to keep the building at its approved height of twenty-six feet four inches and to replace the cut stone with rounded stone. The alterations were corrected and the work began again.

Another stop work order was issued the following month, in June, stating that DeSeta had violated the approval of his Certificate of Appropriateness for removing the sheathing of the front and rear walls of his house, contrary to his presentation in August, 2005.\textsuperscript{75} The HDC stated that DeSeta was “doing a demolition board by board but without a demolition permit from the Building Department.” The HDC had approved the chimney to be rebuilt, the new foundation and some replacement of windows, but the scope of work on the house was much more than the HDC had ever approved.\textsuperscript{76} DeSetas attorney, Bill Hunter defended it was not a demolition by part, but a removal of boards that were completely rotted beyond repair. In addition to the issue of board removals, the HDC was concerned with the interior of the house. The HDC has no regulation over the interior; however it was evident that major changes were occurring. This was made evident, because when the house was initially raised and the sheaths came off, one could completely see through the house and only see minimal structural elements left.\textsuperscript{77} It can be somewhat concerning to see through a house, as they are built to enclose. (Fig. 10)

DeSeta finally agreed to work with the HDC and list of preservation consultants he was provided with to draw up a framing diagram of how they could put it all back

\textsuperscript{74} Aaron Marcavitch and Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.

\textsuperscript{75} Brace “HDC Issues Second Stop Work Order for 105 Main Street.”

\textsuperscript{76} Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.

\textsuperscript{77} Brace “HDC Issues Second Stop Work Order for 105 Main Street.”
together. In the end, the HDC allowed the renovations to continue and the house was finished in the fall of 2006 with a new chimney, sheathing, shingles, foundation, windows, door, roofing, and interior. The natural coloring of the new materials allow for the house to stand out against the weathered shingled houses of its neighborhood, but in time, the materials will weather and the house will fit in again. As the architect Rex Ingram stated, “no one will ever know work went on in the house, because it will look like it did in the past.”79 (Fig. 11)

3.4 Analysis of “Gut Rehab” at 105 Main Street

The Historic District Commission of Nantucket has the regulatory power over the exteriors of houses and not the interiors. Without the protection of deed restrictions or easements by previous home-owners, all interiors of the island are not safe from demolition. The ‘gut rehab’ at 105 Main Street follows the typical steps for all ‘gut rehabs’ on the island such as its predecessor at 43 Centre Street and soon to be the Dreamland Theater. There are a couple of main reasons for the loss of the historic materials on the island which range from the regulation control to education.

It is mandatory for any construction, new or alterations to exteriors, a Certificate of Appropriateness must first be obtained by the HDC. This is true for not only historic homes moved from Sherburne, but as well for additions to sheds and new housing developments at mid-island. The “ultimate lean-to” house of Nantucket, The Starbuck-Kilvert house, with its original materials, may not be reviewed by the commission until the end of the list at the weekly HDC meetings. The meetings can be extremely long for

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78 Brace “HDC Issues Second Stop Work Order for 105 Main Street.”
the reviewers, who are human and become tired, can have altered perceptions of what is appropriate. As with 43 Centre Street, 105 Main Street was awarded a Certificate of Appropriateness to replace the chimney, put in a basement with exposed foundation, replace the windows and re-shingle the house.\(^{80}\) Once the work begins, it seems that these few regulations are a head-way to do whatever seems necessary to the house after that. When the houses are raised, owners claim that the materials ‘fell off’ the structures because they were completely rotted.\(^{81}\) At which time, because there are so many buildings for the HDC to regulate, it can be too late to realize the harm done. The low cost of a penalties instated by the HDC are not a major threat to the homeowners.\(^{82}\)

The loss of interiors is a result of the lack of regulation. There are many interested home-owners who want to save the historic materials of their homes, and are placing restrictions and easements on them. The easements are costly but can provide a tax break.\(^{83}\) The high cost and fear that the future resale value of the house will decrease dissuades many home-owners from placing easements. There is also a fear that the restrictions will create a museum of their home. There is a lack of information about restrictions for owners to realize that it is possible to place easements on specific parts of a structure, such as floorboards, doors, etc. and not on entire interiors.

