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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Martha's Vineyard Commission  
FROM: Eric Dray, Preservation Consultant  
DATE: June 3, 2022  
RE: DRI #718, 7 Arlington Avenue, Oak Bluffs - Demolition

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As a preservation consultant to the Martha's Vineyard Commission, I have been asked to provide my analysis for two questions regarding DRI #718 – Demolition of 7 Arlington Avenue, Oak Bluffs:

*1. Identify those portions of the building (including any previous additions or renovations) that have architectural significance, including the dating of all portions where possible, and describe why each portion is significant.*

**Background:** The house at 7 Arlington Avenue began as one-half of the so-called Palmer Villa, built in 1875 and originally located in Plymouth Park (see Photo 1). Palmer Villa was moved to Arlington Avenue in 1917 and divided to form the two cottages at 7 and 11 Arlington Avenue.

**Observations:** Many alterations have been made to 7 Arlington Avenue. These alterations were made either in 1917 when the house was moved, or sometime thereafter. There are no early photos available to confirm alteration dates. The footprint of the house remained unchanged on available Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps between 1923 (Figure 1) and the last available map in 1966.

Alterations include the following (see Photos 1 and 2 for further reference):

- Removal of all ornamental trim. The house in its original form was highly ornamented, including vergeboards, roof-top finials and cresting, patterned roofing (presumably slate), and turned porch posts with ornamental brackets.
- Replacement of corner turret with larger tower.
- Replacement of wrap-around porch. This was likely done when the house was moved in 1917. The replacement porch has no ornamental details, and the corner steps with clipped-gable roof were not replicated.
- Infilling of dormer decks.
- It is unclear if the rear ell is original to the house. The ell appears to have a similar roof height, but in the original location, the second story appears to have been stepped back, which is no longer the case.
- Window replacement and resizing. None of the windows appear to be original or historically significant. The majority of the windows appear to originally have been wood, 2/2 double-hung sash. These windows have all been replaced with modern, thermal 2/2 windows and large fixed sash.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) Building Form for 7 Arlington Avenue, prepared in 1978, classified the house's style as Expansive Campground. That is not a style now recognized by MHC. In their cover sheet for this Building Form, MHC classifies the style as Victorian Eclectic, meaning that it was built in the Victorian era but does display sufficient characteristics to clearly identify with one style.

In its original appearance, the Palmer Villa included features associated with the Queen Anne style and Second Empire style. Character-defining features of the Queen Anne style include irregular massing, including corner turrets, varying roof shapes, and use of different siding materials to animate the elevations. Character-defining features of the Second Empire style include most notably the use of Mansard roofs for the main roof and/or turrets.

**Conclusions:** In its current form, 7 Arlington Street retains some of the Queen Anne-style irregular massing of the original 1875 villa, most notably the roof forms with clipped-gable dormers on both sides of the corner tower. However, the house has lost all ornamental trim that animated the elevations and roof; and the primary reference to the Second Empire style – the Mansard-roofed turret – was replaced by a larger, astylistic corner tower with shallow hip roof.<sup>1</sup>

***2. Assess the relationship of the building to its streetscape/neighborhood, including with respect to the age and style of other buildings in the area.***

**Background:** The 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Oak Bluffs included a map showing this small stretch of what was then called Eaton Avenue (now East Chop Drive) developed with a row a cottages that were located close to the each other but were otherwise in relative isolation (see Figure 1). The house at 7 Arlington Avenue was the most recent addition to that row of houses; the other five had been built or relocated here in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. A comparison of that 1923 map to the current Assessor map (see Figure 2) shows how that pattern has been retained, although a few houses have been replaced, and a few contemporary houses have been added or replaced older houses to the south.

**Observations:** 7 Arlington Avenue is aligned with, but slightly separated from the row of cottages on the ridge above East Chop Drive (see Photo 6). The four most adjacent houses date(d) to the late-1800s, but 19 Mill Square Road has been demolished and a new house is under construction. The remaining 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages are similar in scale and siting.

The row of cottages is of a heterogeneous mix of styles. The cottage at 21 Mill Square Road is most similar in style and form to 7 and 11 Arlington Drive. The 1978 MHC Building Form for 21 Mill Square Road also identified its architectural style as Expansive Campground.<sup>2</sup> Both Palmer Villa and 21 Mill Square Road were moved here from elsewhere in Oak Bluffs, and they were built in their original locations within a year of each other (1875 and 1874 respectively). 21 Mill Square Road was originally located on Ocean Park. It was moved to this location in 1891. Palmer Villa was moved here and divided into two cottages in 1917. Unlike 7 Arlington Street, 21 Mill Square Road has retained its Mansard-roofed corner turret, and retained or replaced-in-kind a fair amount of the ornamental detail.

**Conclusion:** It was likely intended that 7 Arlington Avenue be located in a manner that continued the row of summer cottages on the ridge overlooking Vineyard Sound. Although somewhat altered, 7 Arlington Avenue does provide the north terminus to a distinct row of late-19<sup>th</sup> century cottages.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that 11 Arlington Street retains its rectangular Second Empire-style turret

<sup>2</sup> As noted above, MHC now classified all three as Victorian Eclectic.

