

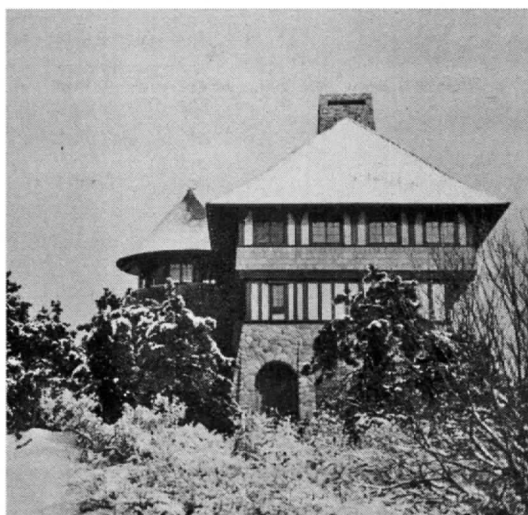
The House above Nobska Pond

by *Samm Carlton and Mary Carlton Swope*

The house now known as 80 Church Street was built in 1920 by Newcomb Carlton, our grandfather. He wanted a place where, with his wife Josephine, stepson Clifford and son Winslow, he could escape the summer heat of New York City. He learned about Woods Hole from his friend Mr. Prosser and found the climate perfect, but Penzance Point was too windy for his wife. High on a hill above Nobska Pond stood a stone tower that was part of the Glidden Farm, a favorite trysting place for local lovers. It had a panoramic view of Vineyard Sound and the Elizabeth Islands, and it occurred to our grandfather that perhaps it could be incorporated into a house. As children, we imagined it was a Viking tower, not anything so mundane as a water tower. Our father, Winslow, told us that it might have been one of a series of signal towers that studded the coastline to announce the arrival of large sailing ships.



The Glidden Tower with the H. H. Fay water tower–windmill in the left background and Nobska Lighthouse in the right background, 1890s. Photograph by Baldwin Coolidge. Courtesy WHHC. *Spritsai* Vol. 19 No. 2, p. 8.



80 Church Street in 1921.
Photo courtesy of Samm Carlton.

Our grandfather, who was then president of Western Union (1914-1933) and known for his personal manner, convinced Mr. Glidden to sell him the tower along with a few surrounding acres. He hired William Welles Bosworth, a well-known, affable and imaginative Beaux Arts architect, to design him a summer house incorporating the tower. Welles, who later designed two of Western Union's buildings in Philadelphia and St. Louis, had become a friend and colleague.* When he saw the tower, built of local granite and topped by crenellations like miniature battlements, he said, "Newcomb, you have a Norman tower. I will build you a Norman farmhouse!"

The main part of the three-story house was finished in 1921. All the bedrooms on the second floor faced south towards the Sound, so the house was long east to west, and narrower north to south. The former trysting



The staircase in the tower. Photo by Wendy Workman.

tower, topped by a lantern-like circular roof of wood and glass, became a spiral staircase. When the house was passed on to our father, Winslow Carlton, it came with his father's experienced advice: "Sell it. It's a white elephant!" The house's current owner, our sister, Rhona Carlton-Foss, says, "Some people like white elephants!"

The house was unusual in many ways for Cape Cod in the 1920s. The living room and library, separated by the large chimney and double fireplace,

were on the top floor, as was our grandfather's adjacent, airy bedroom. It is totally uninsulated, and the top floor living room, open to the enormous roof, has a very high vaulted ceiling, almost like the hull of a large ship. It made an ideal place for us to play badminton where we often lost shuttle cocks high up in crevices or in some of our grandfather's collection of ship models that once lined the walls – though, alas, no more. Our family would often repair to that room after dinner to dance to classical records that our father would play on the Victrola.

In the adjoining library, a pair of tall spears, harpoons and whaling paraphernalia flanked the fireplace. Across the room in the southeast corner hung a large, Malaysian-style rope hammock. It had heavy wooden beams at each end and supported a thick, multicolored striped mattress. It became a favorite game for at least two of us to get in and swing as high as we could. The hammock was banished after the

wooden beams took out one too many panes of glass from the corner windows and caused a couple of unfortunate spills.

The house seemed to be made for imagination; for bare sandy feet, dancing, dreaming or reading; for creating plays or events in the large playroom in the back part of the house. That was once a room for Stanton Goddard, our grandfather's wonderful

valet and chauffeur and, at another time for the butler, Ernest, and his wife.

In addition to the main house and its “back” portion finished by 1927, there is a caretaker’s house with garage, lived in for many years by Anne and William Chambers, who came from England to tend the gardens and run the estate. Much later, in the 50s, our father created a grass tennis court which we called his “baby.” He also built a free-standing stone wall, mostly by himself, for Mother’s rose garden, following the infamous hurricanes of 1954, Carol and Edna.

When our parents sold the family apartment in Manhattan in 1976, they moved to Woods Hole year-round and built a winter house south of that grass court. They moved back and forth between houses with the seasons, very convenient for visiting children and grandchildren! But, no matter what season, we know there is a ghost that seems to enjoy the summer house built around a stone tower at 80 Church Street.



The library. Photo by Samm Carlton

*Welles Bosworth became known as “The Rockefeller Architect.” He designed the garden and other parts of Kykuit, the Rockefeller estate north of Tarrytown, NY, as well as The Cloisters. Later, living in Paris, he was hired by the Rockefellers to restore Versailles and Rheims Cathedral after the destruction of WWI. He is also largely responsible for the MIT campus, most notably the highly visible dome.