The island of Nantucket has not been surveyed since the 1960s, so many of the early twentieth century buildings are not considered contributing to the historic district and are vulnerable to alterations and demolitions. The new survey, to be completed in

\(^{80}\) Aaron Marcavitch and Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.

\(^{81}\) Gabriella Burnham. “Gut Feelings.” The Inquirer and Mirror. 25 June 2006, Sec. B.

\(^{82}\) Aaron Marcavitch and Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.

the fall of 2007 will update the historic district, as well as possibly regulate some interiors.

Another major reason for the loss of the historic interiors is the lack of basic awareness and education. Many new homeowners do not know what treasure they have under their fingertips and they are very willing to throw it away for the comforts of modern living. The Nantucket Preservation Trust, ‘Sconset Trust, and various other organizations try to reach out to the new owners to educate them on historic buildings, how to renovate them and who to work with. The DeSetas were not contacted when they purchased their house, so they may have not been given the valuable information necessary from preservation professionals before taking on their renovations. As Michael May of the Nantucket Preservation Trust stated, “why would someone buy an expensive Picasso just to paint over it because they did not like the red color.” Buying an antique is having an authentic piece of history but requires special care and understanding.84

It is not only the homeowner’s lack of education about historic structures; it is the combination of architect, builder and workers. For example, Rex Ingram, who worked with the DeSetas on the renovation of 105 Main Street had been practicing architecture on Nantucket for six years, first with Lyman Perry and then opening his own firm.85 His job was to work for the owners and achieve their wants. They bought the house for their retirement and were nervous about safety in their older age. Rex Ingram wanted to bring the house up to code, work with the regulations by the HDC and get the owners what they wanted. He felt somewhat stuck in the middle and believed that all needed to make compromises. He stated, “it is difficult to work with a privately owned building that has

84 Michael May, interview by Alexis Casale, Nantucket Preservation Trust. 20 December 2006.
external controls and that if they wanted so much control over the structure than a public entity should have purchased the building and made it a museum.” He knew what the client wanted and was going to help them get it. Rex stated, “while studying architecture he did not study historic preservation or the theory of it.” He understands that it is the job of the HDC to maintain the historical integrity of the island, so he feels he does not need to bother with the historic preservation side of the renovation. He believes that the HDC tells him what to do in terms of renovating historic homes, and if they approve his designs, then he believes he is doing the right thing. Rex stated, “the HDC got in the middle and was trying to control the interior of the house which was out of their jurisdiction.” However, he wanted to follow some of the interior requests to appease all involved. Rex Ingram firmly believes that he did not change the structure because the finished product looked the same as the old one.86

The loss of historic interiors is not the fault of a single factor; it is a combination of numerous elements. It is necessary to understand all sides of the story, which brings to light how people learn and react to historic preservation. It is not always an understood practice or concept and needs to be better informed to all people involved, not just regulated by a small committee. As DeSeta’s attorney stated, “This was never presented as a preservation of the house. As I understand it, this was a renovation of 105 Main Street, not a preservation of a historic structure on Nantucket.”87

87 Brace “HDC Issues Second Stop Work Order for 105 Main Street.”
Chapter Four: Alteration of Historic Landscapes

4.1 Introduction

The landscape of Nantucket was originally formed by the carvings and debris of a moving glacier. The natural landscape consists of wide and sandy beaches, moorlands, bogs, glaciated valleys, hills and hummocks. “From almost every spot on the island there is a view of water; ocean, sound, harbor or pond.”88 The island is predominately flat with some rise and falls throughout mid-island. The landscape was open with the lack of tree cover when the proprietors first came to the island. Since the soil was poor for farming the best way to work the land was through raising sheep. Trees were introduced to the island during the height of whaling period when Henry Coffin, son of an original proprietor, bought vegetation to the island, which is still evident today with the elm trees that line Main Street.89

