

The Hoffman House (The Holmhurst Hotel)
123-131 Pennsylvania Avenue
Atlantic City
Atlantic County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-925

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NJ-925

THE HOFFMAN HOUSE

(The Holmhurst Hotel)

Location: 123-131 Pennsylvania Avenue, Atlantic City, Atlantic County, New Jersey

Located on Absecon Island in Atlantic City, south of Pacific Avenue (Figure 1), the Holmhurst occupies lot 56 of Block 14 of the City Plan. The subject property is bounded on the north and south by properties of Resorts International of New Jersey, on the west by Presbyterian Avenue (alley). Absecon Lighthouse, at the corner of Rhode Island and Pacific Avenues, is approximately, twelve blocks to the east, near Absecon Inlet.

USGS: Atlantic City Quadrangle, New Jersey - Atlantic Co., Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18 549720 4356780.

Present Owner: Resorts International of New Jersey, Inc.
Box 208
Atlantic City, New Jersey 08404

Present Use: Vacant from January, 1985, the Holmhurst was demolished during the week of March 19, 1985 in order to provide space for new commercial development. To avoid confusion in chronology, this report describes the building in the present tense.

Significance: The Holmhurst is the largest extant frame building in Atlantic City, and the last link to the gracious resort hotels which characterized late nineteenth century Atlantic City as "America's Brighton." The hotel dates at least to 1890 and represents a second generation of resort development on its particular site, succeeding the "Seaside House" (1860-1888). The site itself constitutes one of the high points in the area and was the place from which Dr. Jonathan Pitney, the founder of Atlantic City in 1845, declared that the area should become "the El Dorado of the Atlantic Coast" (English, 1884:44).

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of Construction: Began before 1890; enlarged 1897, 1912; renovated 1935, 1941, 1956, 1959, 1960, 1964, 1971 (Boyds Directories, 1890-1910; Mueller, 1892, plate 2; Mueller 1908, plate 3; Stitzer, 1985). Precedent for construction had been provided by the Seaside House, one of the city's early hostelryes which was moved south to a new location in 1888.
2. Architect: Not documented.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

Because it has not yet been proven that pre-1890 construction did not exist on the property, the following is a property history extending to first construction on the lot rather than to the first owner of the Holmhurst:

- 1856 Deed, May 29, 1856, recorded in Volume 2, folio 244. Camden and Atlantic Land Company to William T. and Mary Ann Fry.
- 1860 Deed, December 15, 1860, recorded in Volume 2, folio 345. William T. and Mary Ann Fry to David and Margaret Scattergood.
- 1867 Deed, March 25, 1867, recorded in Volume 29, folio 632. David and Margaret Scattergood to Charles Evans and Casper W. Haines.
- 1876 Deed of confirmation, April 14, 1876, recorded in Volume 111, folio 58. The Camden and Atlantic Land Company to Charles Evans.
- 1887 Deed, April 29, 1887, recorded in Volume 117, folio 315. Charles and Anna Evans to Edward S. Lee.
- 1898 Deed, March 15, 1898, recorded in Volume 220, folio 356. Edward S. Lee and wife to Henry Darnell.
- 1900 Deed, March 31, 1900, recorded in Volume 245, folio 169. Edward S. Lee and wife to Henry Darnell.

- 1938 Deed, January 24, 1938, recorded in Volume 1070, folio 330. Albert H. and Edith S. Darnell to Holmhurst Hotel Co.
- 1942 Deed, December 28, 1942, recorded in Volume 1138, folio 353 Holmhurst Hotel Company to Charles and Mabel Stitzer.
- 1964 Deed, April 29, 1964, recorded in Volume 2218, folio 160. Mabel Stitzer to Norman Stitzer.
- 1985 Deed, January 25, 1985, recorded in Volume 4019, folio 248. Norman and Louise P. Stitzer to Resorts International, Inc. of New Jersey.
4. Builder, Contractor: Not documented. Probably E. S. Lee, a prominent local brick merchant and builder, who purchased the property in 1887.
 5. Original Plans and Construction: Built on the plan of a modified L, with the east wing set south of the side face of the main block in 1892 (Mueller, 1892). Constructed with three stories above an above-grade basement, this building featured a continuous two story porch which faced the west, south, and east walls of the main block and continued along a portion of the south wall of the wing. Another porch sheltered a major portion of the north face of the wing. Brick piers were integral to the basement and first floor wood frame with a clapboard exterior.
 6. Subsequent Plan: An annex added to ell, north and south towers added; brick kitchen added south of annex and dining room annex built out from south wall of ell.

B. Historical Context:

1. Background History.

The Holmhurst relates historically to Lot 176 of the 1855 survey of lots for sale as the property of the Camden and Atlantic Land Company. Lot 176 was the east side, beach front lot on Pennsylvania Avenue (Figure 2). Typical of the landscape of the time, sand dunes stood between Pacific Avenue and the beach, causing Lot 176 to be among the high points of the area. In addition, according to land records, this property in 1856 extended south 90± to the line of storm tides; line of the Atlantic Ocean (Atlantic County Deed Book 111:159). The earliest

private owners were William and Mary Ann Fry who purchased the parcel in 1856.

