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Architectural Preservation Consultant

TO: East Hampton Town Board
Scott Wilson, Land Acquisition & Management

FROM: Zachary N. Studenroth

DATE: November 18, 2024

RE: Architectural assessment of the Osborn Farm property, 66 Main Street, Wainscott, NY

The 30.419-acre parcel located at 66 Main Street, Wainscott, New York (SCTM #300-200-2-29) is associated historically with the John Osborn family, who settled the community in the mid-17th century and remained prominent in its evolution for over ten generations. The property borders Wainscott Main Street to the north, Five Rod Highway to the west, residential and unimproved properties to the east, and Wainscott Pond to the south. Celebrated for its ecological importance and sensitivity, as well as its exceptional views of Wainscott Pond, the property is situated within Agricultural and Harbor Protection Overlay Districts and preserves a rich mix of native flora and fauna. Its architectural significance is featured in three historic structures: a two-story wood-framed house, a large barn/garage, and small accessory farm building.



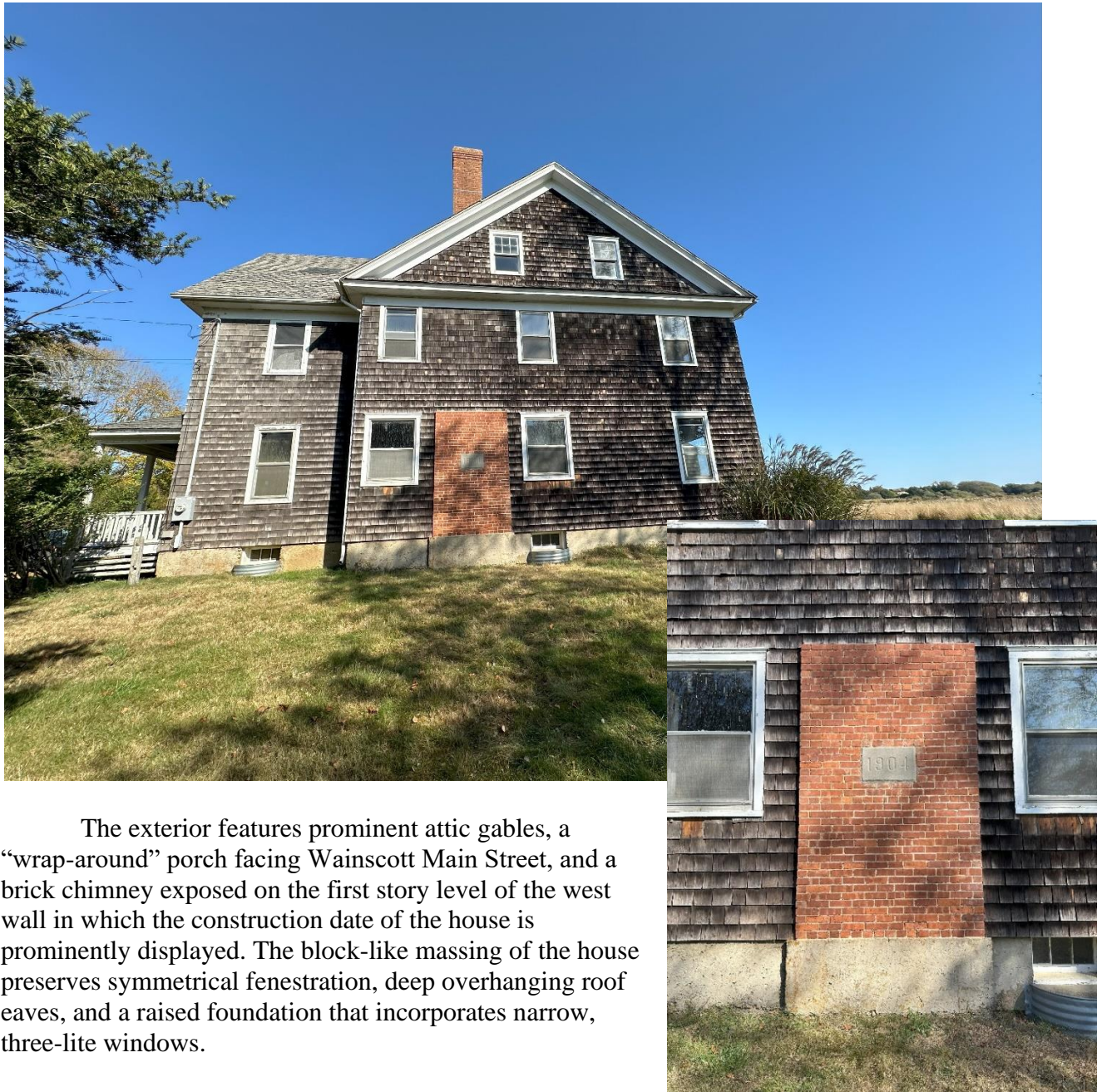
This report is an assessment of the architectural significance of the property to inform the consideration of its acquisition by the Community Preservation Fund.¹