The island’s townscape grew around town centers. Most of the island’s landscape, outside of town and ‘Sconset, was left open. This type of close-knit town was created out of necessity; established to keep people together. Men would go out whaling and fishing for long periods of time and the women would find solace in the close relationships with their neighbors. “The women, left alone in these houses when their husbands were at sea, took great comfort in the proximity to each other and to the street where it was possible to watch “the pass” [passerby] from the front windows.”90

Townscapes developed not only through the need for community but as well for the need

88 Forman, 22.
89 Tyler, 31.
of shelter from the winds that roared over the treeless land, and because travel on the island was limited to a train that connected the two concentrations of ‘Town’ and ‘Sconset. To keep supplies close by, the townspeople would house their animals on their property, which they fenced with low barricades to keep their livestock within the boundaries of their property while still enabling neighborly contact. This created open parcels in and among the townscapes. (Fig. 12)

Nantucket’s landscapes are sought after picturesque examples of open space. The diversity of the landscapes is manifest in the beaches, moors, ponds, plains, bluffs and marshes. The natural landscapes of the island are shaped by its glacial geological history, its vegetation and the adaptation and preservation by man. The land mass of an island has a constantly evolving border that is shaped by tides and wind. The barren windswept land of Nantucket originally deterred the inhabitants from building upon it, because it was difficult to farm the land and find protection from the weather.

The island has been shaped by various historic factors. The glacial valleys that stretch inland more than nine-thousand feet, created ponds and inflow of ocean water, ultimately fostering an ecology for salt-water species. The interior of the island, the moraine, is a “soft, undulating terrain of small hills and depressions that hint of areas hidden behind its crests and distant vistas.” This area too was created by the receding glacier and farmers who grazed sheep in this area, creating a well mowed and open land. The sandy beaches gradually rise to grassy dunes or steeply rise to the slowly receding cliffs. Each element created by the glacier, the passing of time or man has culminated in

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91 Lang and Stout, 34.
92 Lang and Stout, 125.
93 Lang and Stout, 140.
a timeless open landscape, left behind by the inhabitants setting up their villages. (Fig. 13)

Nantucket has been experiencing changes through widespread growth; severely altering the historic landscapes. “Sprawl, though it looks different here, still consumes ‘our’ dwindling countryside.”\textsuperscript{94} Developers are quick to purchase and subdivide any available land that is not yet protected by restrictions. “Today the moors, beaches and undeveloped expanses perhaps draw more people to the island than quaint Main Street. And yet, the open landscape is Nantucket’s primary and therefore, most exploited resource.”\textsuperscript{95} The townscapes are also being tainted by the need for expanding development. The alterations to the landscapes are occurring for various reasons, such as changes in zoning, Certificates of Appropriateness awarded by the HDC for construction and alterations, and lack of understanding and education.

4.2 Historic Townscapes

4.2.1 Lot Percentage

The historic town of Nantucket began to take shape hundreds of years ago when it first moved from the Sherburne settlement around 1700. Not only did the island’s people move, but the houses, meeting houses, construction materials and animals went along with them. The new locations of the homes allowed space for yards and animals. Deeds


\textsuperscript{95} Lang and Stout, 125.
passed not only the land and buildings, but the animals associated with them.\textsuperscript{96} This open lot development in town was a way of life for the inhabitants, room enough to live and provide community. Currently, houses constructed in town are subject to many regulations set forth by zoning and the Historic District Commission’s building guidelines. Any new construction must be approved not only for style and materials, but size, proportion and lot placement as well. Previous zoning regulations have maintained that structures only cover a maximum of fifty percent of the lot as in keeping with the historic open space surrounding homes.\textsuperscript{97} During the wave of preservation in the 1960s, some restorations included tearing down adjacent houses to create gardens and yards. Though the tearing down of houses was not the ideal preservation effort, it did maintain the open lots of the downtown area.

