

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	OAK.1037
Historic Name:	Maxwell, Martha A. Guest House
Common Name:	
Address:	5 Dorothy West Ave
City/Town:	Oak Bluffs
Village/Neighborhood:	The Highlands;
Local No:	8-36;
Year Constructed:	C 1919
Architectural Style(s):	Bungalow; Craftsman;
Use(s):	Hotel or Inn; Secondary Dwelling House; Single Family Dwelling House;
Significance:	Architecture; Commerce; Ethnic Heritage; Recreation;
Area(s):	OAK.B
Designation(s):	
Building Materials:	Roof: Asphalt Shingle; Wall: Wood; Wood Shingle; Foundation: Poured Concrete;
Demolished	No



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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FORM B - BUILDING

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

Assessors's Number **8-36** USGS Quad **EDG** Area(s) **B** Form Number **1037**

Town **Oak Bluffs**

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

Photograph



5 Dorothy West Avenue (formerly Vineland Avenue)

Name **Maxwell Cottage**

Present **Residence**
 Original **Guest house**

Construction **ca. 1920s (est.)**

Visual

Form **Vernacular**

Architect/Builder

Primary Material:

Foundation **Cement**

Wall/Trim **Wood shingles**

Roof **Asphalt shingles**

Outbuilding/Secondary Structures

Major Alterations (*with dates*)
Several rooms added 1920s to 1940s

Condition **Fair**

Moved? **Date**

Acreage **Less than 1 acre**

Setting **Residential neighborhood**

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.

See attached.

RECEIVED

SEP 30 1999

MASS. HIST. COMM

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

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

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

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

BUILDING FORM

OAK.1037

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION see continuation sheet

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

This is a cross-gabled vernacular bungalow, five bays wide by six bays deep, with projecting gabled entry in front-facing gable, supported by steel columns and resting on a concrete slab. Rear ell with shed roof extends northward. The house is said to have been expanded room by room until seven guest rooms and a dining room had been added to the original small house. There are two internal chimneys, one on the east slope of the main block and the other on the ridge of the rear ell. Windows are a mix of sizes and types, some 3-over-1 and some 6-over-1. The building is covered in wood shingles and has an asphalt shingle roof.

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.

The Maxwell Cottage was a guest house owned and operated by Martha A. Maxwell, providing room and board to African Americans in Oak Bluffs during the summer months. Maxwell established the business in the mid-1920s and it continued until the mid-1940s. The accommodations and dining service she provided were essential to African-American vacationers during that period, as they were generally not permitted to stay at white-owned establishments.

Martha Maxwell was originally from Boston. In 1924, she purchased three lots of land with buildings and furnishings from Emma Faye, who had constructed or had moved to the property at least one building after 1919. Martha Maxwell evidently added rooms one at a time to an original one-room structure, until the cottage featured seven guest rooms and a dining hall. For twenty years, the business was very successful. Guests included the Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and his wife Isabel Powell, who stayed at Mrs. Maxwell's for several summers in the mid-1930s before purchasing their own cottage on the opposite side of the street [see form #468]. Although the business declined ca. 1945, a bed and breakfast service was conducted on the premises until the 1960s by nieces of Mrs. Maxwell, Edmonia Squires and Viola Knight, during the early 1950s. The Maxwell Cottage made a significant contribution to the development of the African-American community in Oak Bluffs, by providing accommodations for vacationers who later became homeowners in the town.

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.

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

OAK.1037

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Community
Oak Bluffs

Property Address
5 D. West Avenue

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

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE - Cont'd.

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)."



INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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

Community Property
Oak Bluffs 5 Dorothy West Ave.