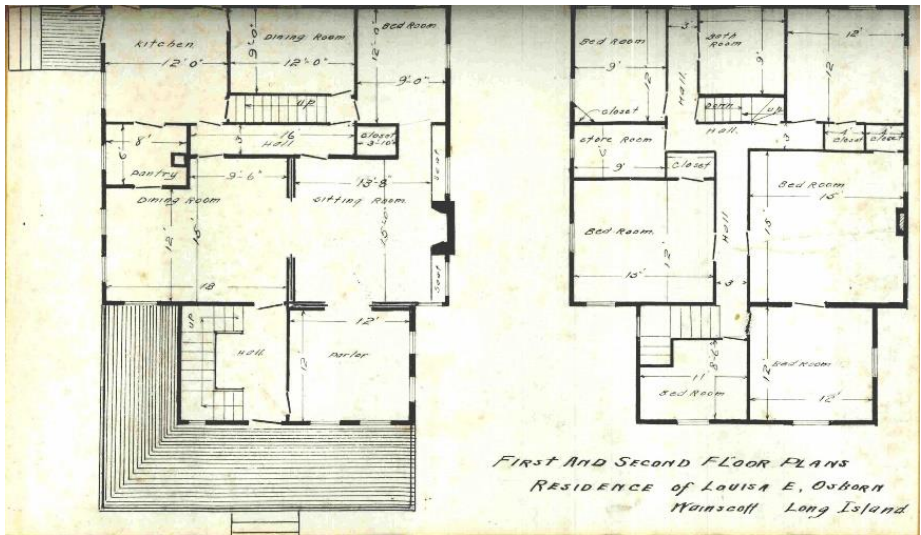
¹ The consultant is indebted to Hillary Osborn Malecki's "The History of the Osborn's on Wainscott Pond" (2020) for much of the family history and documentation.

Main House

The Osborn House is a two-story, wood-frame, vernacular style farmhouse constructed by Louisa Edwards Osborn (1851-1926) in 1904. Louisa had married John M. Osborn (1846-1894), a seventh generation Osborn resident of Wainscott, in 1876 but was widowed at age forty-three. Louisa evidently built the house to generate rental income in an era of increasing local tourism, as evidenced by the nearby Georgica Association formed in 1892 by William S. Wood for wealthy summer residents. The design of the house is attributed to Louisa's daughter Alice Osborn Hand on the basis of family documentation.



The exterior features prominent attic gables, a “wrap-around” porch facing Wainscott Main Street, and a brick chimney exposed on the first story level of the west wall in which the construction date of the house is prominently displayed. The block-like massing of the house preserves symmetrical fenestration, deep overhanging roof eaves, and a raised foundation that incorporates narrow, three-lite windows.



The interior, which is now gutted to the structural frame, preserves architectural features that are not only characteristic of its turn-of-the-century construction period, but are also indicative of its intended seasonal use. Large parlors are interconnected with wide pocket doors and a single fireplace (below left), which is centered

against the west wall of the center parlor or “sitting room” is the only apparent source of heating in the original house. Upstairs, there are six bedrooms and a large bathroom.



The front staircase (right) rises within the entry hall to two landings and preserves newel posts that are square in section with ball tops, turned balusters, and a molded stair rail that typify late 19th to early 20th century design and construction.

Of particular interest in terms of the technology of the house is the large, galvanized metal cistern that survives in the attic (below), which was originally positioned against the rear edge of the attic stair opening, directly above the second floor bathroom.



The tank received and stored water that was pumped into the attic and then flowed by gravity not only to the bathroom below it for bathing and sanitation purposes, but also to the kitchen on the first floor. These were relatively unusual household features in rural areas at the time and are indicative of the intended purpose of the house, which was to attract summer boarders whose urban lifestyle would have undoubtedly enjoyed such amenities.