In 1861 the Seaside House, a plainly-built, thirty room hotel was erected on the site (Heston, 1904; II, 125). In 1867, when the high water mark was about fifty feet from the house, the property was owned by Charles Evans and Caspar Haines, Philadelphia area Quakers who also managed the hotel (Heston, 1904). Evans and Haines in 1872 added thirty-five rooms to the Seaside House (Heston, 1904). The work possibly related to a north ell because by 1872 the plan of the Seaside House was an infilled L (Figure 3). More construction probably took place before 1884, when an addition north of the ell is also recorded (Figure 4).

Charles Evans became whole owner of the Seaside House following the death of his partner in 1876. Over the years, however, the sea had gradually receded, adding considerably more land to the ocean side of Lot 176 and other beachfront properties. As a consequence, the Camden and Atlantic Land Company in 1880 established a test case, suing Edwin Lippincott, owner of the Haddon House, a hotel west of the Seaside House. With this suit, the Land Company issued a writ of ejectment and claimed ownership of all land beyond the 90± foot mark as established in the early deeds. The trial was first postponed and then subject to two struck juries before the case went to the Supreme Court in 1883. The upper court decided in favor of Lippincott but also noted an error in one of the questions of the lower court. Following yet another trial, a final opinion was rendered in favor of Lippincott and thus favorable to all other beachfront property owners, including Charles Evans (English, 1884:144). Possessed of a considerable amount of marketable land and his position affirmed by a deed of confirmation from the Land Company, Charles Evans then subdivided the southerly portion of his Seaside House parcel, allowing for at least six cottage lots between the original hotel and a new beach front commercial property. In 1887, Evans sold the Seaside House and an adjacent parcel to Edward S. Lee, brick yard owner, builder of most of the major public facilities in Atlantic City and a City Councilman in 1888. While Evans moved the Seaside House to the beach property, Lee established a new hotel business on the old site. The cottage parcels Evans sold with covenants, "making Pennsylvania Avenue the most select and desirable Avenue in Atlantic City" (Hall, 1900:470).

2. Holmhurst History.

The Hoffman House, founded by Edward S. Lee and probably named for the then mayor of Atlantic City, S. D. Hoffman, was a 60 room hotel in 1892 (Heston, 1892). Although smaller than the old Seaside House, it nevertheless conformed to the ell plan established by the original hotel (Figures 3, 5). The Hoffman House remained in Lee's ownership between 1892 and 1900 when Atlantic City experienced the beginnings of unprecedented growth. The resort boom between 1890 and 1910 caused the permanent population to more than triple in size and new high-rise hotels built of brick and even of reinforced concrete were constructed to compete with the sprawling frame hostelrys of the earlier times. In 1900 Edward Lee sold the Hoffman House to Henry Darnell who renamed the place the Holmhurst in reference to its being on a sand bank or a piece of rising ground by the sea (Stitzer, 1985). Having also bought the adjacent south parcel, Darnell enlarged the building, adding the squared south pavilion and a fourth floor overall (Figures 6, 7, 8).

At least by 1903, the Holmhurst offered steam heat and provided elevator service from the street to the principal first floor lobby. Open all year, the place was advertised as a "high class, modern homelike hotel" (Heston, 1903). In 1904, the hotel advertised 100 rooms and specified "excellent cuisine" (Heston, 1904:II, 415).

By 1936 the Holmhurst appeared much as it does at present, the major exception being the conformation of the porch, including stairs and two galleried floors (Figure 9).

The Darnell family continued to manage the Holmhurst, until the peak of the Depression years. In 1938, Albert H. Darnell sold the property to the Holmhurst Hotel Company. The controlling owner of the company was Charles W. Stitzer an experienced hotel man who, as manager of the New England Hotel, had been the first entrepreneur to draw conventions to Atlantic City (Stitzer, 1985). Three generations of the Stitzer family managed the Holmhurst from 1938 to 1985, adding to the property and considerably altering the interior of the hotel. The family sold the premises in January, 1985.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Late nineteenth century bracketed frame building enlarged and updated to a freely interpreted neo-classical image. Major feature of principal elevation is two-stage veranda. End-towers feature overscaled covered cornices which tie into extended eaves of hipped roofs.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good, as of March 11, 1985.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 164' x 131' (Figure 10).
2. Foundations: unexcavated. Brick basement above grade.
3. Walls:
 - a. Hotel block: frame.
 - b. Basement: buff brick painted white.
 - c. Kitchen: brick.
4. Structural Systems:
 - a. Basement and 1st floor - post and beam
 - b. Other - standard wood framing
5. Openings:
 - a. Doors: double leaf entrance door unarticulated, sliding French doors provide ventilation for enclosed porch.
 - b. Windows: original windows are single-unit double hung sash 2/2, with pedimented frame. Alterations include blocked-in openings, whole or in part, or twinned units, 1/1.
6. Porches: A two-stage veranda is major feature of front elevation. Uprights at grade level are brick piers; at first floor level, Tuscan columns. Turned ballustrade at first floor level.

