

# Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

## Scanned Record Cover Page

<b>Inventory No:</b>	OAK.1039
<b>Historic Name:</b>	Wormley, Ambler B. Socony Vacuum Oil Gas Station
<b>Common Name:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	83 New York Ave
<b>City/Town:</b>	Oak Bluffs
<b>Village/Neighborhood:</b>	The Highlands;
<b>Local No:</b>	7-172;
<b>Year Constructed:</b>	C 1928
<b>Architectural Style(s):</b>	No style;
<b>Use(s):</b>	Gas Station or Service Station; Market or Grocery Store;
<b>Significance:</b>	Architecture; Commerce; Ethnic Heritage; Transportation;
<b>Area(s):</b>	OAK.B
<b>Designation(s):</b>	
<b>Building Materials:</b>	Roof: Asphalt Shingle; Wall: Brick; Wood; Wood Shingle; Foundation: Concrete Unspecified;
<b>Demolished</b>	No



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125  
[www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)

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**FORM B - BUILDING**

Assessors's Number **7-172** USGS Quad **EDG** Area(s) **J,** Form Number **1039**  
*B*

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
 MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
 220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
 BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Town **Oak Bluffs**

Place (*neighborhood or village*) **The Highlands**

**Photograph**



Address: **83 New York Avenue**  
 Name: **Wormley's Service Station**  
 Present: **Gas station/garage**  
 Original: **Gas station/convenience store**  
 Date of Construction: **ca. 1928**  
 Maps: **Sanborn maps & Robert Hayden 1999**  
 Form: **Vernacular**  
 Architect/Builder:

*natural features. Show all buildings between inventoried building and nearest intersection or natural feature. Label streets including route numbers, if any. Circle and number the inventoried building. Indicate north.*

Exterior Material:  
 Foundation: **Cement**  
 Wall/Trim: **Wood shingles**  
 Roof: **Asphalt shingles**

See attached.

**RECEIVED**

**SÉP 30 1999**

**MASS. HIST. COMM**

Outbuilding/Secondary Structures  
 Major Alterations (*with dates*) Modifications associated with making this a convenience store

Recorded by **Thomas Arcuti, Timothy Binzen, Robert C. Hayden, & Jan Whitaker**

Condition **Poor**

Organization **Martha's Vineyard Commission & Massachusetts Historical Commission**

Moved? \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date (*month/year*) **August 1999**

Acreage **Less than 1 acre**

Setting **Commercial district**

*Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.*

# BUILDING FORM

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION see continuation sheet

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

This building is a drive-in gas station of the sort that became commonplace in the 1920s, the decade when the popularity of the automobile began to reconfigure cities and villages, and the time when city ordinances began to restrict the earlier curbside pumps. It is a front-gabled building with an extended roof that forms a pedimented canopy supported by fieldstone columns. Socony stations of the 1920s, according to historian Chester H. Liebs, "used a pedimented front to cash in on the positive associations ascribed at the time to all that was 'colonial'..." Today it is notable not only for its pedimented front, its stonework, and its wood shingle siding, but also for its near-total absence of signage. The main block of the building is three bays across and two deep. A garage door is evident on the south side. When Ambler Wormley operated the station it had two car repair stalls on this side. The large front window is an evident addition, probably associated with the station's recent conversion into a convenience store.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE see continuation sheet

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

Ambler B. Wormley [ca. 1892-1957] owned and operated a Socony Vacuum Oil Company gasoline station and auto repair and maintenance business from 1928 to 1946. He had been a resident of the island since 1902 (when he was 10 years old). Prior to opening the station described herein, he had owned a small station on Uncas Avenue at the site of the present Graves Machine & Tool Company [see form #1041]. During the time he operated the station he lived in the house on land next to the garage. A World War I veteran, Wormley was a member and one-time Commander of the Governor Thomas Mayhew Post of the American Legion, and also served on the Finance Committee for the Town of Oak Bluffs. During a period when the place of African Americans on Martha's Vineyard was restricted because of race, Ambler Wormley was a business owner and contributor to the civic life of Oak Bluffs. Wormley sold the station upon his retirement in 1946.