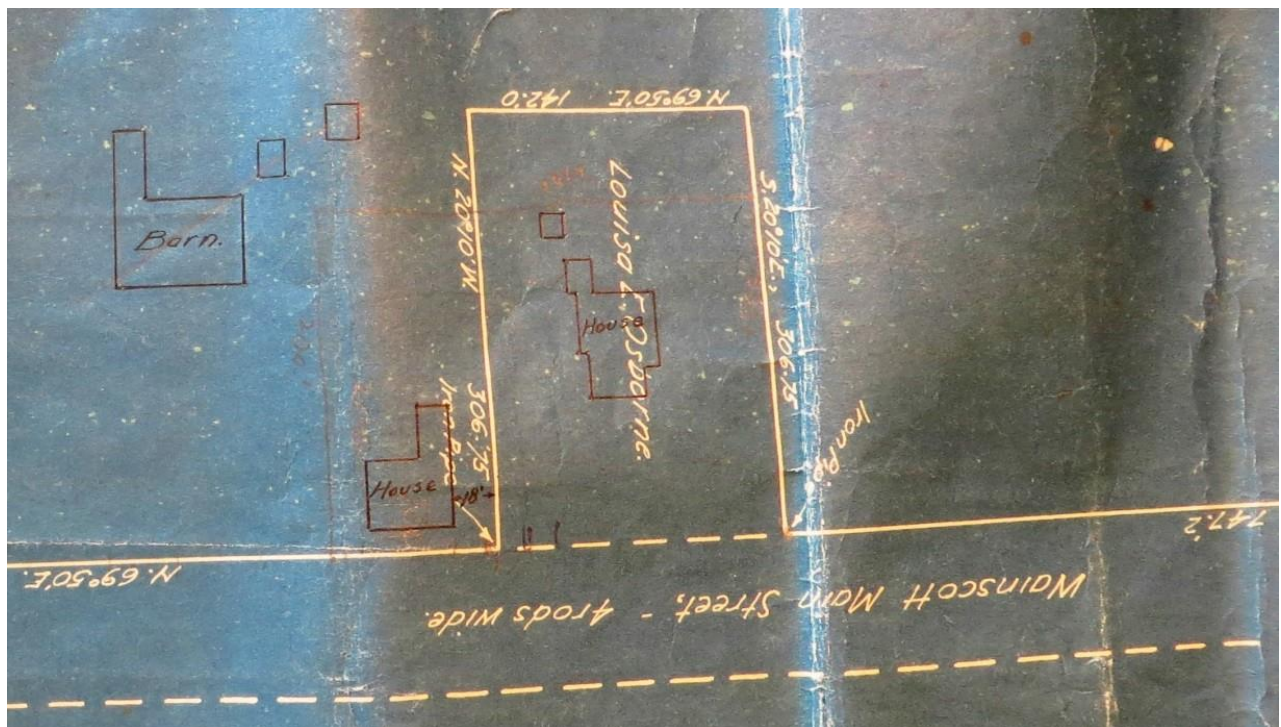
The association of the house with the Osborn family and with the historical period in which it was built, when tourism was in its infancy and local families were adapting to and accommodating the influx of “summer people” contribute to the architectural significance of the house and underscore the importance of acquiring it for preservation.

Garage/Barn

The large two-story, wood frame barn/garage located in the northwest corner of the property was reported in the *East Hampton Star* as having been moved to the site from elsewhere on the property in 1926:

W. Sherrill Hedges has moved the large barn from the Louisa E. Osborn property in Wainscott to the western extremity of that property which was sold recently to T. A. Gilmartin of Southampton. J. F. Miller, the building mover of East Hampton, was in charge of the work and Mr. Hedges is to have it converted into an up-to-date home for his family.
Raymond H. Osborn spent part of last week in New York.

Louisa Edwards Osborn had sold the ancestral farm to William Sherrill Hedges (1890-1948) in 1922 and Hedges, in turn, sold it to Southampton dairy farmer Timothy A. Gilmartin in 1926. Hedges reserved two acres for his own use, however, and moved the barn which was previously located to the east of the house to the new site (c. 1921 survey, below). According to the *East Hampton Star*, the barn was “converted into an up-to-date home for [Hedges’] family” and the “garage, with an apartment on the second floor, [is] where Mr. and Mrs. Hedges will make their home.” Hedges operated a tractor and automobile repair business in the garage on the main floor.





