LIGHTHOUSE INFORMATION FORM NUMBER 35

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
80 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116

PHOTOGRAPH KEY

Leslie Fox - MHC - August 1981

1) Sankaty Head Light Station

tower and modern housing

HISTORIC NAME: Sankaty Head Light

TOWN: Siasconset, Nantucket Island

LOCATION: Sankaty Head

COUNTY: Nantucket CODE: 019

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: 12th

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Nantucket County Registry of Deeds,

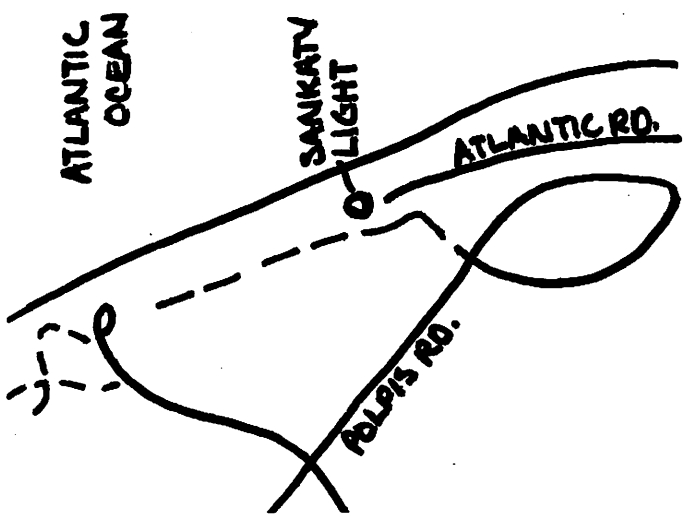
Book H, P. 37 George Myrick to U.S. Government

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nomination includes the Coast Guard Station, including the tower and oil house and three non-contributing properties.

LAT./LONG.: 41°17'0"/69°57'56"

SKETCH MAP



UTM COORDINATE: 19/419/100/4570/700

USGS QUADRANGLE: Prov. RI., Mass., Conn.

SCALE: 1:250,000

ACREAGE: 10 acres

OWNER(S): United States Coast Guard

First Coast Guard District
408 Atlantic Avenue
Boston, MA 02210

STATUS:

Unmanned/Active

RECORDED BY: Leslie Fox

ORGANIZATION: MHC

DATE: August 1981

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SITE DESCRIPTION

The Sankaty Head Lights Station is located on 10 acres of land, about 1 mile north of the town of Siasconset on Nantucket Island. It sits near the edge of a cliff, 160' above water, overlooking several miles of beach and ocean. A short distance from the tower is a narrow, paved road tht leads by 20-25 residential, one-family houses, to the town. The lighthouse site is a popular tourist attration, because of its aesthetic atmosphere. A golf course borders the inland side of the Coast Guard property. The light protects mariners from the Southern Shoals, and is located 9 miles from Nantucket Light (27).

MAJOR ELEMENTS DESCRIPTION

Today, a tower (1849), oil house (1887), two 1960 ranch-style houses, and a helicopter pad make up the station; the tower and oil house are contributing elements. At one time, the station complex was larger, and included two storage sheds (1942 and 1950), a brick 1 1/2 story (1849) Keeper's dwelling connected to the 60' tower, a (1949) barn to the south of the house, and an (1887) oil house. A second keeper's dwelling was added to the station in 1887.

TOWER:

Exterior: The wooden door is modern, and is 9" above the base of the tower. 6" above the top of the door is a granite block. The door is 44" wide x 75" high, including a 5" facing. The wooden doorframe is 7" wide. The walls of the tower are brick with painted bands: red (middle section), and white (on the top and bottom sections). A brick corbel table is located under the balcony.

Interior: The brick walls have been sandblasted, and remain exposed and unpainted.