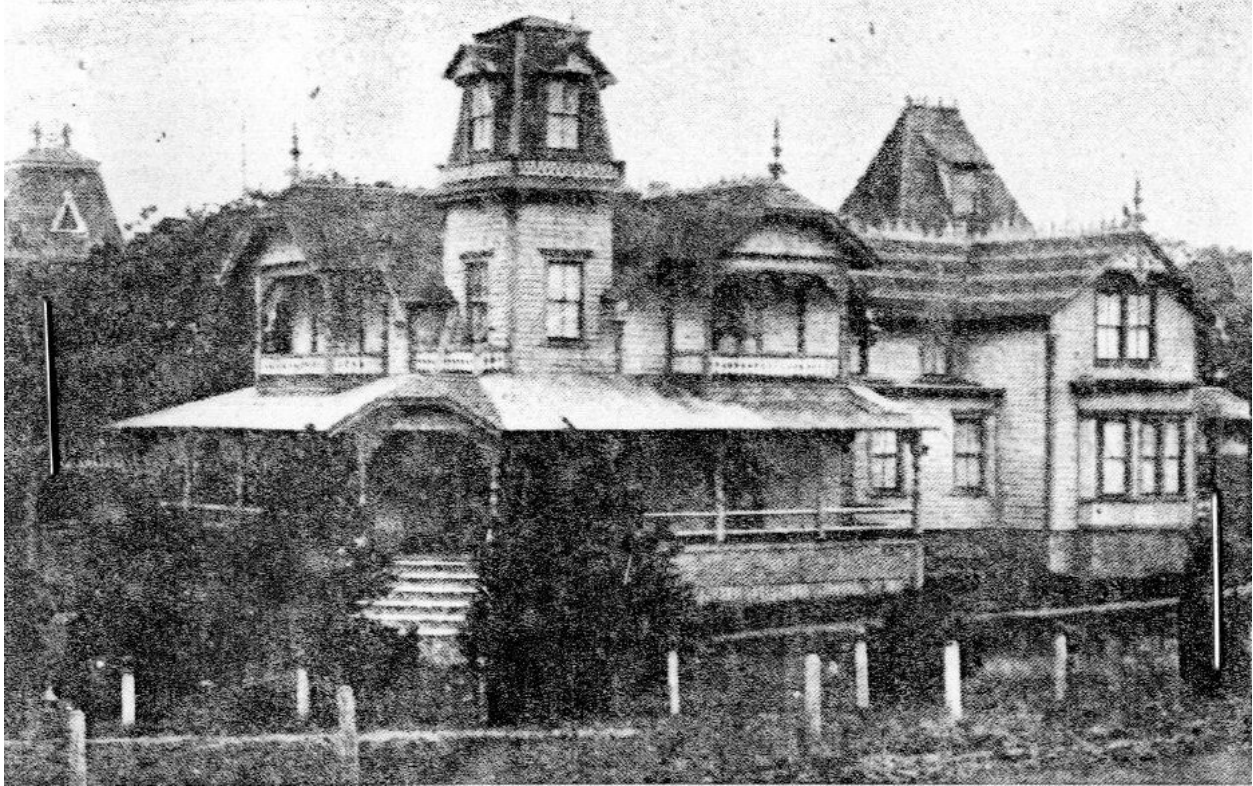


Photo 1. Undated view of Palmer Villa in original location.



Photo 2. View of 7 Arlington Avenue, looking south (annotated).



Photo 3. NW Elevation.



Photo 4. NE Elevation.



Photo 5. SE Elevation.



Photo 6. View looking north from East Chop Drive (annotated).

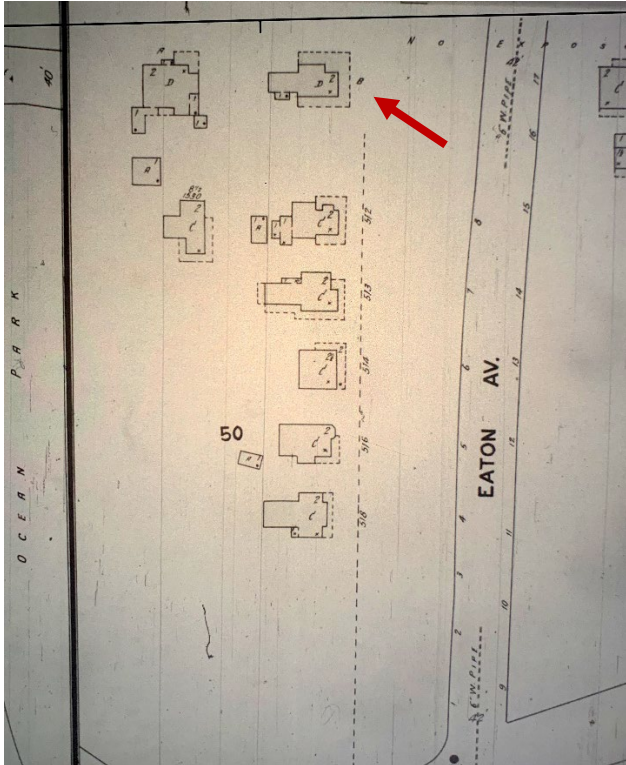


Figure 1. Detail, 1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Oak Bluffs, Map 5.



Figure 2. Oak Bluffs GIS Assessor Map.