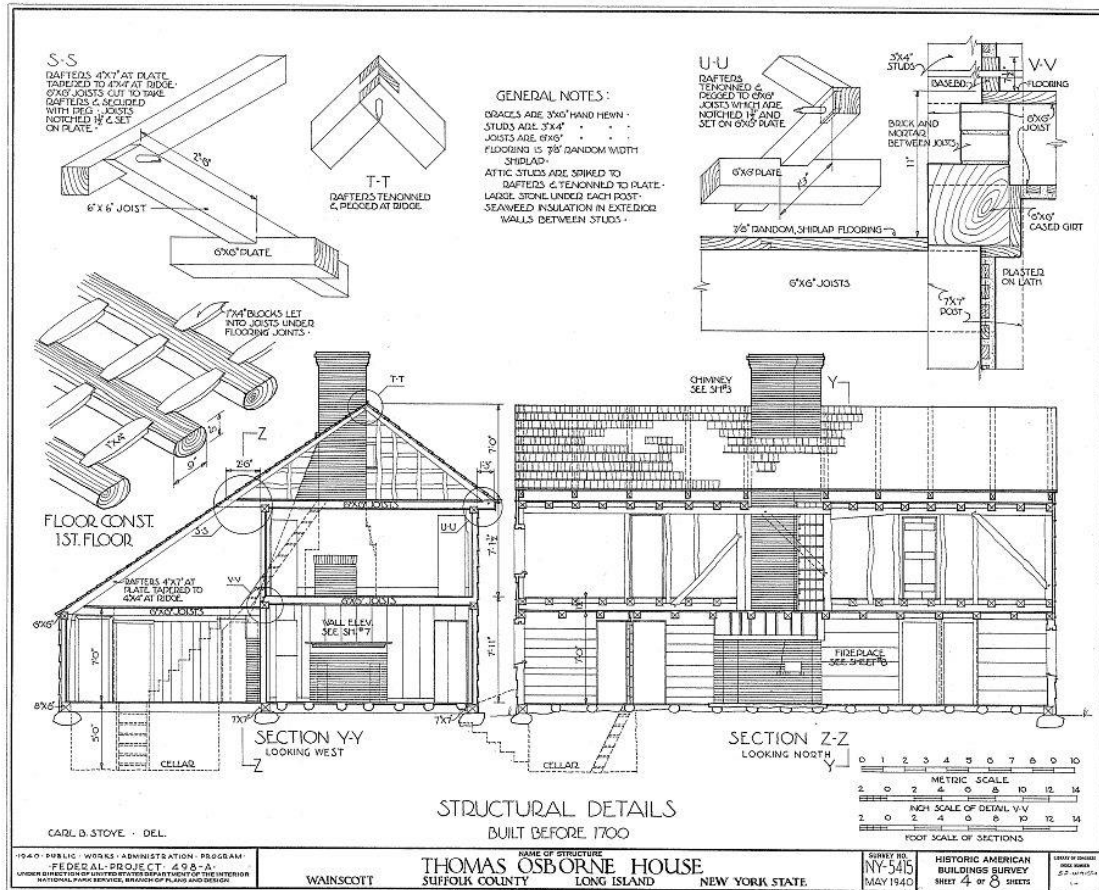
The front of the barn/garage was finished with two large rolling doors that could accommodate the movement of vehicles in and out of the interior work space (left), whereas the end walls and upper story were given a more residential appearance in keeping with its residential use, with symmetrical fenestration and a covered entryway on the south-facing façade leading to an enclosed staircase to the apartment on the second floor (below).

The barn/garage, which measures approximately 60' long by 34'-6" wide, is supported on a foundation of concrete blocks laid three courses high that elevate the structure nearly 2' above grade. This architectural feature was dictated in part by the height requirements of the repair business conducted within the building, but raises the question concerning why the structural frame wasn't built higher and set on a conventional foundation?



Analysis of the barn frame reveals not only that it was moved intact from elsewhere on the property, as documented by newspaper accounts, but also that it preserves the materials, methods of construction, and general characteristics of post-and-beam, mortise-and-tenon technology of the early 18th century. Repurposed as an automobile repair shop in the early 20th century, the structure actually survives as a feature of the original, settlement period Osborn farmstead which preserved a saltbox house of the period, too, until its demolition in the 1940s.

An early view of the Osborn farm depicts the farmhouse facing north onto Main Street and the large barn situated behind it to the south. The ancient house was measured and drawn in May 1940 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and labeled "Thomas Osborne House" (NY-5415):