Pedimented pavilion projects eight feet from face of porch. Pavilion defines public entrance to hotel now at grade.

7. Roof: Standing seam metal; cresting on pavilion roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Public Spaces, Basement: Lower Lobby (reception) entered from under pavilion. Post and beam construction is provided paneled finish.
2. Public Spaces, First Floor: Segmentally arched spaces in Upper Lobby; Dining Room finished with column uprights.
3. Public Spaces, All Floors: Long narrow halls are typical.
4. Public Spaces; Stairs: Open string, dog leg.
5. Openings.
 - a. Doors: French doors lead to veranda from public rooms; double doors, transomed-over, identify the one elevator; two-panel doors, transomed-over, identify guest room entrances.
 - b. Windows: Typically 2/2, single units of various widths.
 1. Trim: Symmetrically molded trim, bullseye corner-blocks are typical.
6. Construction.
 - a. Tower attic: Plaster cove on lath, hipped roof.

D. Site:

1. General Setting: The Holmhurst is the last vestige of a Victorian streetscape which featured cottages and hotels (Figures 3-8). The low scale of a former time is rapidly being displaced by hotel casinos and office buildings. Two of the few pre-1920 landmarks nearby are the U. S. Post Office and the brownstone Presbyterian Church. Otherwise, casinos dominate.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Photographic Views.

Collection of Mr. Norman Stitzer, 109 South Summer Avenue, Margate, New Jersey.

B. Interviews:

Stitzer, Norman, Sr. Last owner/manager of hotel, 109 South Summer Avenue, Margate, New Jersey.

Stitzer, Norman, Jr. Assistant manager of hotel, 22 South Pennsylvania Avenue, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Tilton, Margaret. Granddaughter of Charles Evans. 26 S. Laclade Place, South Atlantic City, New Jersey.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and Unpublished Sources.

Atlantic County Courthouse, Mays Landing, New Jersey,
Land Records.

Book 2, Folio 244, May 28, 1856
Book 2, Folio 345, December 15, 1860
Book 29, Folio 632, March 25, 1867
Book 111, Folio 58, April 14, 1886
Book 117, Folio 315, April 29, 1887
Book 220, Folio 356, March 15, 1898
Book 245, Folio 169, March 31, 1900
Book 1070, Folio 330, January 24, 1938
Book 1138, Folio 353, December 28, 1942
Book 2036, Folio 417, November 17, 1960
Book 2170, Folio 402, June 24, 1963
Book 2218, Folio 248, April 29, 1964
Book 3304, Folio 60, January 2, 1979
Book 4019, Folio 248, January 25, 1985

2. Secondary and Published Sources.

A. H. Muehler Company. Atlas of Atlantic City, New Jersey (1896).

A. H. Muehler Company. Atlas of Atlantic City and Absecon Island (1908).

A. H. Muehler Company. Atlas of Atlantic City and City of Brigantine, (1924), Plate 3.

Beers, Comstock, and Cline. Topographical Map of Atlantic County, New Jersey (1872).

Bloom, Nancy. Historic Sites Survey, Atlantic City, New Jersey. Atlantic City: Atlantic County Office of Cultural Affairs and New Jersey State Office of Historic Preservation (1979).

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Coccaro, Joseph, "Hotel Sale Fills Void," Atlantic City Press, January 28, 1985.

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Funnell, Charles E. By the Beautiful Sea: the Rise and High Times of that Great American Resort (1975).

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Heston, Alfred. Heston's Handbook of Atlantic City, (1888 - 1897).

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Lee, A. Y. Map of Atlantic City, New Jersey (1890).

Mason, Cindy. "Holmhurst Hotel: National Register Nomination," 1977.

Montaigne, Fen. "The End of an Era; An A. C. Hotel Falls," Philadelphia Inquirer, March 23, 1985.

Sanborn Map Co. Insurance Maps of Atlantic City (1952, amended to 1957), Plate 15.

Woolman and Rose, Historical and Biographical Atlas of
the New Jersey Coast (1878).

D. Suggestions for further Study or Inquiry.

Collection of Norman Stitzer. Uncatalogued collection of artifacts and photographs, now stored in a trailer in Atlantic City and currently unavailable.

