

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

AD 76000 725



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Alice Austen House; Clear Comfort multiple property: NO Additional Doc
other names/site number Alice Austen House

2. Location

street & number 2 Hylan Boulevard not for publication
city or town New York vicinity
state New York code NY county Richmond code 085 zip code 10305

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. See continuation sheet for additional comments.
Michael Lynch Deputy SHPO 3 FEB 2017
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet for additional comments.
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:)
Signature of the Keeper Alexander Date of Action 3/23/17

Alice Austen House

Name of Property

Richmond County, NY

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single family

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial/Gothic

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls _____

roof _____

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Alice Austen House

Name of Property

Richmond County, NY

County and State

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # HABS No. NY-5472
- recorded by Historic American Engineering

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- architecture
- art
- community planning
- _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance

C1700-1945

Significant Dates

1867-1945

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Alice Austen

Cultural Affiliation

na

Architect/Builder

unknown

Primary location of additional data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Alice Austen House
Name of Property

Richmond County, NY
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.12 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18	579249	4496465	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Andrew S. Dolkart contact: Kathleen LaFrank, NR Coordinator, NYSHPO 518.268.2165
organization NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project date January 2017
street & number 116 Pinehurst Avenue, S-11 telephone 212.854.5728
city or town New York state New York zip code 100033

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Alice Austen House
Richmond County, New York

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Introduction

The Alice Austen House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970 and designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1993. Now, as part of New York SHPO's Underrepresented Communities Grant for LGBT Sites in New York City, undertaken by the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, we are submitting additional documentation that more fully recognizes Austen's openly non-traditional life and how she dealt with gender and social norms in her photography. Because of the poor quality of the 1970 form, which had an extremely brief description and did not specify a period of significance or applicable criteria, and because new information has since come to light, the SHPO has chosen to submit a new National Register nomination to current standards. This form documents a period of significance of c. 1690-1945. Although we are updating the description and significance, adding an area of significance, and substantially expanding another one, we are not making any changes to the boundary and we are not seeking to amend the National Historic Landmark nomination at this time.

The description in this updated National Register nomination is based closely on that prepared for the NHL nomination, which, in turn, was closely based on the description in the *Alice Austen House Historic Structure Report*, completed in 1979 by historian Shirley A. Zavin, architect Raymond F. Pavia, and historical consultant Ann Novotny. The NHL description has been slightly edited and amended to accord with changes to the property since 1979.

Description

The Alice Austen House is located at 2 Hylan Boulevard in the Rosebank (originally Clifton) section of the New York City borough of Staten Island, Richmond County, New York. Rosebank is a largely residential neighborhood with a mix of low-scale houses, some dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, and a few apartment buildings. The house sits on a small landscaped site that, to the east, is bounded by the shore of The Narrows, the entrance to New York's harbor and the body of water that separates Staten Island from Brooklyn. The Austen House occupies a lot now owned by the city of New York. To the west of the Austen property is the former Henry McFarlane House, a villa begun in the 1840s with later additions; this property is also owned by New York City, although as of 2016 the house was vacant and deteriorated. To the north, the nominated property borders onto Hylan Boulevard, a residential street. Immediately across the street, on the north side of Hylan Boulevard, is a group of six two- to three-story houses and a fourteen-story modern apartment building. To the south of the property is a wooded area with modern single-family houses. The site is just north of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. The house and grounds have undergone extensive restoration since acquisition by New York City.

The Austen House has a complex construction history dating back to c. 1690-1700, when the central section of the house was built. The house was enlarged to the north between 1725 and 1750 and to the east between 1750

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and 1775. After the purchase of the property by John Haggerty Austen, an addition was added to the south in 1844-46. It was between 1844 and 1878 that changes were made by the Austen family that converted the one-and-one-half story and cellar Colonial-era farmhouse into a picturesque, two-story and cellar Gothic villa. Additional small changes were made at other times. The house is roughly T-shaped with the top of the T lying parallel to the water. The east (front) facade of the house has five irregularly spaced bays between door and windows and corresponds to the top of the T. The foundation is fieldstone and cut stone. The walls are principally of clapboard except for the walls of the kitchen, dining wing and south wall, which are of fieldstone roughly patched with cement mortar and whitewashed. A porch extends the full length of the east facade facing the water. It has six bays with trellis-work supported by intervening lattice panels. Another porch, smaller and enclosed, is on the north side of the house. There are three chimneys. The north and south chimneys are similar in design, built of brick with common bond and a projecting header course at the next to last top course. They both have Tudor-style pots. The third chimney is in the western wing above the kitchen and the west attic room. It is built of brick with common bond and projecting bands of headers.

The Historic Structure Report (HSR) details the construction history and illustrates the construction phases on a plan (see continuation sheet). The construction phases, as delineated in the HSR are: A) the original, central portion of the house, ca. 1690-1700; B) a one-room addition at the south end, ca. 1725-50; C) a one and a half story addition constructed at the rear giving the house an L-shaped plan, ca. 1750-75; D) a one-room extension to the north end of the house, 1844-46; E) the addition of a kitchen section at the rear of the house, c. 1852 (demolished); F) the addition of a porch (later enclosed) at the north end of the house, along with the construction of a projecting bay window at the rear of section B, 1868-70; G) twentieth-century additions (1900, 1945) in order to have modern plumbing facilities.