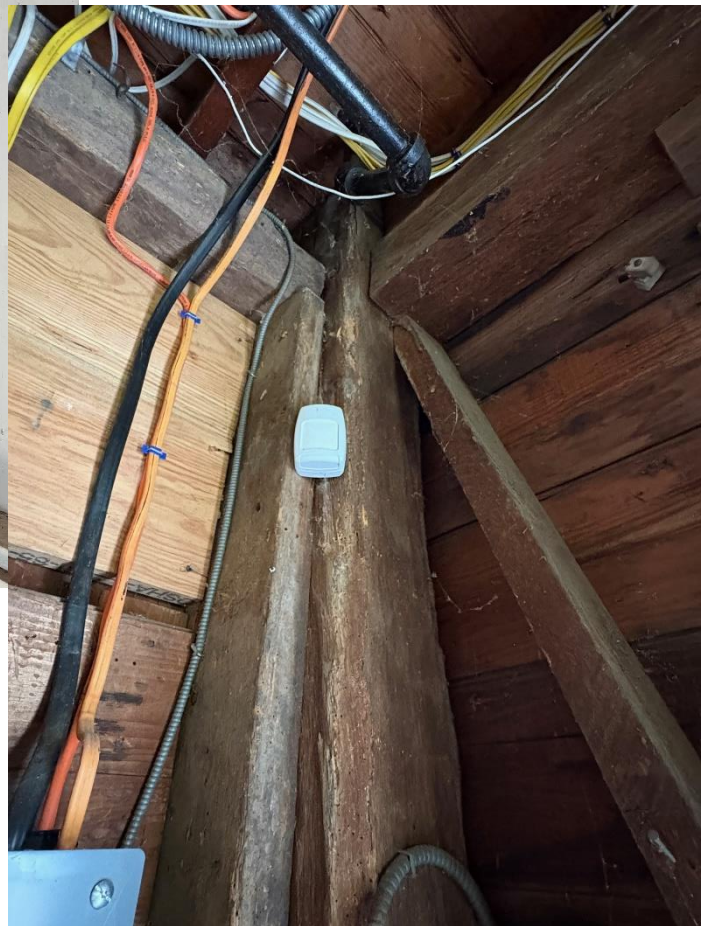
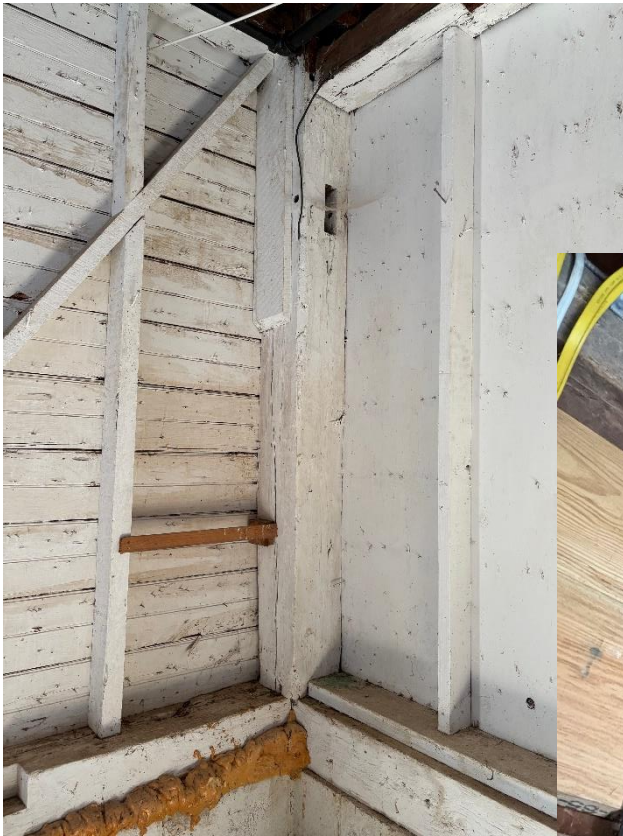
Notes associated with the HABS file say that the house was already "in ruinous condition" and it is presumed to have been demolished soon after the recording project. The *East Hampton Star* made note of the architects responsible for the work on May 16, 1940 (right). [One of the two architects, Daniel M. C. Hopping, would later be associated with the restoration of the Jan Martense Schenck House at the Brooklyn Museum, period rooms at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts, and numerous other restoration and preservation projects in New York and Long Island before his death in 1990.]

J. visited over the week-end with Barbara Osborn. Mrs. Albert Hand went to the city Sunday afternoon with Miss Ernestine Rose when she returned home. Daniel Hopping of New York City and Carl Stoye of Sayville are boarding with Mrs. Clara Conklin while they are making a government survey of the old Osborn house on Main Street. Samuel Depew Hedges, son of Mr. and Mrs. Sherrill Hedges of Rolla, Ark., is graduating from Malvern High School May 31. Some of their friends here have received announcements of the commencement exercises.

Thomas Bucinochle, Miss East Hampton tract, Mrs. Bridge, Mrs. Six-handed Sears of Mor Joseph A. Mi gas donated. The Women's ful to Mrs. E benefit which the Guild ha

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It is unlikely that the barn, which was moved and renovated in 1926, preserves any elements of the historic house frame. The barn's massive 8" square posts, sills and other wall elements date it to the early 18th century construction period of the house, however, and it survives as an intact frame, with corner and wall posts, horizontal sills and girts, and many of its the diagonal braces intact (below left and right).