PROJECT INFORMATION

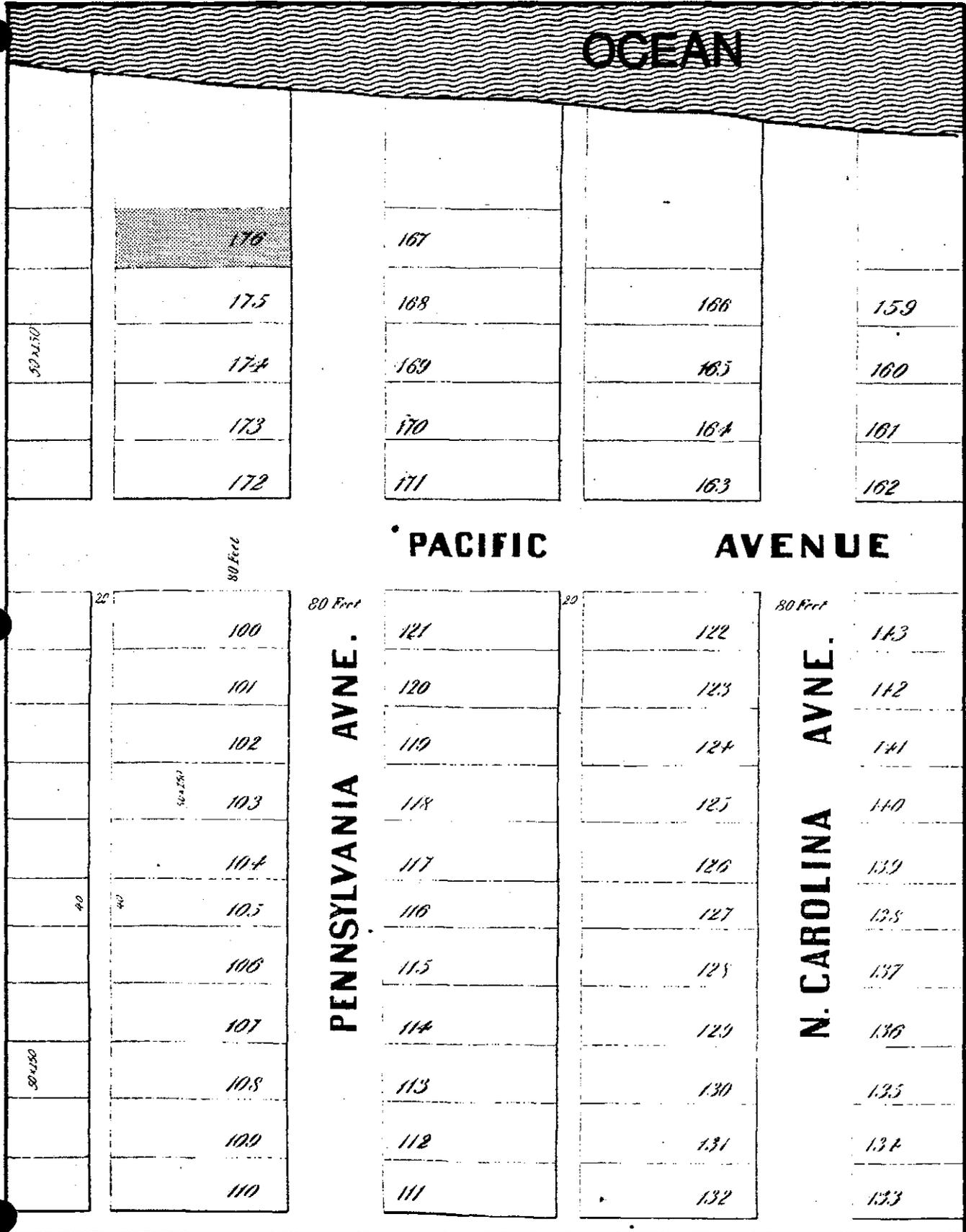
The Holmhurst Hotel was listed in the National Register in 1977, at which time it was serving as one of Atlantic City's older, notable hostelrys. It closed after Christmas, 1984.

This survey of the Holmhurst Hotel was undertaken by John Milner Associates, Inc. from March 11 to April 10, 1985, under contract by Resorts International of New Jersey. Demolition of the premises took place during the week of March 18, 1985.

Prepared by: Alice Kent Schooler
Principal Architectural Historian
and
John E. McGaw, Preservation Specialist