The island of Nantucket has been experiencing problems with affordable housing and maintaining local businesses. The smaller establishments are being pushed out for larger brand-named stores and the residential structures are larger and more expensive. In response to the change, the planning board decided to restructure the regulation concerning the percentage of buildable lot area. The new sanction allows the buildable percentage of a lot to be seventy-five percent to allow for and enable mixed use. The hope was to create lower rents and keep the local businesses. However, there has not been an increase in affordable apartments, or an abundance of local businesses. Rather, wealthy homeowners are taking advantage of the new regulation and building either bigger new houses in town or building larger additions to their homes.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{96} Lang and Stout, 34.  
\textsuperscript{97} Michael May, interview by Alexis Casale, Nantucket Preservation Trust. 20 December 2006.  
\textsuperscript{98} Michael May, interview by Alexis Casale, Nantucket Preservation Trust. 20 December 2006.
The historic thoroughfare of Main Street in downtown Nantucket has witnessed changes and additions of houses lining it. One of the new arrivals to the street came in the 1960s as a colonial revival style house with gambrel roof. The size, style and proportion of the house fit extremely well into the townscape as it does not overwhelm its neighbors and illustrates that it is contemporary and not from the 1800s.99

Approximately forty years later, a new home is nearing completion on the street. The lot of 105 Main Street was split in two and sold separately. The new house constructed on the empty half of the lot is close to taking up seventy-five percent of its property. It is obvious that the new house takes up much more land than its neighbors and seems to dwarf many of the surrounding houses. (Fig. 14) The style of the house blends well, but its sheer size alters the entire streetscape.

The historic townscape of Nantucket is not only changing because of the size of houses, but also for increased privacy. The town has historically been a community allowing for interaction through the fences. The HDC provides guidelines to keep the fences historic. However, the fences and shrubs, used as property barriers, are higher and denser today, completely closing in homes and properties from neighbors. Residents feel empowered because they are spending enormous amounts of money on their new homes to do what they please with their property. With the higher prices, the owners want to keep their property private and elusive.

4.2.2 Garages

Automobiles on the island are a more recent concern. Initially, there was no need to shelter automobiles, because there were none. At first, there were carriages housed in

99 Michael May, interview by Alexis Casale, Nantucket Preservation Trust. 20 December 2006.
carriage houses. These buildings were built mimicking the style of the houses of the historic town of Nantucket. In recent times, it has been a struggle to deal with the over abundance of cars on the island. Parking in the downtown area is a constant problem. New houses in town want a garage to make life easier. “In the historic town it is imperative to conceal or minimize the visual impact of garages. Placement of the garage to the rear of the lot is preferred.”\textsuperscript{100} Garages are to be reminiscent of boat houses or carriage houses and separated from the main house but sited in relation to it as stated by the HDC guidelines.\textsuperscript{101} “The face of the garage should be positioned farther back on the lot than the main wall of the house or the doors of the garage can be turned so they do not face the street or public view.”\textsuperscript{102} The regulations set forth by the HDC are very straightforward and reasonable. These requirements were violated in the building of a garage on downtown’s Fair Street. The construction of a new house with garage was completed this fall of 2007 in the historic downtown area on Fair Street. The house is situated adjacent to the Quaker Meeting House in which the Nantucket Historical Association is housed. During the construction, the foundation of the Quaker house began to shake and a stop work order was issued. The project never had approval to dig so far below ground level for its foundation. However, the construction continued and no harm to the meeting house ensued. However, the outbuilding located immediately next to the meeting house is the garage. The two front elevations of the meeting house and the garage are flush with one another facing the street. The design for the garage follows the

\textsuperscript{100} Lang and Stout, 61. \\
\textsuperscript{101} Lang and Stout, 105. \\
\textsuperscript{102} Lang and Stout, 105.
guidelines for style set forth by the HDC; however, the siting completely alters the streetscape. (Fig. 15)

This project did receive a Certificate of Appropriateness, because according to Mark Voight of the HDC,

“Due to zoning and building code setbacks there was only one place for the structure to be located which lined up with the front of the historic building next door. The garage was setback from the front of the historic building on the same lot but the adjacent historic building is offset from the front of the street more than the predominate context of the majority of other structures. With all of these factors taken into consideration the garage wasn’t feasible any other way. The property owner had a right to build it and it technically met the guidelines.”