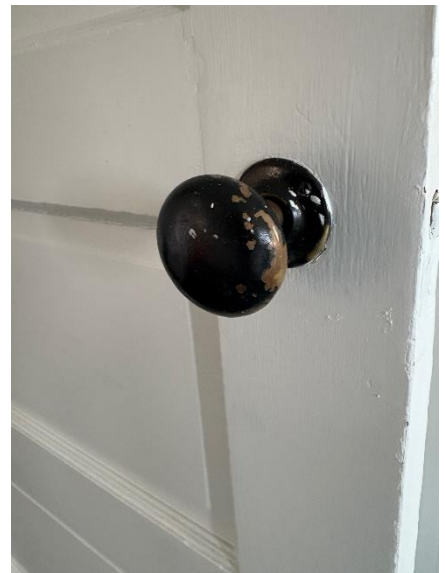
The attic frame, composed of 3" by 8" rafters set 24" apart, appears to have been rebuilt in the mid- to late 19th century (right).



On the second floor, which was finished as living space in 1926, the original structural barn frame is visible in the form of hand-hewn posts and beams such as those shown below:



The second floor rooms also preserve interior features associated with residential finishes of the 1920s, such as the five-panel doors (left) and “japanned” doorknobs (right).



The garage/barn frame is remarkable for surviving intact from its early 18th century construction period and gained added significance in the early 20th century when it was relocated, renovated and repurposed as a combined automobile and tractor repair shop with living quarters on the second floor. The original purpose of the building demonstrates the agrarian nature of the early Wainscott settlement whereas the later use characterizes the needs of a changing population in the early 20th century. The building is a time capsule and worthy of acquisition and preservation for both its historical and architectural significance.

Accessory Farm Building

The small accessory farm building located to the east of the house appears to date from the early to mid-20th century and may have served as an office and/or farm stand.

While its original function is as yet undocumented, it remains a contributing feature on the farmstead and deserving of preservation.



Summary

Acquisition of the historic Osborn Farm on Wainscott Main Street will have a dramatic impact on preserving the streetscape of the hamlet as well as the view shed from its historic thoroughfare. The property is both a 30+ acre nature sanctuary which fronts on and protects a major portion of Wainscott Pond, as well as a historical asset that preserves a late Victorian-era house associated with the Osborn family and East Hampton's early resort period, and a large barn surviving from the early 18th century.

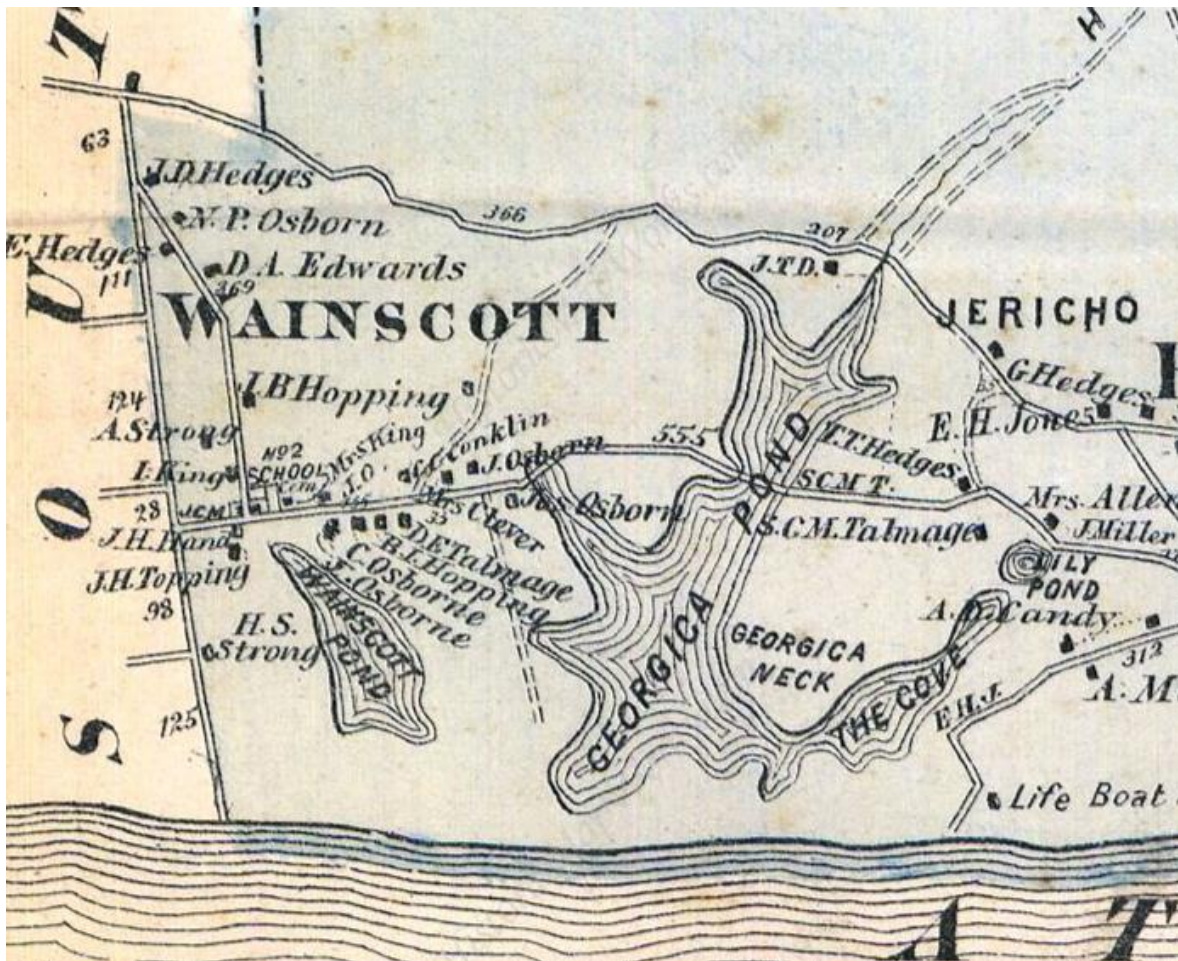
If the property is acquired, consideration should be given to how both the house and barn are used in the future.

