

## THE HOUSES

Research for the houses participating in this year's kitchen tour was compiled by Historian and author Betsy Tyler.

### 19 Union Street

House carpenter Nathan Nye bought land here in 1803 and built the two and-a-half-story, four-bay, "typical" Nantucket house, which he sold to Sylvanus Ewer in 1805. Ewer, originally a ship-carpenter, became a successful businessman with interests in a number of whaling vessels. Although married four times, he had only one child, Peter F. Ewer, who is known in the annals of Nantucket history as the person who placed the milestones on the road to 'Sconset in the early 1820s, and invented the camels, the oddly named floating dry dock that lifted heavily laden ships over the shallow entrance to the harbor. Peter inherited his father's house, and lived there with his first wife, Eunice, who died in 1822, and then with his second wife, Eunice's sister, Mary, who acquired the house when Peter died in 1855. Nineteen Union remained in the Ewer family for several generations before it was finally sold in 1926.

### 20 Union Street

Long ago, four houses in a row on the east side of Union Street belonged to the daughters of William Coffin Jr., who lived at 18 Union. He built or purchased the dwellings for his daughters, one of whom, Martha, wife of Samuel Jenks, lived at 20 Union. She inherited the house in 1837, but had probably been living there since it was built around 1830. Unlike the typical houses across the street, this is a Federal-style house, with a five-bay façade, central doorway, and four end chimneys. Martha's husband, Samuel, was the first editor of *The Inquirer*, in 1821, and he became the publisher as well, until he sold the paper to his son, William, twenty years later. The newspaper was printed in a small building then standing on Coffin Street during the elder Jenks's reign as editor and publisher. In 1865, *The Inquirer* merged with another island paper, *The Weekly Mirror*, to become *The Inquirer and Mirror*.



20 Union Street at the corner of Coffin Street, circa 1890s

## 22 Union Street

The house at 22 Union Street originated as a “lean-to” somewhere else on the island in the mid 1700s. The lean-to was the predominant style of early dwelling on Nantucket, characterized by a large central chimney and a sloping roof over a shed-like extension at the rear of the house. The style is often referred to as a “saltbox.” The rafters in the attic on the south side of the house at 22 Union Street have been cut, suggesting that the roofline changed from that of a lean-to to a house that is two stories high, front and back. This alteration may have occurred when the house was moved from its original location; it first appeared in its current setting between 1796 and 1809. The deed trail clearly traces it back from current owner Terry Bradley to soapmaker and tallow candlemaker Thaddeus Hussey, whose family lived in the house in 1809. Where the house originated, who built it, and how it got to its present location are matters of conjecture that were explored in depth in the NPT’s first comprehensive house history. Known as the Chopping Bowl restaurant in the early twentieth century, and well known for its abundant flower gardens, the dwelling has been through several incarnations; it was repositioned, renovated, and enlarged in 1998.



### **25 Union Street**

Ebenezer Rand (1746–1825), and his sons, Ebenezer Jr. and Nathaniel, identified as masons and bricklayers in their deed of purchase, bought the property at 25 Union Street in 1806 and sold the land with a dwelling house and outbuildings in 1813 to master mariner Christopher Wyer. The house changed hands a number of times in the nineteenth century, and was the home of a baker, several merchants, and a cooper, before another master mariner, Charles Grant, purchased it in 1863. Like the houses at 19 and 21 Union, it has a four-bay façade and sits on a high brick basement, necessitating a stoop and stairs leading to the sidewalk.

### **35 Union Street**

This typical house, situated on a low stone basement, was not on the land that blacksmith William Gurrill purchased here in 1830. He bought two adjacent parcels that year and moved an older house to the site. According to a note written by Maria Louisa Owen in 1894, the house (once owned by her grandfather, William Coffin) first stood on Chicken Hill, off Prospect Street, and was moved to Union Street in 1797. Gurrill must have moved it from another location on Union Street to his newly acquired property in 1830. He and his wife, Nancy, had six children and made 35 Union their home until 1870. Census records show that Arthur L. Johnson, a painter and paperhanger, and his wife, Florence, lived at 35 Union from the 1920s until the mid-sixties, when the house was sold at auction.

### **36 1/2 Union Street**

A larger house stood at this site as late as 1892, when it appears on one of the Sanborn Insurance Company maps of the town, next to a newly laid “foundation” at 36 Union. The Sanborn maps, which show detailed footprints of houses, garages, shops, schools, churches, and other structures, are invaluable resources for the study of local architecture, they can be viewed online at [www.nha.org](http://www.nha.org). Expansion of the new Victorian house next door may have prompted removal of the old house, which does not appear at the site, on the next published Sanborn map in 1898. The lot remained empty on the 1909 map, but on the next map, published in 1923, the footprint of a small, one-and-a-half-story dwelling appears. Elliot Barnard, who owned 38 Union in the early twentieth century, may have built the small house next to his, or moved a house to the location. His daughter sold 36 ½ Union as a separate residence in 1954.

### **45 Union Street**

Ezra W. Lewis was the first in a long family line of undertakers on Nantucket who still run the Lewis Funeral Parlor at 42 Union Street today. Lewis built his first one-story undertaker’s shop at this site between 1887 and 1892, but replaced it with a one-and-one-half story building in 1898. The Lewis family owned the property until 1980. Since that time the “coffin shop,” as it was familiarly known, has been a private dwelling.

### 47 Union Street

Mariner Thomas V. McCleave, who built the house at 1 Weymouth Lane in the late 1790s, also built this house, known as his “tenant house,” around 1820. Although Thomas and his wife did not live in the tenant house, it was inherited by their grandchildren, the children of their daughter, Polly Coffin, who died in 1836. Those four children all eventually moved away from the island, but owned the house jointly until 1871. The oldest part of the house faces south onto Weymouth Lane, with a large addition built on the northwest side sometime later. The entire structure sits on a very high granite basement.



### 2 Flora Street

William Taber, a house carpenter, sold the house at 2 Flora Street to mariner Thomas Fuller for \$600 in 1831. It is likely that Taber built the small, three-bay, one-and-three-quarter-story house. His deed to Fuller gives as the west boundary the land “which I bought of David Chadwick this day.” Taber used the profit from the sale of his small house to move up the hill, where he probably built 4 Flora as well. Thomas Fuller died in 1841, but his wife, Sofia, and children Reuben and Caroline, lived at 2 Flora for twenty-three more years, until Reuben, who had moved to Illinois, sold the house to mariner Thomas M. Bearse in 1864. During Nantucket’s worst economic depression in the 1860s and 70s, the house was sold at auction for \$225.