The commission found it reasonable since no other solution would work for the garage. Looking back, Mark Voight believes that this was the wrong decision. The owner of the structure is a predominant figure in the preservation community of Nantucket. He has given generous amounts of money to the organizations and rehabilitated historic structures. It can be assumed that this special relationship with the preservation community allowed him to have a variance on the guidelines. Money may be the answer to altering the historic integrity of Nantucket.

4.3 Historic Landscapes

4.3.1 Large-Lot Development

Nantucket’s historic landscape is being threatened by development, both sub-division and large-lot. They are consuming the landscape. Large-lot development began

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103 Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.
because of zoning laws passed in the 1970s for low density districts with minimum lot sizes. A house located outside of land serviced by town utilities needs a lot of 15,000 square feet or more to add its own well and septic system, thus a want for larger lots. The development is also occurring because people want their own uninhibited view of Nantucket. “While its open landscapes and undeveloped moors have historically accentuated the compactness of the old Nantucket settlements, with large-lot development, the island is being divided into tiny pieces, each claimed by a building.”

4.3.2 Developments

Large-lot development is not the only type consuming the land, but subdivision is as well. Two new divisions are currently underway, one near Cisco Beach and one near the ‘Sconset nine-hole golf course off Milestone Road. The developments slated for construction have lots divided up along a cul-de-sac road. The HDC’s guidelines and the Planning Board’s Rules and Regulations Governing the Subdivision of Land (The Subdivision Control Law of Massachusetts (Sections 81K through 81GG inclusive, of Chapter 41 of the General Laws of the Commonwealth) adopted February 16, 1955 with amendments) require development to be clustered to allow for a maximum percentage of open land.

The rules are concrete and only allow for subdivisions on the open areas of the island. Many of the developments consider the guidelines and lot assignments, but are still consuming the landscape, mostly in the areas zoned for limited use. The new developments have their lots laid out surrounding a cul-de-sac style. (Fig. 16) This is

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104 Lang and Stout, 102.
105 Lang and Stout, 102.
referred to as a ‘typical suburban residential pod layout.’\textsuperscript{106} While this type of dead-end street provides quiet for the houses, it also promotes increased sprawl with the need for the next cul-de-sac street and the next.\textsuperscript{107}

The need for affordable housing on the island is a constant problem. It is desperately needed, for the island is loosing valuable residents, for example, the principle of the school had to finally move because he could not afford to live there anymore. The town thought that subdivisions would provide the necessary needed affordable housing. The zoning bylaw ATM by Art 48 is a major residential development special permit (MRD). This Bylaw is to “permit and encourage development which is more in keeping with Nantucket’s history than typical suburban sprawl.” It is also used to encourage variances for affordable housing. However, this bylaw is entirely voluntary and not necessary for developers to follow.

4.4 Analysis

The 1997 Nantucket Buildout Analysis concluded that the island has a total, for all categories, of a little more than twelve-thousand buildable lots. With protected land, and less and less buildable area, there is a race to build on Nantucket with the island’s affluence growing and the desire for houses is abundant. Houses will be built on all possible lots left in the historic core areas, because of their desirability. Managing the need for affordable units and small businesses has inadvertently allowed larger houses into the areas. The zoning bylaws need to account for this misuse of the new codes.


\textsuperscript{107} Daniels, 403.
Developers know they can make a lot of money with each new development and with less land available, are approaching property owners who are willing to sell their acreage.

Nantucket has all the challenges associated with sprawl on the mainland where to put it, how to arrange it, and what it looks like and how it impacts the natural environment and working landscapes. Nantucket has been conscious of the later two challenges by establishing requirements for clustered development for the maximum protection of the environment and the design guidelines set forth by the town and HDC. It is still an issue of where to put the new homes and how to arrange them. Ian McHarg introduced in his Design with Nature (1971) a layering technique to formulate best placements. It is evident that the guidelines set forth by the HDC have introduced this same idea, so as not to place development in constraint areas, such as valley floors, on hill tops and away from stream beds. Yet, this has limited the island even more relative to development locations. The automobiles on the island have allowed the development to stretch to the farthest reaches. The new subdivisions have no centralized commercial structures to develop around, since they have no zoning for this. The dense cluster development has been replaced by sprawl.