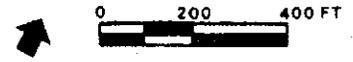
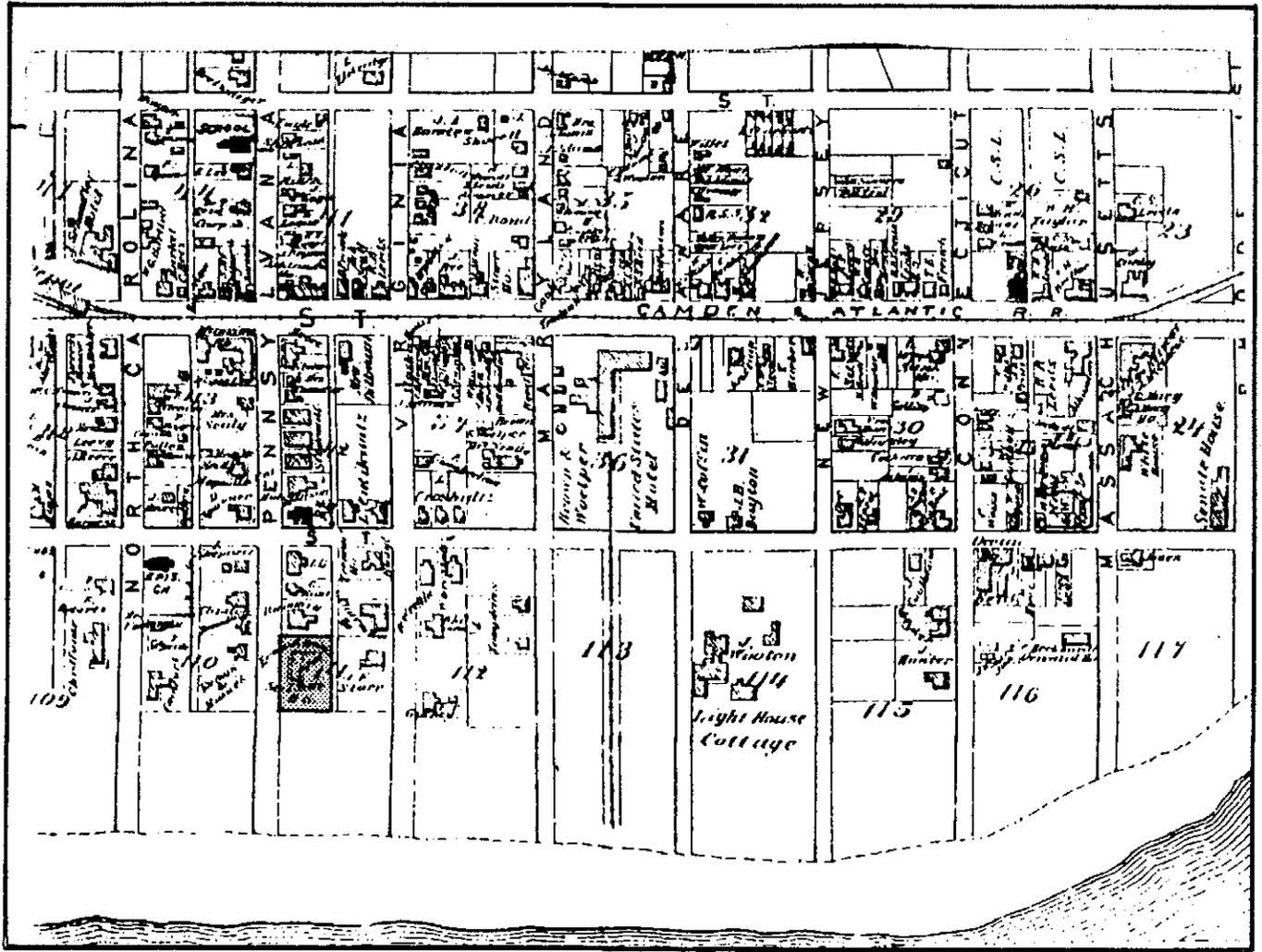
John Milner Associates, Inc.
West Chester, Pennsylvania 19380
April 20, 1985

Photographs by: James L. Dillon Company, Inc.
7765 Wayne Avenue
Upper Darby, Pennsylvania 19082