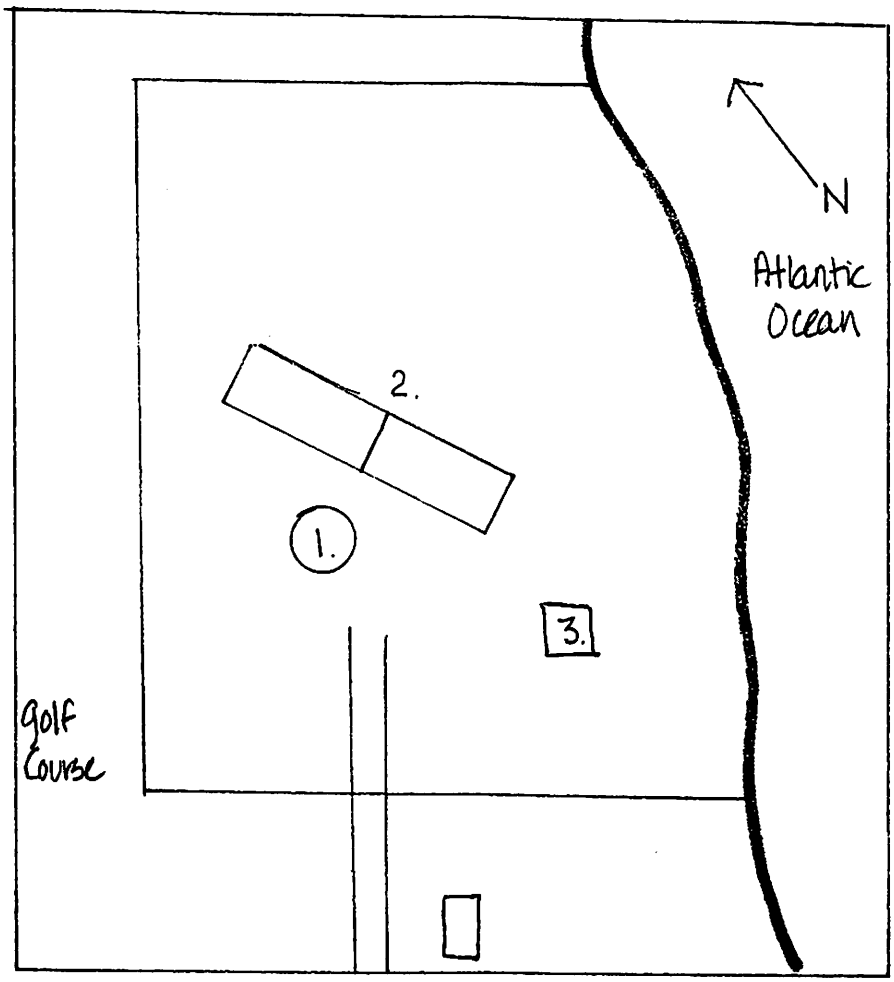
Floor: The cement floor is 140' in diameter.

Windows: There are four windows. The wooden-frame window on the ground floor has a granite lintel, sill, and posts. It measures 37 1/2" x 20 1/2". The frame's exterior measurements are 42 1/2" x 27 1/2". It is set 32" into the wall. The lintel is 6 1/2", and the post, 7" wide. The second and third windows, located halfway up the tower, have the same measurements and features. They are set into the granite 25" and 21" respectively. A fourth window, located in the former lamp room, is set 17" into the granite wall.

Stairs: The modern staircase has a tubular handrail and two posts per stair. It is a standard iron staircase. Each step is 51" wide and 4" deep at the narrow end, 10 1/2" in the middle, and 15" at the longest end. 22 stairs lead to the second window. 18 more stairs lead to a ladder which rests on a wooden platform 4 rungs lead from this platform to a third window, wich is 20" wide. There are 62 stairs altogether.

Lamp Room: A simple aluminum platform, made of 2 1/2 segments, with a standard handrail running around it, has replaced the lamp room floor. The walls are still exposed brick. There is an aluminum trap door and a 9-step curved steel ladder leading to the lens room. A 44" x 23 1/2 " door leads out to the balcony. The simple iron railing (1888) is 38" high, 5 posts, 5 1/2" apart, are in each section of the railing. There are 85 posts in all. An 8-rung aluminum ladder leads up to the lens room.

Lens Room: Plexiglass floor-to-ceiling windows permit the lights' maximum visibility. The lens room is 8-side. A 7" x 9" sand vent is located under each window. This room, too, has been stripped and rebuilt. The floor is aluminum.



Sankaty Head Light

1. Tower
2. Modern Coast Guard Housing
3. Helicopter pad

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE/RELATION TO NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA
Sankaty Head Light possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials and workmanship as welll as important associations with the development of aids to navigation in Massachusetts. Constructed in 1849-50, the 60' brick tower was called the "blazing star" due to the brilliant light produced by its Fresnel lens, which was one of the first to be installed in a U.S. lighthouse. It meets criteria A & C of the National Register of Historic Places on the state level as well as survey criteria 3a, 4b, 5a.