Section A. ca. 1700-1725

The original portion of the Austen House was a one-room, one and a half story, gable-roofed structure. It was built using the late-medieval exposed frame or half-timber technique. The massive beams were hand hewn with a broadaxe, and the infilling consists of bricks, clay and mortar nogging coated with plaster and then whitewashed. As the house was enlarged, portions of the exterior walls of this section were lost; however, the exterior portion of the west wall is preserved behind section C (added 1750-1775), as are the thirty-six inch hand-split cedar shingles that were used to cover the upper story and some of the original roof shingles and wood gutter. All of these are visible on the interior through view holes. The original cellar was probably shallow, although very little evidence remains due to later construction. The east wall, obscured by concrete, remains, but the fireplace wall has been replaced. The foundation is of roughly laid fieldstone.

Some of the original interior finishing remains extant, including heavy hand-planed widely spaced vertical and horizontal timbers used for framing. Also, the original sixteen-inch-wide floor boards on the second story that

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form the "ceiling" of the first story are intact. Flooring, molding, door and window surrounds date from later periods.

In the second quarter of the eighteenth century, when an addition was erected to the south (see Section B), the space was divided into a hall and parlor on the first story and a hall and bedroom on the second story. During Alice Austen's occupancy of the house, the first floor continued to be a hall and parlor. On the second story, Austen's grandparents occupied the bedroom.

Section B. 1725-50

This one-room addition to the south of the main structure is somewhat smaller than the original section of the house and uses construction methods more traditional for the period. This addition extended the gable roof and the one-and-one-half-story original house. As a result, the south foundation wall was removed. The foundation of the addition is similar to the original house – roughly laid fieldstone pointed with sand and lime. The original cellar was entered by the existing hatchway at the southeast corner. The central portion of the south wall of the addition is occupied by the chimney base consisting of two stone piers supporting the hearth and chimney. The exterior south wall of this addition is original in appearance. The lower masonry portion, composed of small stones, rises to a height of ten feet. Above are early, but not original, clapboards nailed with machine cut nails. Small six-over-six windows flank the chimney in the upper story.

As a result of this addition, the plan of the house was altered somewhat. A center hall was created by partitioning off the two southernmost bents of the original one-room house. The doors entering into the new hall at both ends and the doors that lead to the two flanking rooms are all equally wide and seem to date from the period of this addition. The present double or "Dutch" front door, with its five-light transom and wide muntins, also dates from this period. The door surrounds date from a later period. Much of the original material of this addition is extant. The flooring on both the first and second floors, consisting of wide boards laid with splines and handmade nails, is original. The beams are massive, but less so than in the first section of the house, and they are less widely spaced. Windows in this addition have been altered several times.

The south wall fireplace is the most prominent feature of the addition. The original construction consists of perpendicular jambs seven-and-one-half feet apart and topped by an oak lintel. A shallow smoke channel, which widens as it ascends, is located at the rear as an early attempt to remove the draft. The chimney narrows slightly toward the ceiling. This fireplace was covered with decorative woodwork and tiles during the occupancy of the Austen family in the mid-nineteenth century.

The addition continued to be used as a parlor on the first story. The second-story room was used by Alice Austen's grandparents and, after Austen inherited the house and Gertrude Tate moved in with her, this was

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Gertrude's room. At some point the north wall on the second floor of the original house was removed and a new wall erected several feet to the north, thus widening the hall. A closet was built in the northwest corner of the hall that was converted into Alice Austen's darkroom, which, with its shelving, is extant.

Section C. 1750-75

This section of the house consists of a one-and-one-half story stone wing added to the west of the house. It originally had a kitchen and, later, the dining room and kitchen. Constructed of fieldstone with a gable roof, the walls are seven-feet-high on the north and south ends, and the west wall is fifteen-feet-high. The fireplace and floor level in the kitchen are original, although the lintel of the fireplace was once higher, as indicated by the row of beveled bricks seen inside the opening. In order to enlarge the dining room, the Austens excavated it and thus lowered the floor about one foot. The beams in the kitchen addition are roughhewn and were intended to be boxed in.

Section D. 1844-46; Section E. ca. 1852; other alterations prior to 1860

The additions and alterations made by the Austens between their purchase of the property in 1844 and 1860 consisted primarily of repairs and stabilization to the old and deteriorated house and the addition of a one-room wing to the north of the original structure.

The one-room addition built to the north in 1844-46 entailed the demolition of the original north wall and chimney. The foundation for the new wing is constructed of squared, carefully faced stones well laid with lime and sand mortar. This north addition extends the one-and-one-half-story height and the gable roof form of the original house. As part of this project, the north foundation of Section A was replaced and a new hatchway was built. In addition, fourteen feet of the north sill of the original house was replaced and the rotten ends of four beams, which were reinforced by adding three-foot sections, were securely attached to the side of the floor beams with wooden pins. The floor beams in Section D are much smaller than those in Sections A and B.

On the exterior of the house, the Austens added the facade porch with trellis-work supports and intervening lattice panels. They placed a scalloped bargeboard under the porch roof eaves, inserted diamond-pane glazing in the upper half of the Dutch door and constructed dormer windows in the main section of the house. Also during this remodeling, new roofing boards were installed in sections A and B, and the entire roof was re-shingled; a bargeboard was placed under the dormer eaves.

On the interior of the house, every room – except the second floor south bedroom – required re-plastering; also, flooring was replaced, molding around all doors added, and south wall ventilators were installed. In addition, six and one-half foot built-in cupboards and an oak closet, both with gilt moldings and decorative patent cast hinges, were installed in the main room of section A along with built-in wardrobes in the second floor rooms.

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The original stairs were replaced by a two-run staircase which provided access to the second floor from the rear of the house.

