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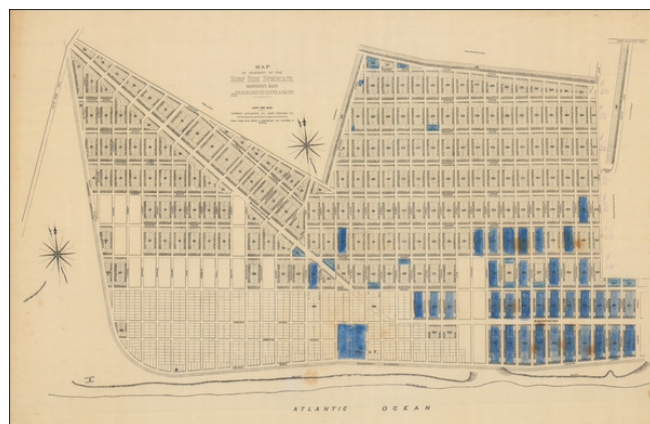
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Map of Property of the Surf Side Syndicate, Nantucket, Mass.... Lots for Sale by Robert Appleton, Jr. East Grange, N.J.

Stock#: 94516
Map Maker:
Date: 1880s
Place:
Color:
Condition:
Size: 34.5 x 21 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

An extremely rare 1880s plat of lots for sale in Surfside on Nantucket's South Shore.

After decades of great prosperity mid-18th century [Nantucket](#) entered a steep economic and demographic decline. The primary cause was the increasing scarcity of whales, which necessitated the construction of ever-larger vessels able to voyage far into the Pacific, but too large to negotiate the sand bar at the entrance to Nantucket Harbor. The decline was accelerated by the double blow of the Great Fire of 1846 followed by the Gold Rush, the latter of which drew both men and ships to California. By the end of the [Civil War](#), which claimed yet more islanders, Nantucket's population had fallen from 9000 in 1840 to fewer than 5000.

No one quite knew it quite yet, but the island's long-term future lay with the seasonal tourist economy. By the 1870s the accumulation of wealth among America's upper and middle classes began to create demand for tourism options, while the explosion of intermodal (rail and steamer) links connecting the island with Cape Cod, Boston, and New York began to create the means of meeting that demand. A similar dynamic occurred on Martha's Vineyard, which had the added and powerful catalyst of the mammoth revival meetings held in and around Oak Bluffs.

Against this background a number of real estate development companies began sniffing around Nantucket, among them the Surfside Land Company. Established in 1873 by prominent citizen Henry Coffin, his brother, son and two other local men, the Company purchased land along the island's South Shore. The parcel was huge, occupying some three miles of coast between Weweeder and Nobader Ponds. This was a visionary move, as the coast was gorgeous but empty of habitation or amenities until a Coast Guard lifesaving station was erected there in 1874.



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Sales seem to have been slow until the Nantucket Railroad inaugurated service to Surfside on July 4, 1881. Around the same time a restaurant was opened, and the Surfside Hotel was established by moving a building piece-by-piece from Providence, Rhode Island. One estimate has it that in its first season of service the train carried 30,000 passengers, many times the island's full-time population. As a result of these improvements, the Land Company's sales picked up, and by 1884 180 lots had been sold, though no residences appear to have been constructed.

The Map of Property of the Surf Side Syndicate

Offered here is an otherwise unrecorded plat map of Surfside issued by New Jersey real estate agent Robert Appleton, Jr. Though the entity named in the title is the "Surf Side Syndicate," Appleton was clearly acting as an agent of Coffin's partnership, as there was no other land speculation in this area at the time.

"Robert Appleton, Jr., Seaside & Country Real Estate. 120 Broadway, New York Branches Properties in all the Oranges and in Nantucket, Mass., for Sale, Rent or Exchange. Nantucket, Mass. Brick Church, N.J.

"Among the many real estate and insurance agents in this vicinity, one of the best known and most highly respected is Robert Appleton, Jr. He has been carrying on a real estate and insurance agency in this place during the past eighteen years. Besides the office at Brick Church a second one is maintained at 120 Broadway, in the Equitable Rotunda. Mr. Appleton is prepared to transact any dealings in real estate, to make favorable exchanges and to write insurance policies at as moderate rates as any agent in the neighborhood. Mr. Appleton's intimate knowledge of the value of property in this section, makes his advice of the utmost value to all persons desiring real estate, and who have little or no opportunity to study into the details of this complex business. Employment is given to five assistants at Mr. Appleton's office." [\(The Oranges and Their Leading Business Men. Newark: Mercantile Publishing Co., 1890, p. 90\)*](#)*

The map depicts a town laid out on an unimaginative grid pattern, with thousands of lots of various sizes priced between \$40 and 100 depending on size and proximity to the beach. The line of the Nantucket Railroad is clearly visible between Atlantic Avenue and the sea, while three buildings near the intersection of Atlantic and Hawthorne may be the new rail depot, hotel and/or restaurant. Just to the west is the Coast



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Guard Life Saving Station built several years earlier. Lot prices are scribbled in colored pencil on the right, and quite a few lots have been colored in blue, presumably reflecting closed sales. Given the relative lack of amenities at the time, the scale of the venture is almost unbelievably ambitious.

Indeed, despite some progress the development never took hold. The Railroad, repeatedly washed out by winter storms, went belly up in 1895 and was reorganized as the Nantucket Central. The Surfside route was abandoned, with the new line running from town through Tom Nevers and on to [Siasconset](#) on the eastern end of the island. Surfside withered, the hotel fell into disrepair, and the Land Company eventually sold out for a measly \$2.80 an acre.

In summary, an early and hitherto unrecorded artifact of early real estate development on Nantucket.

Detailed Condition:

Lithograph on very thin paper, image area 25 7/8"h x 36 1/4"w at sheet edge, numerous lots highlighted in blue watercolor and a few annotations in colored pencil. Small areas of discoloration, some minor toning and creasing along edges, but very good or better.