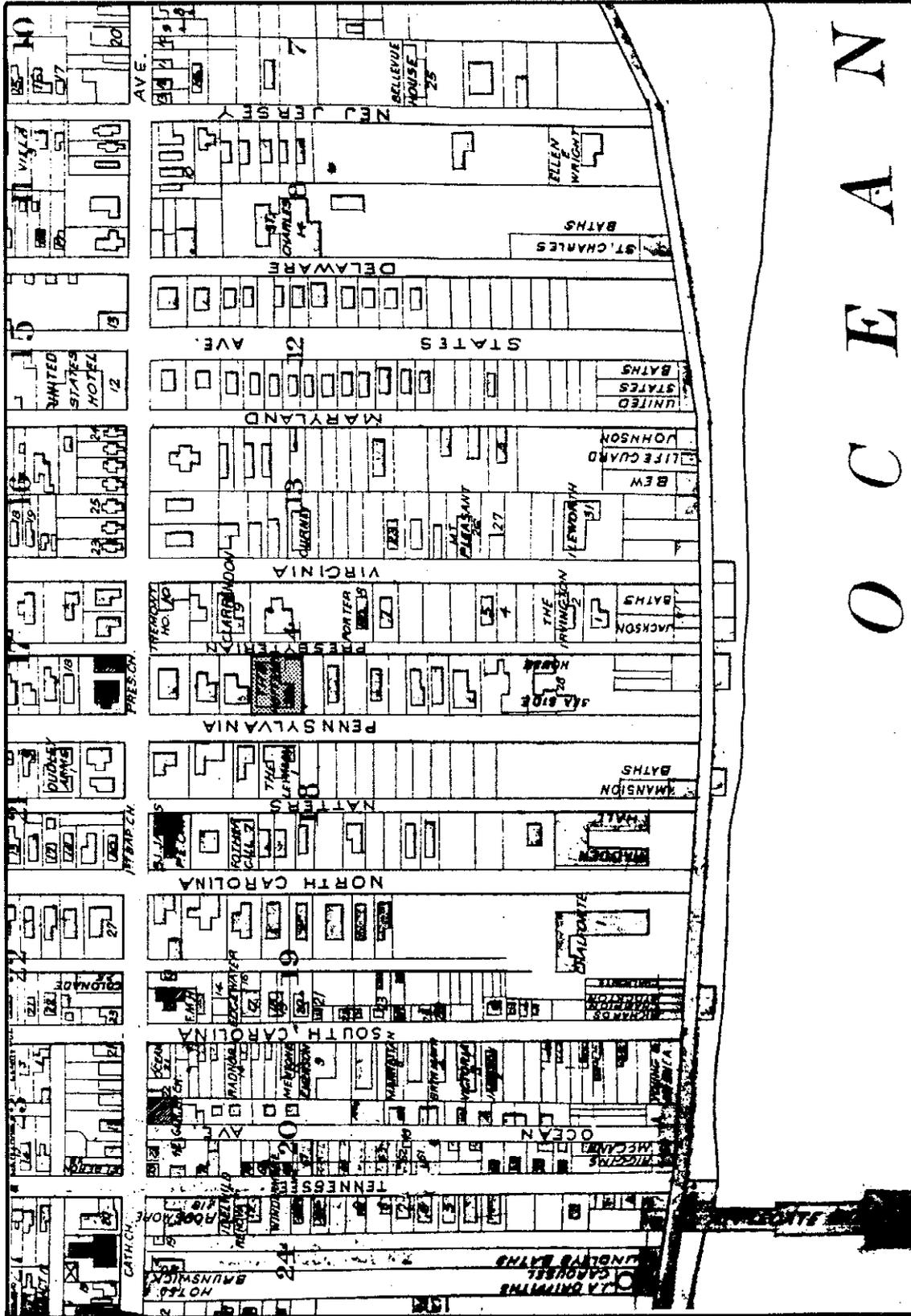
Lots for Sale, circa 1855.
Source: Camden and Atlantic Land Company, Atlantic City.

Figure 2



 Project Location

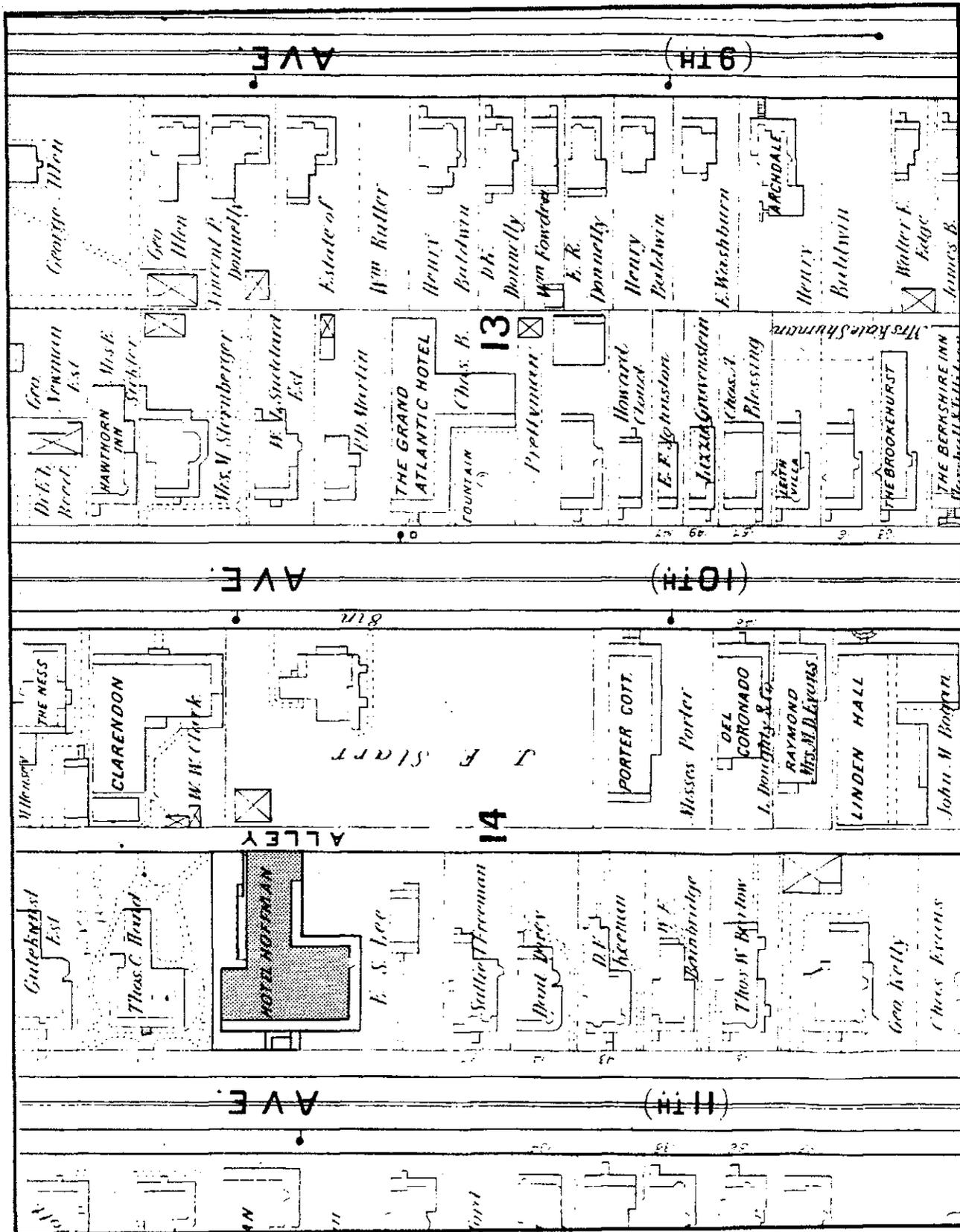
Location of The Seaside House with additions, 1872
Source: Beers and Comstock Topographic Map of
Atlantic City, New Jersey.