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108 Daniels, 400.
109 Daniels, 406.
Chapter Five: Preservation Program Faults and Proposed Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

It is evident through the research and evaluation of specific preservation issues affecting Nantucket that these areas of concern need to be addressed and corrected. The historic integrity of the island is not only in the hands of the regulatory bodies, but as well the homeowners, the general public, architects, workers and tourists. It is an obligation of all parties to ensure the historic authenticity, which the island so encompasses, continues. Two areas of critical concern that need to be addressed are that of education and awareness and the regulatory bodies and their processes.

5.2 The Value of Education and Awareness

Nantucket has made many forward strides in its advocacy for preservation. Many organizations do educate the public on the architectural and historical resources the island possesses. The Nantucket Preservation Trust holds architectural walking tours that address issues of preservation and ongoing lectures and events for the public. The NPT hopes to have an educational program up and running this fall of 2007 for elementary students to understand, appreciate and get hands on experience with the historical architectural resources they have at their fingertips. Other organizations are working the same way to increase public education of the preservation issues and what the public can
do about these issues such as the ‘Sconset Trust, Conservation Foundation, and many others.

Though the preservation programs are advertised throughout the island, a large number of residents and visitors do not benefit from the information on historic structures and landscapes. There are numerous publications of the island, such as the Heart of the Sea, by Nathaniel Philbrick, a popular best-seller that has attuned the public to aspects of the history of Nantucket. Much of the public is interested in the history learned of the island through books and museums, but it is more difficult for them to understand that the history is all around them, alive in the buildings and landscapes. They want their historic homes to retain modern conveniences that the twenty-first century offers with its larger floor area ratios and modern materials. This lack of understanding and education on historic homes and their interiors is not only an issue for the homeowner, but the real estate agent, architect, attorney and builder as well. It is imperative that education on historic homes, landscapes and preservation be improved and made available for all.

Nantucket’s design guidelines enable those involved in the design process to follow an order that maintains the historic style of architecture, having created its own vernacular.\textsuperscript{110} This outward display of uniformity through materials, styles, shapes and proportions portrays this vernacular. Through the design guidelines and review process, Nantucket has maintained its uniform architectural style, unlike its close neighbor of Cape Cod that reveals a mixture of styles and materials. The different style of buildings can make it easier for the public to identify the historic structures from the modern ones. On Nantucket, it is not as readily apparent which structure is historic, since they all start

to look the same. Many believe that if it looks old, then it should still be considered historic.\textsuperscript{111} One way to distinguish historic houses is through house markers from programs that are held by NPT and the Nantucket Historical Association. However, not all houses worthy of the recognition, display a marker.

\textbf{5.3 Utilization of Visual and Technological Aides}

In museums, most visitors prefer to view original artifacts and not their replicas. If the people of Nantucket could understand what historic buildings they possess in the palm of their hands, the appreciation would increase for the safe-keeping of these artifacts. Clay Lancaster in his 1972 publication stated that the island contained almost eight-hundred pre-civil war intact structures, the most of anywhere in the country. Approximately thirty years later, Nantucket still promotes the same statement. However, when preservationists, workers and real estate agents are asked if this number is accurate, no one knows for sure. Many of the structures on the island have been altered and no longer can be considered historic.

It would be extremely beneficial for the island to complete an updated study of their historic resources in order to document the historic structures remaining, and those that still maintain their interiors. A full study of the island’s remaining historic structures, new construction and complete alterations should be pursued to ensure an updated, accurate inventory of the island’s truly historic structures. This study should be completed not only in the historic core areas, but throughout the entire island as well. This comprehensive work should be transferred to metadata so that it can be mapped into