This structure is part of a historically significant, and under-reported African-American community in Oak Bluffs. As such, the structure may be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing structure in a multiple property nomination, under the historic context "African-American occupation in Oak Bluffs (1860-1950)."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES see continuation sheet

Hayden, Robert C.  
 1999 *Research and Historic Narrative: African-American Historic Sites, Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts*. Submitted to the Martha's Vineyard Commission by RCH Associates, Boston.

Liebs, Chester H.  
 1985 *From Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*. New York Graphic Society, New York.

Sanborn Map Company  
 1914/1923 Oak Bluffs, Dukes County, Massachusetts. Sanborn Map Company, New York.

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MA 02125

Community      Property  
Oak Bluffs      83 New York Avenue  
  
Area(s)          Form No. 1039  
The Highlands

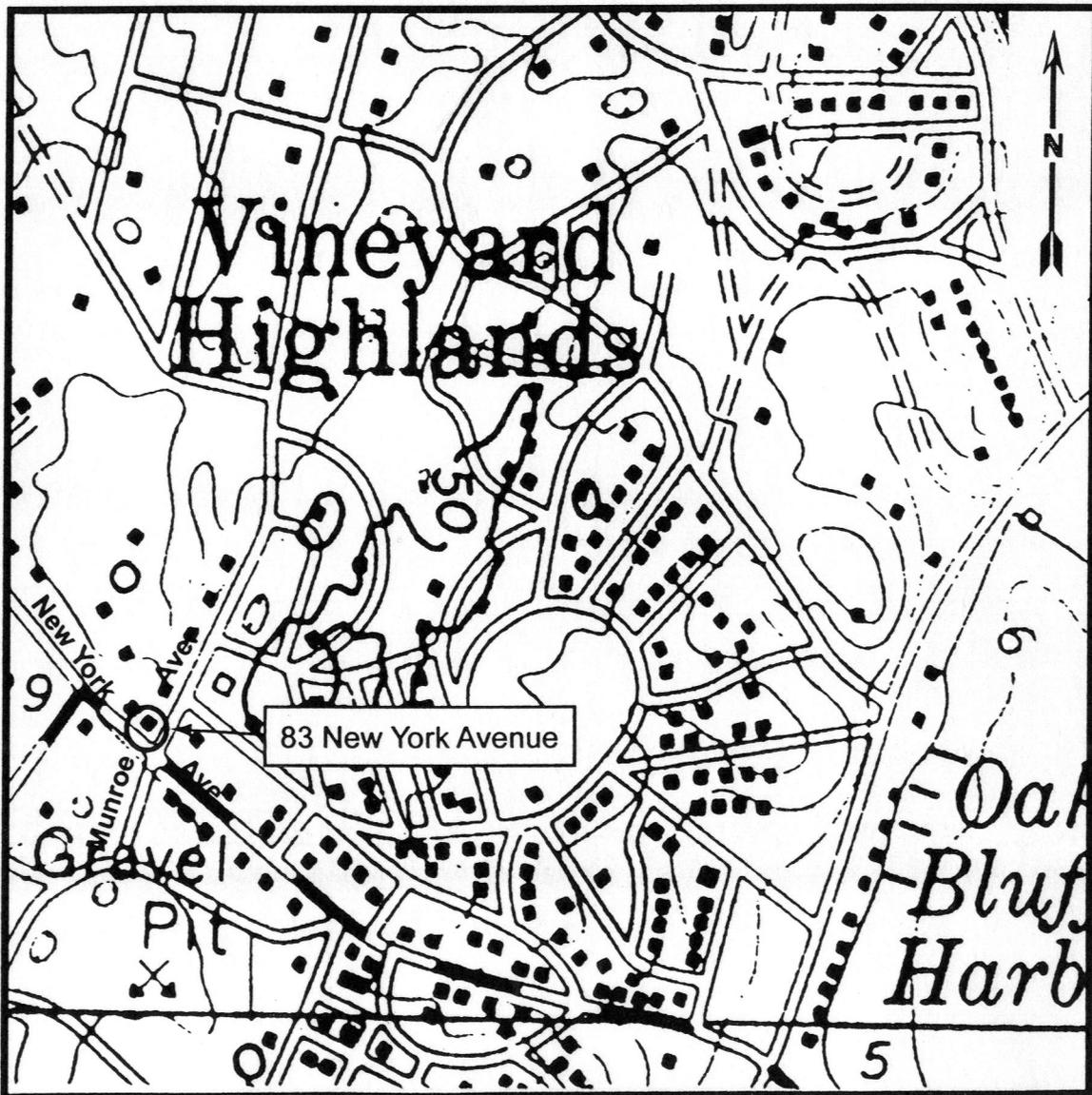
Oak Bluffs Survey Update Project  
T. Arcuti, T. Binzen, R. Hayden, J. Whitaker