- The house has been gutted of interior plaster finishes and mechanical and plumbing systems, and therefore presents a considerable investment of funds to restore it to habitable condition. Alternatively, it could be partially renovated, providing office and/or meeting spaces requiring fewer finished rooms, systems and the like.
- The barn, unlike the house, preserves work spaces on the ground floor and a finished apartment on the second floor. These can be occupied and put to use at little expense. There are advantages to occupying both buildings either part- or full time, one of which being the security associated with having one or more residents living on the property.
- It is recommended that the historic timber-frame barn, one of only a handful standing in the Town of East Hampton and possibly the oldest, be thoroughly studied and documented. This would entail extensive photographic recording, measured drawings, and potentially the use of dendrochronology to determine the exact construction date. Like the Thomas Osborn House which was measured and drawn in 1940, the Osborn barn is a candidate for a comparable recording project and would make a worthy addition to the Historic American Buildings Survey.

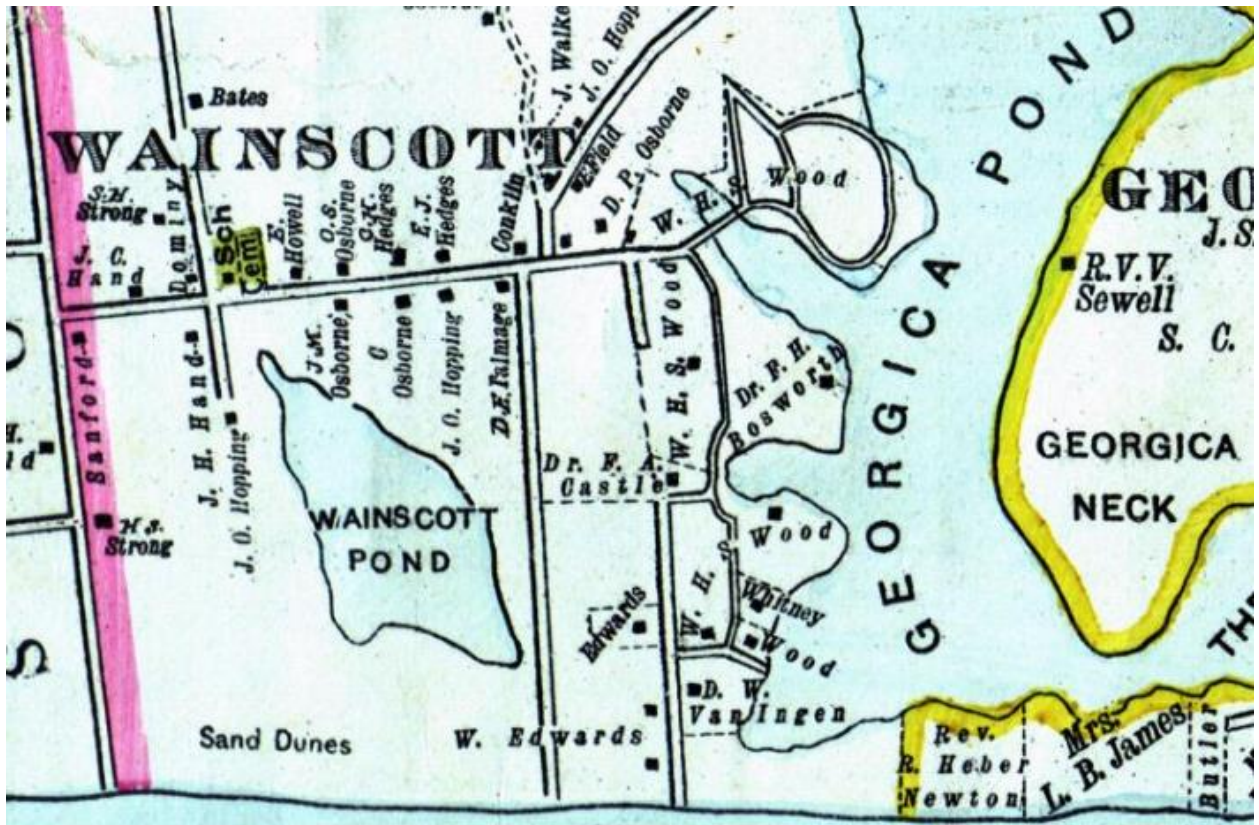




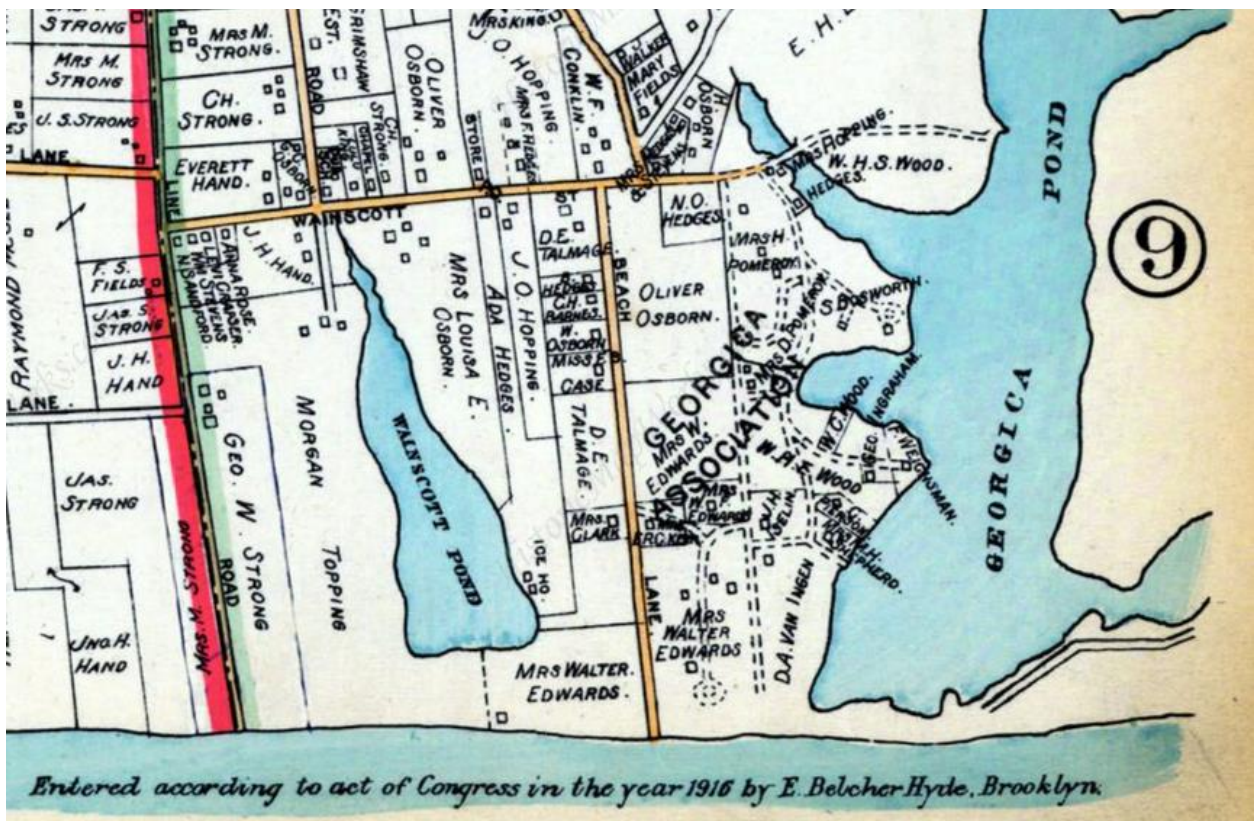
Suffolk County Tax Map #300-200-2-29



Beers, Comstock & Cline Atlas of Long Island, 1873, Plate 192 (detail)



Frederick W. Beers, *Plan of the Town of East Hampton, 1894* (detail)



E. Belcher Hyde, *Atlas of Suffolk County, 1916*, Plate 007 (detail)