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{111} Rex Ingram, interview by Alexis Casale. Ingram Architects. 26 January 2007.}
the Geographic Information System (GIS) map that already exists for the island. This updated information, in the form of photographs, drawings, history write-ups and any other pertinent information, should be made public for anyone and all to view with printable versions readily available. This study may produce evidence that there are far less number of intact structures than previously believed. It could be in itself a tour for the public to see what is actually historic and what just looks historic. This type of study will be timely and expensive and could be completed by the summer students, of Preservation Institute: Nantucket (PIN), who have previously documented numerous structures on the island, such as the Lifesaving Station this past summer of 2006 at Surfside Beach. A survey for the twentieth century structures, including interiors, which the NPT received a grant for, will begin the summer of 2007. There is also a program, Project ACKMap that is under discussion with the Civic Associations, for bringing this twentieth century survey to GIS maps. These are great starting points for the complete detailed survey of the island. This new survey could be compared to the built-out analysis completed in 1997 for recommendations pertaining to developmental issues on the historic landscapes.

5.4 Alteration of Regulations

Preservation issues affecting Nantucket mean more than just ‘gut rehabs’ and loss of historic landscapes; they also impact teardowns, renovations, additions, and other considerations. The construction on the island is subject to strict design guidelines set forth by the Historic District Commission. The process to review all applications for
Certificates of Appropriateness is intense and necessary for all building on the island. Zoning and set-back regulations are also a part of the preservation movement on the island in keeping with Nantucket historic style and integrity. Although the process for building on the island is complicated improvement by the regulatory bodies of the process would be beneficial. The composition of the HDC, the area of focus by the HDC and the zoning of the island can all be improved to enhance the continued preservation of Nantucket.

5.4.1 Regulatory Body: HDC

The Historic District Commission is comprised of voluntary residents of Nantucket. The commission can and does consist of people that have no training in the design sector, building or preservation fields. As stated by Mark Voight, this is not always considered bad; “grandmothers can have a better idea of preservation than that of an architect.”112 Without a proper understanding of historic preservation, certain decisions may not always be in the best interest of the preservation of the island’s historic structures. It would enhance the preservation activities of the HDC by having at least one preservation professional on the commission for the regulatory considerations.

Another option to insure the input of a preservation professional is to use a model set forth by the Beacon Hill Historic District in Boston, Massachusetts. All construction in Beacon Hill must have a Certificate of Appropriateness before it can begin, the same as Nantucket. The applications are looked at by the Beacon Hill Historic District Commission once a month. However, before the application is submitted, a preservation professional

112 Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.
professional must first be consulted in the Environmental Department of the Beacon Hill District. This guarantees that the correct professional is notified of the alterations and new construction occurring in the district. This mandatory review of applications by a preservation professional could benefit the island of Nantucket, because it would provide more time for the HDC to concentrate on applications instead of having time-consuming consults for questions regarding preservation. This preservation professional would readily available to help in any issues.

5.4.2 Regulatory Process: HDC

An area of concentration for the HDC could also be established to allow for better attention to buildings within the historic core areas. Currently, there is no priority given to applications for Certificates of Appropriateness inside the core areas of town and ‘Sconset. The weekly meetings review applications in the order that they are received. An alteration to a twenty-first century garage in mid-island could be first on the list and the complete restoration to an early eighteenth century home in the middle of town could be last. The meetings can run for hours and by the end of the night, many of the people providing approvals are tired and weary of the applications in front of them. The meetings could be divided up weekly, for example, every other Tuesday could be dedicated to only applications in the core areas and the other Tuesdays to areas outside

114 Aaron Marcavitch and Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.
115 Aaron Marcavitch and Mark Voight, interview by Alexis Casale. Historic District Commission. 20 December 2006.
the core. This could allow for better concentration for the renovations and new
construction in the prominent historic areas. The order for consideration of applications
at the weekly meetings could also be altered to consider the core areas in the early part of
the process. Having the staff and commission of the HDC aware and alert during the
meetings for regulations in the core areas could benefit the island’s historic structures and
landscapes.