Area(s) Form No. 1037
The Highlands

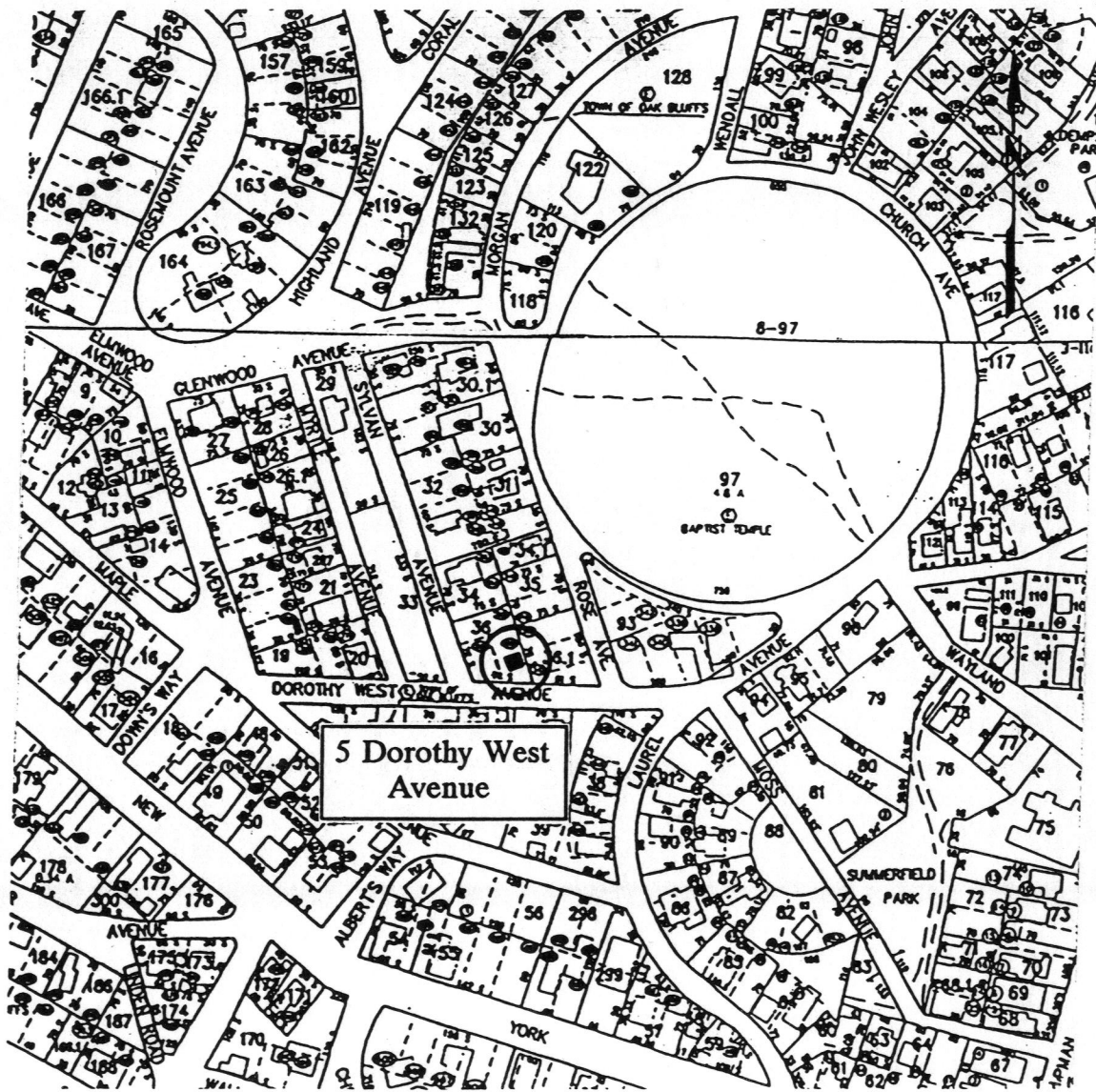
Oak Bluffs Survey Update Project
T. Arcuti, T. Binzen, R. Hayden, J. Whitaker

Summer 1999

Historic Name: Maxwell Cottage

Acreage: less than 1 acre
Roll/Frame: 3/12-14

SKETCH MAP



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

Oak Bluffs
MAXWELL COTTAGE

Form No. 1037

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.

Maxwell Cottage is an example of a successful business which operated for decades, introducing scores of summer residents to Oak Bluffs, many of whom bought properties of their own. It contributes to the African-American community history of Oak Bluffs, and is notable individually as well as a locus of social formation.

African-American Historic Sites

Town of Oak Bluffs
Martha's Vineyard, MA

Site: THE MAXWELL COTTAGE
Address: 5 Dorothy West Avenue
(Formerly Vineland Avenue)

Mrs. Martha A. Maxwell owned and operated an enterprise that provided board and room during the summer months. She established her guest house business in the mid-1920s and it continued until the mid-1940s. Mrs. Maxwell provided board and room for \$20 per week during the late 1930s. Her accommodations and dining service were essential for African-American vacationers during the early decades since race prejudice and discrimination prohibited "people of color" from staying at most other types of establishments.

Martha Maxwell of Boston, Massachusetts purchased "Three certain lots of land together with buildings thereon together with furniture and furnishings" from Emma Faye in September 1924. Legend has it that there was a candy store in the wood-framed building that she lived in, but it is not clear whether she operated the store or whether it was a small enterprise conducted by the previous owners. Emma Faye had purchased two lots in 1922 and in 1919 the same two lots had been conveyed by deed between two other parties. It appears that Emma Faye constructed or had moved to the land one or more buildings.

Mrs. Maxwell (according to some oral history accounts) started with a small wood-framed structure which she expanded by adding rooms, one-by-one, until she had seven small guest rooms, and a dining hall. Candied yams and fried chicken was a regular and popular menu item at Maxwell Cottage. Up to ten people could be served at one. "Special arrangements could be made for those who desire Board only." By all accounts Maxwell Cottage was a thriving business for about twenty years. The Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and his wife Isabel Powell stayed at Mrs. Maxwell's for several summers in the mid-1930s before purchasing their property directly across Myrtle Avenue facing Maxwell Cottage.

THE MAXWELL COTTAGE
African-American Historic Site
Oak Bluffs/Hayden

For some reason, business declined around 1945. In the early 1950s, a bed and breakfast service was conducted on the premises by nieces of Mrs. Maxwell, Edmonia Squires and Viola Knight. This operation ceased sometime in the early 1960s. Between 1964 and 1980 the property was owned alternately by Edmonia Squires and her three sons who sold the cottage to its present owners, Matthew and Delores Goode in 1980.

Maxwell Cottage was important for its time as it allowed African-American summer visitors comfortable, affordable, and hospitable accommodations before they began renting and then buying their own summer homes in The Highlands section of East Chop. Mrs. Maxwell's enterprise and presence contributed to the development of the core and permanent settlement of African-American families that emerged in The Highlands during the second half of the twentieth century and that continues to the present.