The first-story room in this wing was Alice Austen's bedroom, while the second-story room became the apartment of her aunt and uncle, Oswald and Mary Müller.

Section F. 1860-78

Between 1860 and 1878, the Austen family conducted more alterations on their house, but rather than repair and restoration work, this series of changes served to improve the appearance of the house and complete the Gothicization begun earlier. Exterior alterations included the elongation of the east porch windows, the use of diamond-pane glass on windows and storm doors, new window moldings and decorative cresting and bargeboard additions to the roof.

Section F, a faceted one-story bay or sun porch at the north end of the house, was completed by 1878. Entrance to this bay was gained from the exterior through a doorway in the east face. When the bay was added, the east window on the north wall was converted to an internal door. Other alterations of this period on the exterior include a projecting faceted bay window on the west facade off of the 1725-50 addition and Gothic cresting and bargeboard on the rear portion of the house.

On the interior of the house, further decorative embellishments included built-in cupboards on the west wall of the second-floor north bedroom, construction of built-in diamond-pane bookcases flanking the chimney in the parlor, and the perforated scroll work covering the parlor fireplace mantel.

Section G, ca. 1900

Section G, a two-story wood-frame addition was attached to the west side of Section D. This small structure was connected to the house through a door cut into the exterior of the 1844-46 addition. The west slope of the roof was raised to provide enough height to the second floor of the addition. The lower roof slope of the addition intersects with the roof of the kitchen wing.

Twentieth-Century Alterations

A few minor changes took place to the house in the second half of the twentieth century before it became a city-owned property in 1975. The preservation of the house is due to advocacy from Friends of the Alice Austen House, an organization established to save the building from demolition. This group also spearheaded the major restoration of the house and continues to raise funds for its preservation and interpretation. The house underwent an extensive restoration campaign from 1983-1985 by the architectural firm of Beyer Blinder Belle that sought to return it to its appearance in the 1890s. The museum opened to the public in 1985. The museum

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undertook a second restoration in 2013-2014 with funds allocated by the Partners in Preservation program, funded through the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the American Express. The restoration was mostly cosmetic – replacing rotting woodwork and trim, painting the exterior facades, and restoring Alice Austen’s darkroom.

During the years that Alice Austen lived in the house the grounds were extensively landscaped. Much of this landscaping has been lost, although a number of original trees are extant and there has been some restoration work completed on the grounds. The most significant change is erosion along waterfront that has decreased an area of beach that was previously extant as well as necessitated relocating the original entrance drive.

The house has evolved since its initial construction c. 1690-1700. However, it retains its integrity to the period when Alice Austen lived here. Restoration work and the interpretation of the structure focuses on the period from 1890 to 1900, when the home was at its prime condition as a fully developed Victorian suburban residence and when Alice Austen was most active as a photographer.¹ The home retains some original elements and features from this period along with some from earlier that were preserved by the Austen family, including: the massing, doors, glass windows, floor boards, ceiling boards, built-ins, and hardware. Other elements have been refabricated during the structure’s subsequent restorations. Austen’s original darkroom is extant. The furnishing of two historic period rooms feature some original Austen family artifacts in addition to period pieces selected through careful study of Austen’s photographs of the home’s interior.

¹ Shirley Zavin, Raymond F. Pavia, and Ann Novotny, *The Alice Austen House Historic Structure Report* (n.p.:The Friends of Alice Austen House, Inc., 1979), 295.

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Introduction

The Alice Austen House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970 and designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1993. Now, as part of the New York SHPO's Underrepresented Communities Grant for LGBT Sites in New York City, undertaken by the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, we are submitting additional documentation that more fully recognizes Austen's openly non-traditional life and how she dealt with gender and social norms in her photography. Because of the poor quality of the 1970 form, which did not specify a period of significance or criteria, and because new information has come to light since the 1970s, we have chosen to prepare a new National Register nomination to current standards. This form documents a period of significance of c. 1690-1945. Although we are updating the description and significance, adding an area of significance and substantially expanding another one, we are not making any changes to the boundary and we are not seeking to amend the National Historic Landmark nomination at this time.

Summary

The Alice Austen House meets National Register criteria A, B, and C. It is significant under criterion A in the area of community planning as representative of the changing character of Staten Island from the time that the island was primarily occupied by farms, through the nineteenth-century era when the island hosted a significant number of rural estates. The Austen House was initially constructed c. 1690-1700 as a modest farmhouse. The house was expanded in several campaigns during the eighteenth century before it was purchased by the Austen family in 1844 and converted over the next several decades into a picturesque country estate set along the Narrows waterfront on the eastern shore of Staten Island. The house retains features illustrating this transition. The house is also eligible under criterion C as a rare surviving example of Colonial era architecture in New York City, as well as for its important alterations in the picturesque Gothic Revival style, reflecting the influence of Andrew Jackson Downing and Alexander Jackson Davis and dating from the Austen family's period of occupancy.

The house is primarily significant under criterion B as the most important resource associated with the life and work of nationally significant photographer Alice Austen (1866-1952), who resided here from about 1867, when she was an infant, until 1945, near the end of her life. Austen is considered one of the first women photographers in America to work outside of the confines of a studio. Her early body of work, which chronicles Staten Island, New York City, and other places and particularly focuses on the life of her family, friends, and social circle, is considered among the finest produced in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1890s, Austen's work became increasingly more public. She ventured into the streets of Manhattan to photograph immigrants at work and also traveled to local Quarantine stations to document their operations, as well as the life of immigrants living at these stations.