5.4.4 Alterations to Zoning

Finally, it could be highly beneficial to alter the zoning of the island to
allow for commercial structures outside of town and ‘Sconset. Nantucket was
established around town centers out of necessity to create a community and to provide
shelter against the weather. Lots and houses were developed around a center of
commercial activity. The island will continue to build up the available land it has. To
keep the historic landscape of community developments, it would aide the island to allow
for residential/commercial zoning in areas that are already developed and zoned strictly
residential, such as Wauwinet and Quidnet. This could relieve much of the development
pressure on the historic core areas of the island as well as the increase in traffic
congestion. Finally, the move to residential/commercial zoning in outlaying areas could
curb the threat of continued sprawl. Instead of creating cul-de-sac developments, little
clusters of communities could develop around commercial activity. The dead-end streets
could be replaced with through streets to allow for better traffic flow throughout the

island. The community based clusters are in keeping with the historic buildup of the island.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Reconstructions of the Past

The island of Nantucket, has for centuries, maintained its defining character and framework that have contributed to an excellent guide for preservation. Through closer examination, documentation, and evaluation, it can be concluded that this is not a valid statement. Preservation, as defined by the National Park Services is,

“The act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction. New exterior additions are not within the scope of this treatment; however, the limited and sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional is appropriate within a preservation project.”

This definition, accurate, provides the basis for arguing that Nantucket is not the forerunner in preservation. An ongoing theme of the island is that if it looks like it did in the past, then it is historic. This provides individuals with a false sense that the island is preserved. However, it plainly states that extensive replacement is not the formula for preservation. The ‘gut rehabs’ that claim a couple of major historic buildings a year are replacing extensive historic fabric. This method for altering homes, while retaining their historic look is used more as the definition by the NPS for reconstruction, defined as,

“The act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.”
major example of reconstruction is that of Williamsburg, VA. It is evident through publications on and from Nantucket, that it does not put itself in that same category. If a survey of structures is completed, identifying all of those which are heavily altered and reconstructed, Nantucket may then be considered in the category of reconstructions. If it is not too late, and the people associated with the current practices do not like the shift in the island’s reputation, then preservation methods need to quickly and correctly be incorporated as new policy.

6.2 The Nation’s Sprawl

Many areas throughout the world have suffered from the effects of automobile and the need to escape the destitute of city living during the mid-twentieth century. These factors helped create suburban sprawl. Instead of populations remaining in or as close to the city centers, people began to spread across landscapes, devouring whatever was in the way to lay down the fundamental curvilinear streets for the Downing type settlements of the wealthy or the more simplistic, cheaper style of grid like streets ending in cul-de-sacs. This popular way of living took hold in all areas of the country. Nantucket, because of its location managed to maintain its landscapes without the need for sprawling developments. However, as the popularity of the island increased and the desire to live there increased, developers encouraged by the attractive economics, began the development of the island which continues today.

The ‘pod’ style developments began to dot the landscape all over Nantucket from ‘Sconset, mid-island to town. Though the styles of the structures are in keeping with the
HDC’s guidelines, the area they are engulfing is the historic openscapes of the island. Style is important when considering the elements of historic architecture, yet it is not of itself enough. The forms, proportions and placements of buildings are all factors to consider in the new buildings. The entire island’s development needs to be reviewed as a whole not just a parcel by parcel creation. The effects on the island need to be considered instead of simple pods. These strictly residential areas and large lots are consuming the remaining open land. As deed restrictions expire, more land will become available. It is obvious these areas will be developed; it is up to the island, to make sure all future development it is done in a manner that incorporates historic landscapes and their settlements. Nantucket, described as an evolving historic place, needs to reevaluate its strategies to protect its historic fabric and landscapes.
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Appendix A:

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Source: Alexis Casale
Figure 2: 2006 Map of Nantucket. Nantucket Town and Siasconset, the Historic District’s core areas are highlighted.

Source: Nantucket Historical Association. *Nantucket in The State of Massachusetts* Map of the islands of Nantucket, Tuckernuck and Muskeget, drawn by Austin Strong in 1921. The map shows landscape features, Coast Guard stations, two ships, a compass and some ship wreck notes. From the NHA map collection, drawer 7, folder 3, no.1.
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Source: Alexis Casale
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Source: The Nantucket Historical Association
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Source: Nantucket Preservation Trust
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Source: Nantucket Preservation Trust
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Source: Alexis Casale
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Source: Dan Seitz
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Source: Alexis Casale
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Source: Alexis Casale
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