



**Hadwen House**

EILEEN POWERS, 2007

# Hadwen House

William Hadwen stood at the corner of Main and Pleasant Streets and watched the men frame his new house, the edifice that would announce to the town that he was a wealthy man with cosmopolitan tastes.

His stature as a businessman and philanthropist was already known to most of the community, and this Greek revival-style mansion would provide him and his wife, Eunice Starbuck, with grand accommodations for entertaining the island's elite. And it would complement the three houses built across the street between 1836 and 1838 by Eunice's father, Joseph, for her three younger brothers.

William and Eunice had been sharing the house at 100 Main Street with Nathaniel and Eliza Barney since 1829, when the two men bought the house together. Theirs was a partnership not only in real estate, but in business, and they were cousins married to Starbuck sisters. Eliza, the younger of the sisters, married Nathaniel Barney in 1820. At their wedding, Eunice met Nathaniel's cousin,

## ADDRESS

**96 Main Street**

## CONSTRUCTED

**1846**

## DISTANCE FROM WHALING MUSEUM

**.4 miles**





***William Hadwen, by William Willard,  
circa 1850***

1905.38.1



***Eunice Starbuck Hadwen,  
by unknown artist, circa 1830***

GIFT OF MRS. EUNICE S. BARNEY SWAIN

1915.23.1

William Hadwen, a young silversmith from Newport, Rhode Island. Two years later, William and Eunice married, and although William established a jewelry and silver business on Nantucket, he soon realized that the real gold of Nantucket was whale oil. He and Barney pooled their resources and bought the house at 100 Main, which included a candle factory on the property, and they established the firm Hadwen & Barney, whale-oil merchants. Nantucket's whaling industry was at its peak of prosperity in the 1820s and '30s, and the men amassed a small fortune. Now, in 1845, William and Eunice Hadwen were building two houses — their own just two doors away from their housemates, and an equally impressive companion house at 94 Main where various family members, including Nathaniel and Eliza, would live.

With their colonnaded porticoes, the houses evoke Greek temples, one Ionic and the other Corinthian. Enclosed by a common fence and sharing a rear garden, the pair made a family compound like no other, as impressive as — if not more so than — the Three Bricks across the street, which were part of the family, too. What led William Hadwen to build such opulent houses in a style that was dramatically different from the ubiquitous shingled Quaker houses and the sedate Georgian bricks of the neighborhood can only be surmised. His personal taste — formed

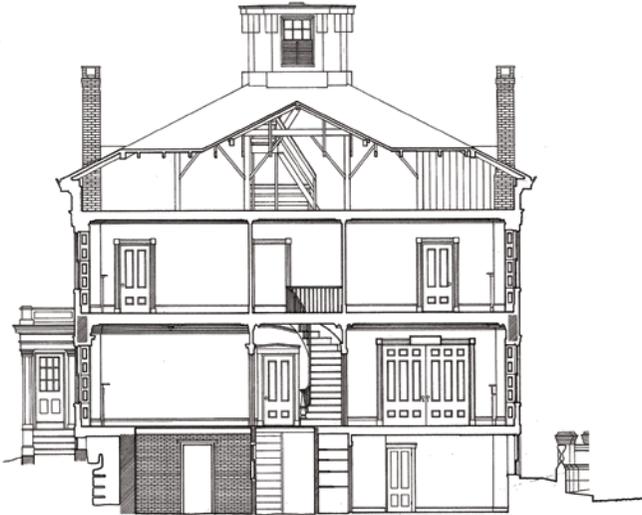


**View of the Greek Revival-style houses built for William Hadwen, 1870s**

CHARLES H. SHUTE & SON GPN-SHUTE-50

in Newport — was obviously incompatible with the local aesthetic, and Eunice, if she had so desired, was not successful in talking him out of his architectural experiment. Local tradition tells us that Hadwen hired self-taught Nantucket architect Frederick Brown Coleman to design and oversee the construction of the houses. Other buildings attributed to Coleman include the First Baptist Church (1840); the portico of the Methodist Church (1840), and the Nantucket Atheneum (1847).

The Hadwen House is situated on elevated ground atop a high foundation, both for the imposing visual effect and to allow for a basement-level kitchen and informal dining room. Instead of the massive central chimney of earlier island architecture, four end-chimneys provide fireplaces in the four rooms on each of the upper two floors. A double parlor separated by sliding doors is on the west side of the first floor along Pleasant Street, directly above the kitchen and informal dining room below. On the east side of the central hallway with its elegant stairway is a larger single formal parlor that originally extended the full length of the house but was later reduced to allow for a first-floor kitchen. Four bedchambers are on the second floor.



**Historic American Buildings Survey sectional view of Hadwen House**

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For all its massive appearance from the street, the house is not particularly commodious by today's standards, but well-attended entertainments were held there in the nineteenth century. On December 23, 1847, Susan Gardner of Nantucket wrote, "Last evening I was at the sewing circle at Mr. Hadwen's new house. We had a very pleasant time and they have a very beautiful house. There were about one hundred persons there to tea and about double that number in the evening."