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While this resource was originally listed under criterion B for its association with Austen as an important photographer, the documentation did not reveal the full extent of Austen's significance as an artist living an openly non-traditional life and how she dealt with gender and social norms in her photography. Between 1917 and 1945, Austen shared the house with her companion, Gertrude Tate, with whom she had an intimate, fifty-three-year, same-sex relationship. Austen was what has become known as a "New Woman," breaking from contemporary societal strictures on feminine behavior. Austen and her friends were among many middle- and upper-class-educated women of the late nineteenth century who did not feel that they needed a man to live a successful life. Austen's non-traditional relationship with Tate and her exploration of gender and societal norms were illustrated in her photographs, creating a unique group of transgressive images of life that was out of the ordinary for its time. Although Alice Austen's life and relationships with other women are crucial to an understanding of her work, for many years this interpretation of her work went unrecognized, as it was assumed that acknowledgment of her same-sex interests would damage her reputation. Only in recent years has this part of Austen's life been closely examined as a key element in her life and career. One of the goals of this amendment to the original National Register nomination is to document this missing element in the record of her life and work.¹

Early History of House

The history of what is now the Alice Austen House begins c. 1690-1700, when a one-and-one-half-story house with one-room per floor was erected near the shore of the Narrows. This small house is a rare survivor of a building erected with half-timber and stucco construction. Sometime between 1725 and 1750 a wing was added to the south, and between 1750 and 1775 another wing was added to the west, creating an L-shaped structure. These were all built for use as a farmhouse. In 1844, the house and surrounding land were purchased by John Haggerty Austen and his wife, Elizabeth Alice Townsend Austen; additional land was purchased in 1859. John Austen was a wealthy merchant from New York City. The 140-year-old house was probably quite deteriorated by the time the Austens purchased it. They undertook repairs and considerable redesign. In addition, a wing was added to the north of the original portion of the house in 1844-46, and a bay window was added to the south end of the west facade sometime between 1860 and 1878. Although there were familial connections with architect James Renwick Jr., it seems likely that the Austen family and the craftsmen hired to implement the work were responsible for the Gothic design elements.² The family used this as a summer home for about eight years, naming it Clear Comfort, before becoming full time occupants in 1852.

¹ This amended National Register nomination is heavily based on material in the *Alice Austen House National Historic Landmark Nomination*, 1992, and Shirley Zavin, Raymond F. Pavia, and Ann Novotny, *The Alice Austen House Historic Structure Report* (The Friends of Alice Austen House, Inc., 1979).

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The alterations made to the house by the Austens were done in a picturesque Gothic Revival style, with architectural motifs in the spirit of the homes discussed by Andrew Jackson Downing in his publications and designed by Alexander Jackson Davis. John Haggerty Austen added dormer windows, porches, elongated windows, Gothic bargeboards, diamond-pane windows, chimney pots, and other details. The alterations that transformed the house into a picturesque Gothic cottage are of very high quality, and Clear Comfort is one of the finest examples of rural Gothic architecture in New York City.

The changes to this house reflect an important transformation of Staten Island that began in the 1830s as urban families began moving there. Some purchased property for summer houses or full-time residences, while others moved into new suburban dwellings, such as those in nearby Hamilton Park. Neighborhoods close to the ferry in the northeastern part of the island became suburban retreats with many picturesque villas of varied scale erected or created from earlier buildings. This included Clifton (now Rosebank), where the Austen house was located.

Alice Austen

Born in 1866, Elizabeth Alice Austen was John and Elizabeth Austen's granddaughter. She was born Elizabeth Alice Munn, and she moved into Clear Comfort as an infant with her mother, Alice Cornell Austen, after her father, Edward Munn, abandoned the family. Her mother dropped her married surname and both she and her daughter took the Austen name. Elizabeth Alice Austen eventually dropped the use of her first name, going by Alice or E. Alice Austen. Photography historian Martin W. Sandler has discussed Austen's lucky social circumstance: "The Austen homestead, Clear Comfort, was aptly named. Austen's wealthy grandparents, her two uncles and an aunt who also lived there enjoyed a carefree privileged existence, which they generously shared with her and her mother.² In 1876 or 1877, Austen was introduced to photography when her uncle, Oswald Müller, who also lived at Clear Comfort, bought a camera. Austen was fascinated as Müller demonstrated its use and he gave her permission to use it. Another uncle, Peter Austen, was a chemist and showed her how to use chemicals to develop her photographs. Soon a storage closet in the second floor stair hall was converted into a darkroom for Austen's use, with shelves and hooks for drying prints; it remained her darkroom through her entire career and is still extant. Use of the darkroom was somewhat handicapped by the fact that there was no running water in Clear Comfort, so Austen had to rinse her prints and plates at a pump in the back garden, no matter how cold it was. She was extremely lucky that her family not only indulged her passion for photography, but also provided the financial support for her to do so. Austen was encouraged to

² Martin W. Sandler, *Against the Odds: Women Pioneers in the First Hundred Years of Photography* (NY: Rizzoli, 2002), 28.