Project Location

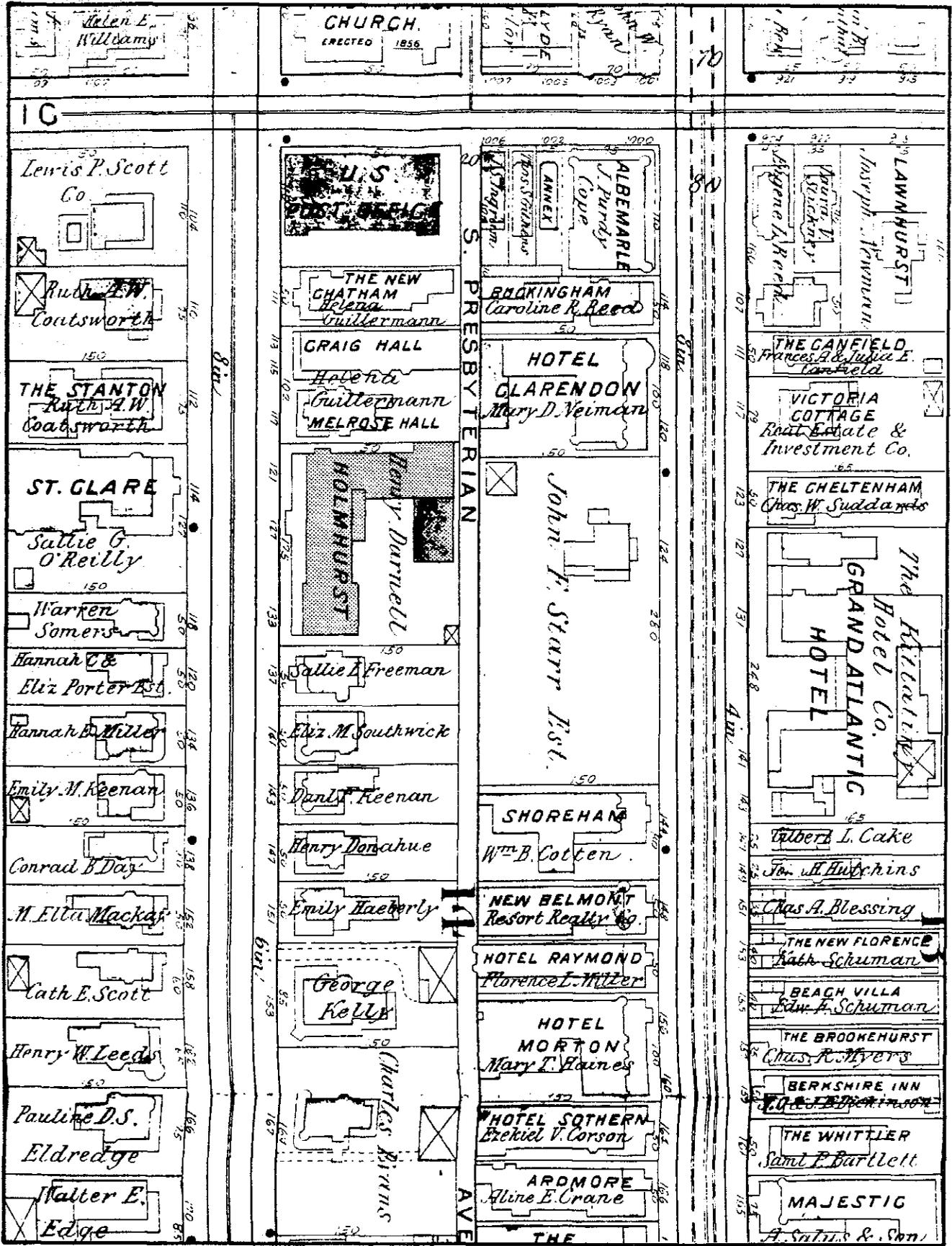
Plan and Location of The Hotel Hoffman, 1891.
Source: A. Y. Lee Map of Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1891.