Summer 1999

Historic Name: Wormley's Service Station

Acreage: less than 1 acre  
Roll/Frame: 3/1

SKETCH MAP



MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Oak Bluffs  
WORMLEY'S SERVICE  
STATION  
Form No. 1039

### National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible       Eligible ~~only~~ in a historic district
- Contributing to a potential historic district       Potential historic district

Criteria:      (A)      (B)      C      D

Criteria Considerations:      A      B      C      D      E      F      G

#### Statement of Significance

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

by Mitchell Mulholland

African-Americans have been an important ethnic group in Oak Bluffs since at least the eighteenth century. By the mid-eighteenth century twenty of the town's inhabitants were identified as "Negroes", presumably of African descent. Since the occupation of the Island by the English, African-Americans have emigrated as slaves, as mariners aboard whaling and commercial vessels, as participants in the religious tourism movement of the late nineteenth century, and as summer residents. Today there are three distinct African-American neighborhoods in Oak Bluffs whose residents over three centuries have made significant contributions to the community and to the nation as workers, politicians, artists, and literary figures. Many of today's residents of the neighborhoods are descendants of these early African-Americans.

The neighborhoods and their interesting history could easily form a National Register Historic District under the context of *African-American Residence in Oak Bluffs, 1700-1950*. It is recommended that the three neighborhoods be researched under a future grant that focusses on the occupation and contributions of the African American population. The houses researched for the 1999-2000 Survey Update Project would be eligible as contributing structures in the district.

Wormley's Service Station contributes to the African-American community history of Oak Bluffs. It is also significant as the site of a nearly 20-year long business of a local African-American entrepreneur.

African-American Historic Sites

Town of Oak Bluffs  
Martha's Vineyard, MA

AMBLER B. WORMLEY'S AUTO SERVICE STATION  
New York Avenue

From 1928 to 1946, Ambler B. Wormley owned and operated a gasoline and auto repair and maintenance business on New York Avenue at the corner of Monroe Avenue. (The station is now owned by Nelson J. deBettencourt, Jr.). There were two drive-in stalls off the Monroe Avenue side of Wormley's garage. His wholesale dealer was Socony Vacuum Oil Co.

Wormley always wore a mechanics hat which he always tipped when he greeted a woman. As a garage proprietor, Wormley's New York Avenue auto business was not his first. Prior to his New York Avenue site he owned a small auto service on Uncas Avenue at the site of the present Graves Machine and Tool Co. Born in Fredricksburg, Virginia, Wormley had been an Oak Bluffs resident for 55 years at the time of his death in 1957 having come to the island at the age of ten. He retired in 1946 selling his station to Nelson J. deBettencourt, Sr.

Upon his retirement he built a small house on Hiawatha in the Bluffs. During the time that he operated his business he lived in the house on land next to his garage. A World War I veteran, Ambler Wormley was a member and one time Commander of the Governor Thomas Mayhew Post of the American Legion. He served as a member of the Finance Committee for the Town of Oak Bluffs. His obituary in the Vineyard Gazette ended, "Mr. Wormley was well known and respected in his home town."