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explore her own personal interests at a time when most girls and young women were expected to be occupied with domestic and familial matters.³

Alice Austen was part of the first generation of women photographers in America. Martin Sandler puts her achievement and that of other women across the continent who took up photography in the nineteenth century into context:

Aside from their photographic talent, what is most remarkable about their [women photographers] achievements was their ability to succeed in the face of extraordinary societal and professional odds. They operated at a time when women's place was truly regarded as being in the home, tending house, children, and husband. They sought to build careers at a time when such an ambition for a woman was not only frowned upon but often condemned.⁴

Austen recorded the environments that she knew best, documenting, in detailed photographs, Clear Comfort – its rooms, its grounds, its family members, and its servants, as well as scenes on Staten Island, Manhattan, and other nearby locations. In addition, she took photographs when she traveled, in the eastern United States, at the world's fairs in Chicago and Buffalo, and internationally. Although she came from a privileged background and took many photographs of her social circle, often at play, she also ventured into Manhattan and photographed a diverse array of people on the streets, including immigrants, laborers, boot blacks, a knife grinder, an organ grinder, rag pickers, news boys and girls, and others less fortunate than she. Only a few of her photographs were published at the time they were taken. She did gain some recognition, as a group of her photographs was

³ The discussion of Alice Austen as a photographer is based on material in the National Historic Landmark Report and in the Historic Structure Report, as well as research and interpretation of her photographs, largely written since the 1980s when photography became a subject of academic research. Among the works that discuss Austen and her photography are Friends of Alice Austen House, *Alice Austen: "The Larky Life,"* (Staten Island: Friends of Alice Austen House, 1991); C. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Oliver Jensen, *The Revolt of American Women: A Pictorial History of the Century from Bloomers to Bikinis – From Feminism to Freud* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1952); Amy S. Khoudari, *Alice Austen House: A National Historic Landmark: Museum and Garden Guide* (Staten Island: Friends of Alice Austen House, 1993); Ann Novotny, *Alice's World: The Life and Photography of an American Original, Alice Austen, 1866-1952* (Old Greenwich: The Chatham Press, 1976); and J. L. Roscio: *Unpacking a Victorian Woman: Alice Austen and Photography of the Cult of Domesticity in Nineteenth Century America* (diss., Buffalo, NY, State U., 2005)

⁴ Sandler, *Against the Odds*, ix.

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exhibited at the 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo. She copyrighted over one hundred photographs at the Library of Congress. These were primarily a series undertaken at the request of a Dr. Alvah H. Doty of the United States Public Health Service (whom Austen photographed) of the quarantine facilities on Staten Island and on nearby Hoffman and Swinburne Islands. She took realistic views of her subjects, eschewing the romantic, blurry, pictorialist style that many of her contemporaries used. Alice Austen has widely been considered an amateur photographer because she did not make her living from photography; however, it is important to note that since she came from a wealthy family, she did not need to make money from her pursuits.⁵ Nevertheless, her activities and mastery of the craft were of professional caliber, especially in regard to the technical aspects of photography. She also took the initiative to join camera clubs as well as copyright, exhibit, and publish her work. As historian C. Jane Gover writes, “clearly, her work reflects a professional attitude evident in her high artistic standards and her total commitment to the medium,” or, as the 1979 Historic Structure Report states, Austen was “a hard-working, professional photographer who made pictures almost every day of her life, at home and abroad.”⁶ The artistic quality of Austen’s photographs has been widely recognized, notably by scholars of women and photography, such as C. Jane Gover, Peter Bacon Hales, Jessica L. Roscio, Laura Wexler, and others (see bibliography). Austen often photographed her friends and their activities, notably bicycling and tennis, especially after these activities became popular for women (Austen was an enthusiastic tennis player). Her photographs were the basis of the illustrations in her friend Maria Ward’s 1896 book *Bicycling for Ladies*.⁷ Austen’s photographs show late-nineteenth-century women as anything but demure housewives. She illustrates affluent women who were liberated from the social strictures of house work. C. Jane Gover noted that by photographing active Victorian women Austen showed “that women could have just as much fun as men.”⁸

A particularly significant aspect of Austen’s photographic images, one that relates directly to her life, has to do with how she dealt with gender and societal norms. As scholar Emmanuel Cooper states, “responding to the magic of the camera and its newness, she photographed her friends and her lover, producing images of lesbian life which even today seem remarkably explicit.”⁹ During the course of her life, Austen had many close

⁵ Dr. Doty paid her for her initial images of the Quarantine islands (Austen continued to photograph the quarantine facilities for years out of personal interest). The idea of Austen as an amateur is discussed in Peter Bacon Hales, *Silver Cities: Photographing American Urbanization 1839-1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 366-371.

⁶ Gover, *The Positive Image*, 116; Zavin, *The Alice Austen House Historic Structure Report*, 146.

⁷ Maria E. Ward, *Bicycling for Ladies* (NY: Brentano’s, 1896).

⁸ Gover, *The Positive Image*, 118.

⁹ Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*, London: Routledge, 1994, 86.

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relationships with other women. Her photographs and correspondence detail a very intimate friendship with Gertrude Eccleston, known as Trude, the daughter of the rector of St. John's Episcopal Church. This church, located close to Clear Comfort, was where Austen's parents were married and where Austen attended services. It was in the rectory of the church, late at night, that Austen staged one of her iconic photographs, "Trude & I Masked, Short Skirts." In 1899, Austen met Gertrude Tate while visiting friends at the Twilight Rest Resort in the Catskills. Tate was a kindergarten and dancing teacher from Brooklyn, who was eleven years younger than Austen and came from a far less wealthy background. Tate was engaged to be married, but she broke the engagement and left with Austen on a trip to Europe. Austen and Tate were together for fifty-three years. They did not live together for the first eighteen years of their relationship because Tate was the major financial supporter for her mother and sister. However, they spent much of their time together, including summer trips to Europe. Tate moved into Clear Comfort in 1917 over the objection of her sister, who saw their relationship as one of "wrong devotion."¹⁰ However, Trude was welcomed by Austen's aunt, who was the last remaining relative living in the family home.