Figure 5



Plan and Location of The Hotel Hoffman, 1892.
 Source: A. H. Mueller's Atlas of Atlantic City and Absecon Island.

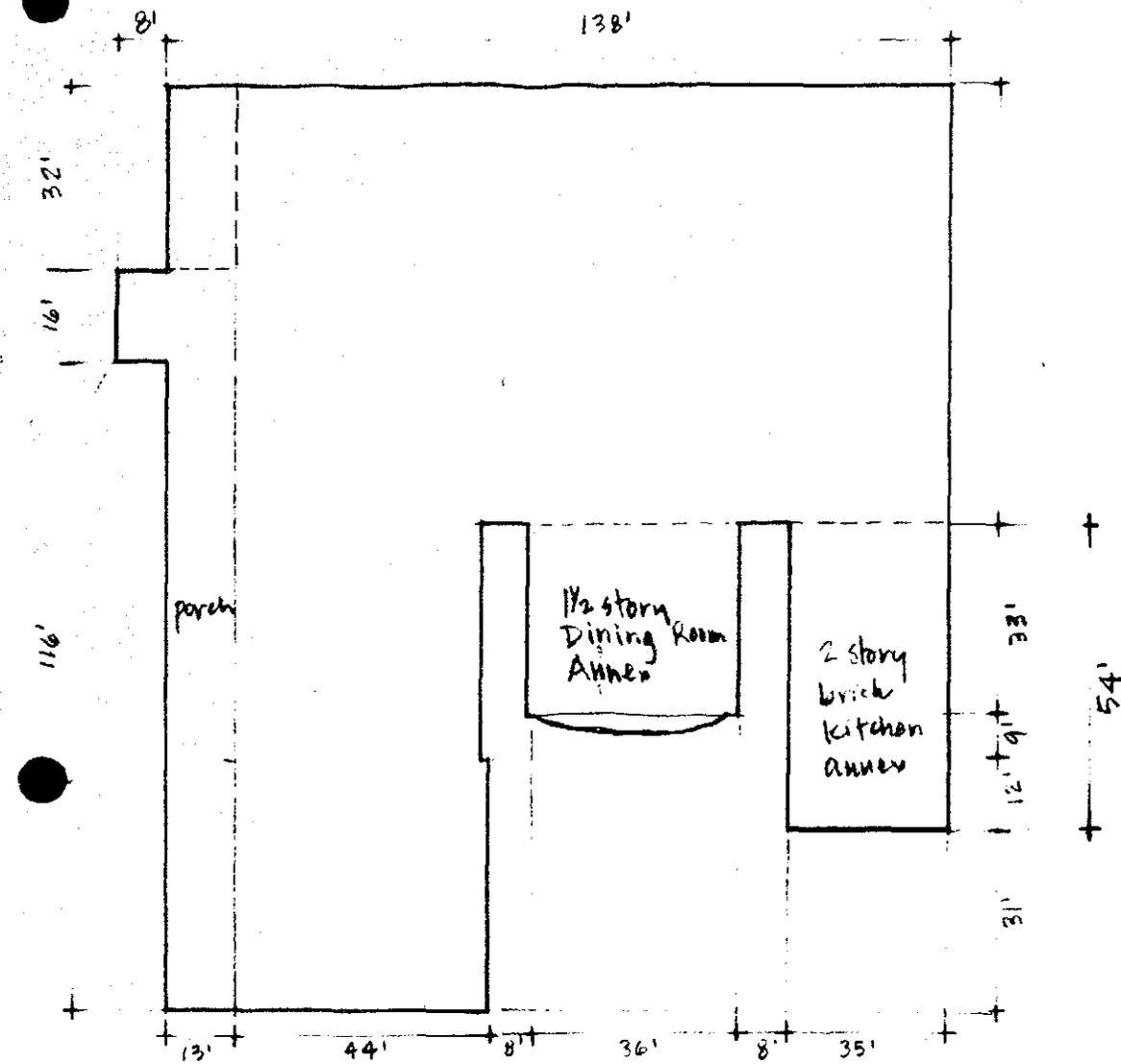
Figure 6



Plan and Location of The Holmhurst Hotel, 1908.
Source: A. H. Mueller's Atlas of Atlantic City and Absecon Island.



North and West Elevation of Holmhurst Hotel, 1936.
Source: Holmhurst Hotel Letterhead



primary elevation →

HOLMHURST HOTEL
PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE
ATLANTIC CITY, NJ



Figure 10

J. McGraw 3/12/85