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

1849 - -Benjamin F. Isherwoode directed the construction of the tower at a cost of $10,333. The bricks, granite blocks and other materials were bought to the site by ship. The Keeper's dwelling (brick, 1 1/2 story) was built, as well, with an ell connecting the tower to the dwelling. A barn and wooden fence (around 3 sides of the property) were finished in the same year. "When built, this light was unsurpassed in brilliance by any on the coast... Fishermen called it the blazing star... its position was of great importance, as a warning to the mariner to steer wide of the great Southern Shoal". (Drake, p. 354, 5). A Fresnel lens was installed, purchased in France by Isherwood. (This lens was removed in 1938 to the Nantucket Whaling Museum.) The panes of glass in the lens soon were made to be 1/2" thick because of the threat of birds hitting them; whale oil was used for fuel.

1850- The tower was lit for the first time in February.

1875 - An "English wick" was installed, new to most lighthouses. The device made it possible to trim the wicks once during the night, whereas they had needed to be trimmed 2-3 times per night previously.

1886 - The U.S. government Signal Station ran a telegraph line out to Sankaty Head. During the same year telephones were installed at Sankaty. A 50' flag staff was erected to display weather signals.

1887 - Another dwelling was erected at a cost of $6,700. $50 was spent on the oil house. The first brick dwelling was razed.

1883 A "new deck" (balcony) and lantern section were installed; increasing the height of the tower by 10', to a total height of 70'. The inside of the tower was plastered and white-washed.

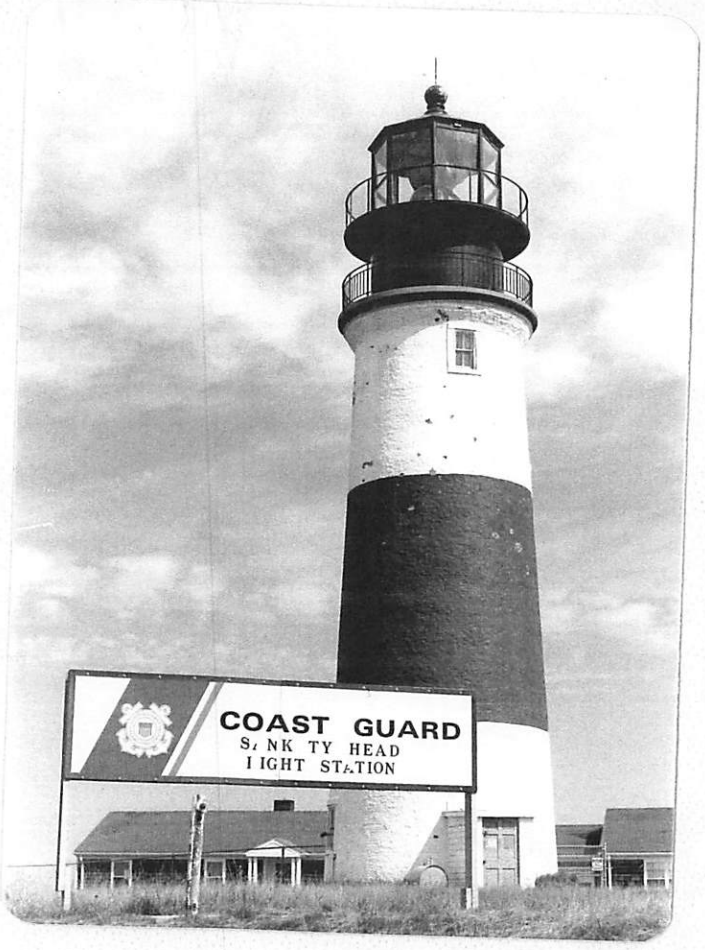
1889 - New frames and doors were installed in the tower.

1933 - The lens were was electrified, and candlepower was increased from 99,000 to 720,000. The brass clockworks were discontinued. For the first time, the station became a onekeeper postion (two keepers and their families had always lived at the site before).

1950 - The Fresnel lens was removed.

1970 - The lens and lamp rooms were stripped and rebuilt with aluminum. The interior of the tower was sandblasted.

1981 - The light has a candlepower of 750,000 and is visible for 28 miles.


COAST GUARD
SANDY HEAD
LIGHT STATION