Austen and Tate were involved in the social life of Staten Island and New York City. They were members of the elite Colony Club in Manhattan and ate lunch there on a regular basis. They were also members of the Richmond Country Club, where Austen played tennis and golf. Austen was a founder of the Staten Island Garden Club and was an early Staten Island historic preservationist. Through the garden club, she helped the Staten Island Antiquarian Society raise money for the preservation of the Perine House (also known as the Pierre Billou House and the Billou-Stillwell-Perine House, National Register listed, 1976) at 1476 Richmond Road in Dongan Hills, the first house on Staten Island saved by a historical group for use as a house museum. The garden club landscaped the grounds. In the late 1910s, Austen and Tate opened the Box Tree Tea Room in the house, with Tate as the manager, and ran it for several years before giving it to a professional caterer. (Austen's photograph of the tea room survives). Meanwhile, Tate continued to teach dance at Delmonico's on Fifth Avenue, among other venues.

Austen and Tate's comfortable life ended with the stock market crash in 1929; they lost all of their savings and their only income thereafter came from Tate's dance classes. Attempting to build on the success of the tea room at the Perine House, Tate suggested, and Austen reluctantly agreed, to opening a similar venue at Clear Comfort during the summer. Austen and Tate took out a mortgage on the home to travel Europe in the 1930s. When they

¹⁰ Novotny, *Alice's World*, 46.

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could no longer afford their mortgage payments, the bank seized the house. The two women were evicted in summer 1945, moving into a small apartment at 151 St. Marks Place in the St. George neighborhood of Staten Island. In 1949, at the age of 79, Gertrude fell on ice and broke her arm. She could no longer care for Austen, who moved to an old-age home. Gertrude went to live with her sister in Jackson Heights, Queens, although she continued to make weekly visits to Austen. Austen moved to several other nursing homes before signing over all of her remaining property to Gertrude in 1950 and moving to the Staten Island Farm Colony, the borough's poor house. In October 1950, Constance Foulk Roberts discovered Austen's photographs in the basement of the Staten Island Historical Society (these were about half of her work, the remainder having been sold to a furniture dealer and lost). Roberts was doing research for Oliver Jensen's book *The Revolt of American Women*. Jensen championed Austen's work and her photographs were soon published in *Life* and *Holiday* magazines.¹¹ Austen became something of a local celebrity. Enough money was raised from the publication of her photographs to move Austen into a nursing home, where she died on June 9, 1952 and was buried in her family's plot at Moravian Cemetery on Staten Island. Gertrude lived for ten more years and, although she asked to be buried next to her beloved Alice, her wishes were not honored. Her sister decided that burial on Staten Island supposedly involved too much "red tape and expense" and buried her in the Tate family plot in Cypress Hills Cemetery, Brooklyn.¹²

Alice Austen lived an openly non-traditional life. She and her friends were what were known as "New Women." As historian Lillian Faderman has noted, these New Women "not only chose to live independently of men but also to have amorous and/or domestic relationships with other women."¹³ Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate were among the many middle- and upper-class-educated women of the late nineteenth century who did not feel that they needed a man to live a successful life. Instead, these women often had female life partners. These relationships became known as "Boston Marriages." Other examples of this type of relationship include Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Jane Addams (founder of Hull House in Chicago) and Mary Rozet Smith, Lillian Wald (founder of the Henry Street Settlement House in New York) and Mabel Hyde Kittredge, Maria Chapin (founder of Chapin School) and teacher Cecilia Fairfax, and teacher Frances Arnold and lawyer Mary Potter, the latter two couples living in houses in the Turtle Bay Gardens Historic District (NR listed) in Manhattan. These well-educated, affluent women would probably not have used the term "lesbian" to describe their relationships. Faderman states that this term was in use at the time, but was associated "with lower-class

¹¹ "The Newly Discovered Picture World of Alice Austen: Great Woman Photographer Steps Out of the Past," *Life* 12 (September 24, 1951): 137-144; "Alice Austen's America," *Holiday* 12 (September 1952): 69-71.

¹² Lillian Faderman, Alice Austen presentation, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2016.

¹³ Lillian Faderman and Phyllis Irwin, "Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate: A 'Boston Marriage' on Staten Island," *Historic House Trust New York City*, 5 no. 4 (Fall 2010): 7.

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outlaw behavior and perversity.” But, she continues, “had they lived in our day ... [they] would not have eschewed the term ‘lesbian’ to identify themselves.”¹⁴

What is especially significant about Alice Austen is that not only did she defy social conventions and the expectations for a respectable Victorian woman by not marrying and by having a loving relationship with another woman for over half a century, but her non-traditional lifestyle and that of her friends is the subject of some of her most provocative photographs. A number of her most intimate images of her friends show them challenging gender roles and, indeed, even dressing as men. Although it is not possible today to know the exact nature of the relationships in her photographs, several stand out for their transgressive nature. In “The Darned Club” (1891), two female couples stand in front of the Narrows with their arms around each other’s waists. The couple on the left is Austen and Gertrude Eccleston, while on the right are her friends Julia Marsh and Sue Ripley. In “Julia Martin, Julia Bredt, and Self Dressed Up as Men” (1891), Austen and two friends are dressed in men’s suits and hats, Austen sports a cigarette in one hand, and her friend Julia Martin is seated with her umbrella protruding from between her legs in a particularly phallic manner. In “Trude and I Masked, Short Skirts” (1891), Austen and Trude Eccleston are dressed only in petticoats, have their hair down and have masks on their faces; they have cigarettes in their mouths and lean towards one another intimately. In “Violet Ward and Friend, Pose 2” (1892), Austen’s friend Violet wears a man’s tie and hat while sitting in a chair with her arm in the lap of another woman. These images appear to have been taken for the pleasure of Austen and her friends and, like most of her images, were not planned for publication or distribution.