William and Eunice had no children, but Eunice took several young women under her wing, offering a very personal "finishing" school. She wrote to her niece, Dorcas Hadwen Lee, in 1845 that she felt amply repaid for all she had done for one of those young ladies "if she would in any degree compare with two very superior women whose characters I had had some hand in forming and whose society I have had a great deal of enjoyment from." William had his protégés, too, young boys named for him — William Hadwen Starbuck, William Hadwen Lee, Hadwen Draper, Hadwen Swain, and William Hadwen Barney, his great-nephew — son of Joseph, who grew up at 100 Main Street with parents Nathaniel and Eliza. Joseph was the only son of Hadwen's partner and cousin, and he inherited his uncle's house at 96 Main when Eunice died two years after her husband, in 1864.

Joseph Barney owned the Hadwen House from 1864 to 1905. He was married to Malinda Swain, and they had four children. Like the Hadwens, the Barneys entertained on a grand scale. An extant seating chart from a gathering in 1874 depicts an outsized oval table with forty seats, plus seven side tables seating two to five people each, and a sofa seating four — all in one of the double parlors on the first floor of the house. Imagine the women in their full skirts, the mirrors and chandeliers reflecting the gaslight, trifles and syllabubs served all round. A newspaper report of the event — a reception in honor of Miss Mary F. Eastman, a supporter of woman suffrage who had just lectured at the Atheneum — described the setting:

*The spacious parlors were grand reception rooms for a polite company. . . . Sparkling with light, every corner was a charming niche where delighted visitors waited for their chances for an introduction to the gifted woman thus publicly honored. . . . To the sound of a tripping march on the piano by*





Parlor of 96 Main Street, watercolor by Edgar W. Jenney, circa 1935

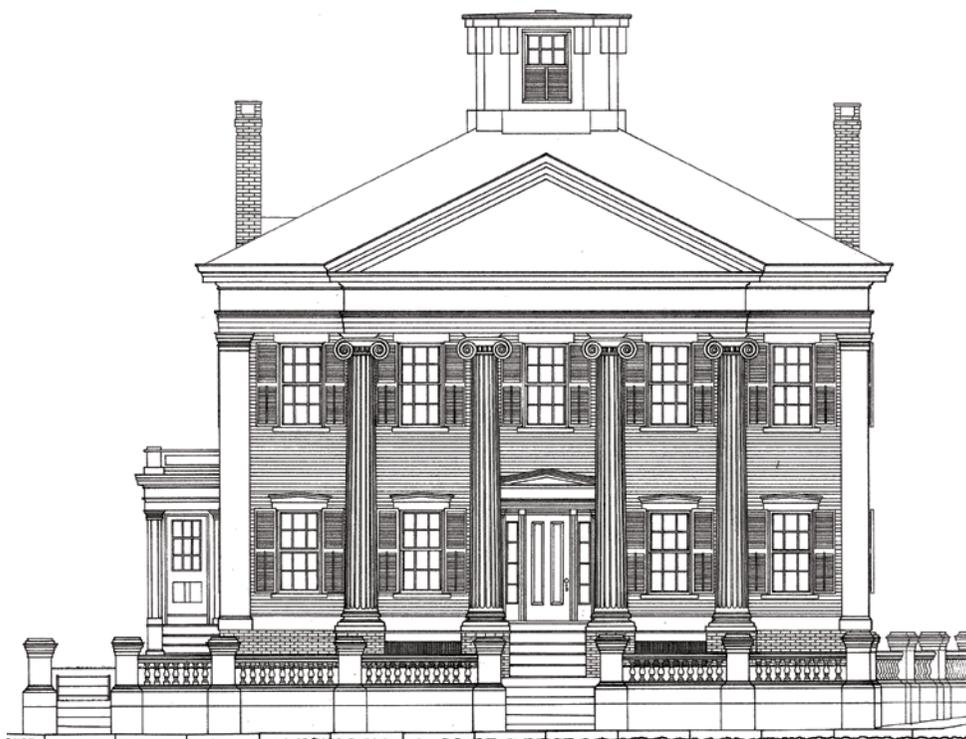
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**Rear view of 96 and 94 Main Street, 1890s** F2524

In 1923, heirs of Joseph and Malinda Barney sold their grandparents' house to Charles E. Satler of Pittsburgh. Satler and his wife, Maria, were summer residents of Nantucket, along with their daughter, Jean, and son, Karl. They expanded the house with a two-story addition to the southwest corner of the building, creating a breakfast room on the first floor behind the double parlor, an expanded bedroom on the second floor, plus a laundry room in the basement. The grand house was the Satler summer home for more than forty years. Jean Satler Williams, who was comfortably ensconced in her own house across the street in the West Brick (97 Main), inherited the Greek-revival mansion in 1962, when her mother died. The next year she made a charitable gift of the property, and furnishings, to the Nantucket Historical Association as a memorial to the Satler family.

Beginning in 1964, the Hadwen House was opened to the public as a house museum, furnished as the Satlers left it. A major refurbishing took place in the 1990s, restoring the interior to an approximation of its mid-nineteenth-century appearance, with wallpaper, floor coverings and furnishings appropriate for the home of a wealthy couple who weren't averse to being stylish. The prominently situated iconic house reminds us of the privileged lives of Nantucket's whale-oil magnates during the height of prosperity in the whaling era, when the prospect for continued success was still rosy and no one could imagine life on the island without whaling as the driving force at the center of it all.



**Historic American Buildings Survey drawing of the Hadwen House**

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