Alice Austen’s life and relationships with other women are crucial to an understanding of her work. Yet for many years this interpretation of her life and work went undocumented, as it was assumed that acknowledging her same-sex interests would damage her reputation.¹⁵ Even as late as 2002, historian Martin Sandler wrote that after losing Clear Comfort, Austen moved into “the apartment of a friend.”¹⁶ Only in recent years has this part of Austen’s life been closely examined by historians as a key element in her life and career. This amended nomination is one step in clarifying the official record.

¹⁴ Ibid, 8.

¹⁵ Tatum Alana Taylor, “Concealed Certainty and Undeniable Conjecture: Interpreting Marginalized Heritage,” MA Thesis, Columbia University, 2012.

¹⁶ Sandler, *Against the Odds*, 29.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary was drawn to clarify the boundary of the original National Register nomination for the Alice Austen House. It neither adds nor removes any land from the listed property but merely distinguishes it from the adjacent McFarlane-Bredt House, which is also listed. Over the years, the two boundaries have become confused. The 1.1.2 acre boundary of this nomination approximates what the Austen family owned during the period of significance.

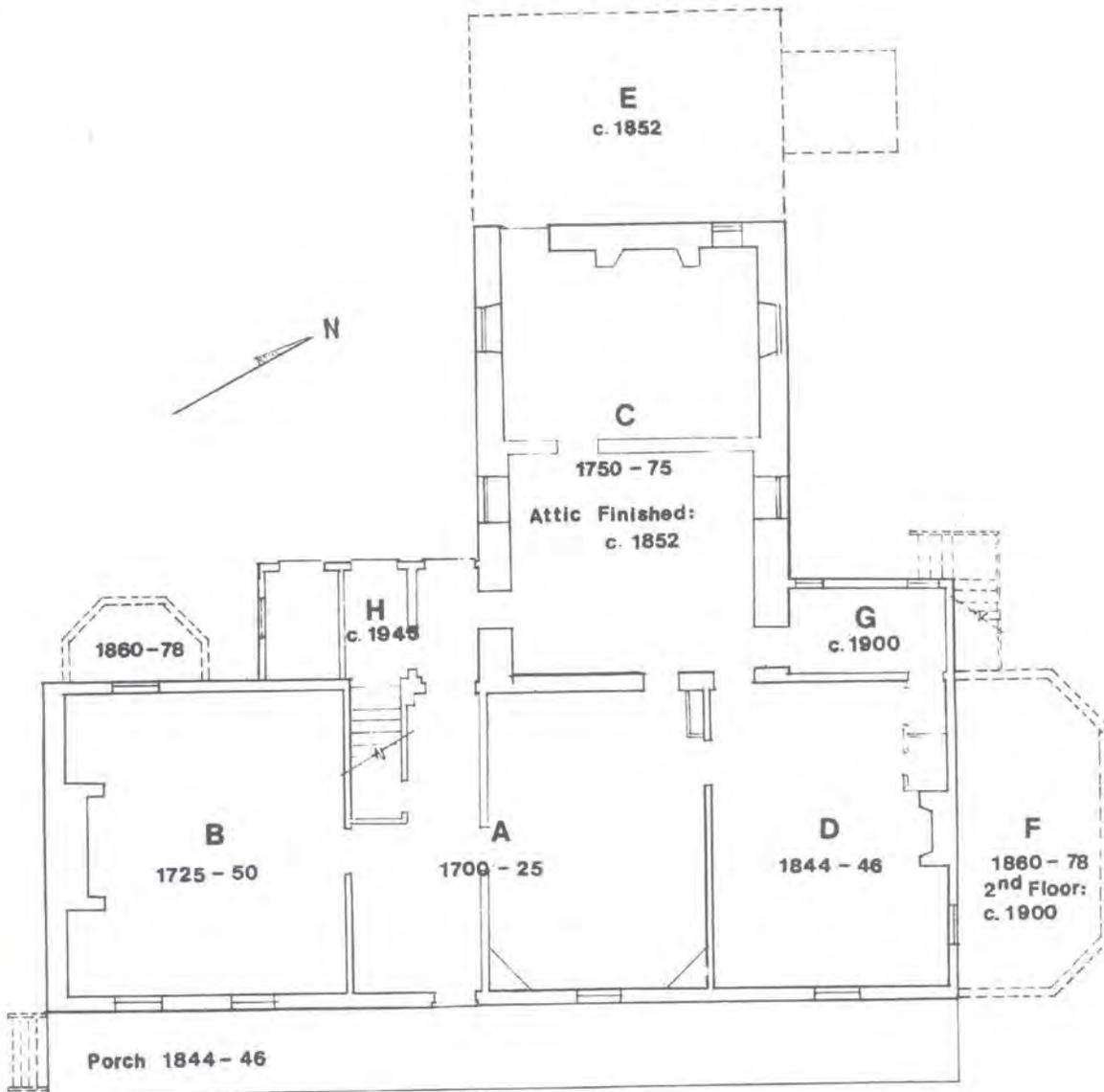
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DATES OF CONSTRUCTION

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photos

Photographers and Dates:

Photos 1-4 and 9: Katelynn Nealon, 2016
Photos 5 and 8: Imara Moore, 2015
Photos 6 and 10: Shiloh Holley, 2014 and 2017
Photo 7: Laura Pennace, 2016

Tiff Files: CD-R of .tiff files on file at
National Park Service
Washington, D.C.
and
New York State Historic Preservation Office
Waterford, NY 12188\

Views:

- 0001. façade looking southwest
- 0002. side elevation looking northwest
- 0003. side elevation looking southeast
- 0004. rear elevation looking northeast
- 0005. interior; entry hall, looking north
- 0006. interior; dining room, looking southwest
- 0007. interior; parlor, looking south
- 0008. interior; informal parlor, looking south
- 0009. interior; sun porch, looking west
- 0010. interior; second floor darkroom, looking northwest

See continuation sheet





Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



Austen House



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

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$\Sigma = 1.12$ Acres

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1 in = 250 ft

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Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter





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Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



Austen House



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

4496800

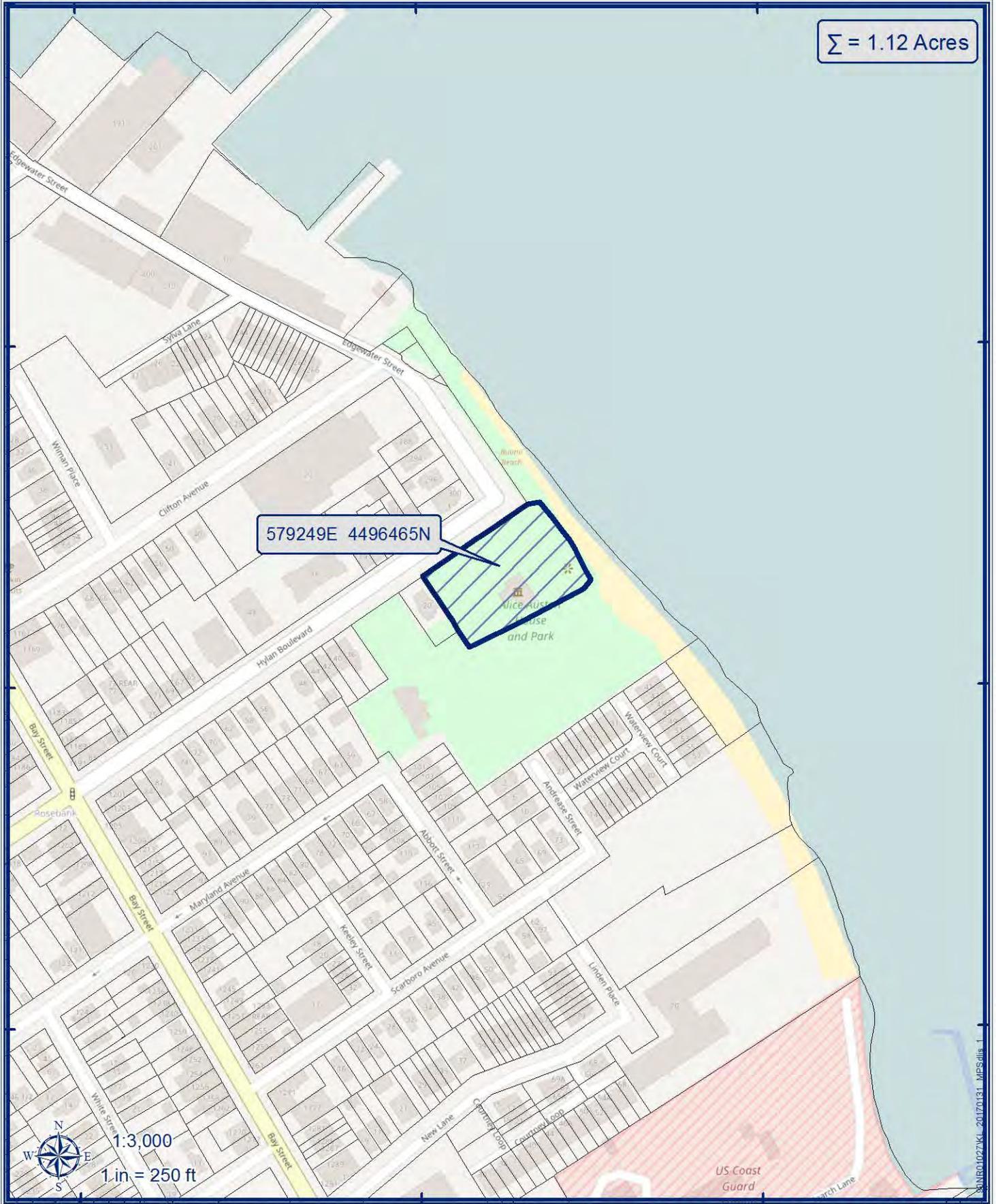
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Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter













MONITORIA 55
Sugestão de leitura







THE LARKS LOST
THE HOUSE



THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE HOUSE
ON SINKER ISLAND





Public Room
This room is open to the public for the use of the community. It is a quiet place for reading and study. Please do not smoke or drink alcohol in this room.





THE DARKROOM
1844-1859

THE DARKROOM
1844-1859
This darkroom was used by the photographer
Oscar Landry in the mid-19th century.
It is a small, dark room with wooden
shelves and a wooden cabinet. The
cabinet has a glass door and is used
to store photographic plates and
other equipment. The shelves are used
to hold photographic equipment and
materials. The room is a good example
of a 19th-century darkroom.