

Landmarks Preservation Commission
October 6, 1987, Designation List 193
LP-1640

DOROTHY VALENTINE SMITH HOUSE, 1213 Clove Road, Borough of Staten Island.
Built 1893-95; architect unknown.

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 247, Lot 38 in part consisting of the property bounded by a line at the eastern end of the property which is the southeasterly extension of the line dividing Tax Map Block 246, Lot 35 (133 Waldron Avenue) and Tax Map Block 246, Lot 39 (139 Waldron Avenue), said line extending to a point 100 feet north of the southeastern property line fronting on Victory Boulevard, a line extending southwesterly at a distance of 100 feet north of the southeastern property line to a point that coincides with an imaginary line extending southeast from the south corner of the house, a line extending southeasterly 25 feet, a line extending southwesterly to the southwestern property line at a distance of 75 feet from the southeastern property line, a line extending northwesterly along the southwestern property line fronting on Clove Road, and a line extending northeasterly along the northwestern property line, fronting on the mapped, but uncut Waldron Avenue, to the point of beginning as shown on the attached site plan.

On September 29, 1987, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Dorothy Valentine Smith House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Fourteen witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Three representatives of the owner spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has also received many letters and other expressions of support for this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Dorothy Valentine Smith House stands on land which during the 18th century was part of a farm owned by successive generations of the Corson family to which she is related as well as to the subsequent owners and occupants of this property, all members of the interrelated Vanderbilt and Vredenburg families. Employing elements of Queen Anne style, as it was used in the United States, the house was constructed in 1893-95 for John Frederick Smith, Miss Smith's father. Significant features characteristic of the style include the offset rear wing, wrap-around porch, tall chimney, ornamental shingles in the peaks of the gables and decoratively glazed window sash.

The Smith House bears a complementary relationship to the adjacent John King Vanderbilt House (1197 Clove Road) built in 1836, which, although using a different stylistic source, has many similarities in facade elevations and plan.

A leading figure in Staten Island banking and insurance circles, John Frederick Smith was also an active participant in Staten Island's civic and cultural life. His house on Clove Road became his daughter's lifelong home. Miss Smith, like her father, was involved in many civic and social service organizations, and she was a staunch guardian of Staten Island's history. Author of several books and numerous articles on the subject, Miss Smith also played a pivotal role in Richmondtown Restoration Inc. and the Staten Island Historical Society, all activities which helped Staten Islanders to recognize the importance of their heritage.

History of the Site

The history of the land on which the Dorothy Valentine Smith House stands has multiple links to the history of her family. In the 18th century the land was part of a farm owned by successive generations of the Corson family to which Miss Smith claimed a relationship on her mother's side.¹ Her history is also bound to that of its later owners and occupants -- members of the Vanderbilt and Vredenburg families.² The 1819 marriage of Dorothy Valentine Smith's great-grandparents, Abraham Valentine and Maria Flock Vredenburg (she was John King Vanderbilt's stepdaughter) led to the formation of an extended family whose members, through the early 20th century, either lived together or in close proximity at several locations. The longest period of shared and adjacent occupancy began with John King Vanderbilt's 1832 purchase of the eighty-acre Corson farm. His will, probated in 1871, left this property to Maria Vredenburg and although she died in 1874, it was not subdivided until 1888. Census records reveal that in the interim the Vanderbilt House was occupied by Joseph Leviness and Cornelia Vredenburg Vanderbilt (the nephew and stepgranddaughter of John King Vanderbilt) and their children including John Mortimer Vanderbilt. Under the terms of the subdivision, Miss Smith's father, John Frederick Smith, the son of Charles H. and Mary Ann Vredenburg Smith (she was Cornelia's sister) acquired the portion which included the Vanderbilt House. Ownership of this house and adjacent land passed to Joseph Mortimer Vanderbilt in 1889. John Frederick Smith retained the corner lot on which his house was constructed a few years later.

History and significance of the Dorothy Valentine Smith House

The house constructed near the intersection of Clove Road and today's Victory Boulevard, originally Richmond Turnpike, by John Frederick Smith in 1893-95 employs a restrained version of the often exuberant Queen Anne style as used in the United States; neither the architect nor the builder has been identified.³ For example, the style's characteristic picturesque juxtapositions of many contrasting structural volumes is reduced in the Smith House to that provided by the L-shaped plan of the original structure with the rear wing set off against the larger mass of the main section, a relationship which is emphasized by the intersecting gabled roofs and the tall chimney rising from and above the point of juncture.

Queen Anne-inspired decorative elements include the ornamentally cut shingles used in the peaks of the gables, the multi-pane borders of the

upper window sash, and the wrap-around porch with its turned posts set atop tall plinths. The porch is a key element in claiming the space surrounding

this modestly scaled structure. These features, far fewer than the fullblown expression of the style accommodates, seem close to the minimum required for the appellation "Queen Anne." By virtue of its restrained version of the style, the Smith House demonstrates its affinity with the John King Vanderbilt House, and like that house, the Smith House occupies a similar position in the stylistic continuum to which it belongs.

Residences designed in more grandiose, more robust, more ornate versions of the Queen Anne style were once not uncommon on Staten Island; a few can still be found. The Bechtel House at 387 St. Paul's Avenue is probably the grandest survivor. While the equally grand houses designed by Edward A. Sargent, a Staten Island resident and one of the island's foremost practitioners of the style, have been demolished, a number of his smaller but still elaborate houses remain; several are located on St. Mark's Place. There are also many very modest houses -- rectangular gabled boxes with Queen Anne derived ornament rather sparingly applied -- which offer a dim reflection of the style. Builders' houses, these still abound in the more densely settled sections of Staten Island's numerous villages, all of which experienced intensifying urbanization in the late 19th century.

Other manifestations of the style were commonly found in Staten Island's new late-19th century suburban developments such as New Dorp, Oakwood and Prohibition Park (now Westerly). They appeared also in the less densely populated sections of the island villages. Examples survive in many locations. These suburban versions of the Queen Anne style -- designed by both local architects and builders and Manhattan-based architects -- received the design features and detailing required to render them stylistically up-to-date, but these houses were intended for a comfortable yet less affluent class than the residents of Staten Island's earlier suburbs, a factor which imposed certain constraints. The relatively modest Smith House seems most closely related to these.

Although the construction dates of the Smith and Vanderbilt houses lie sixty years apart and their styles are different, they possess -- their facades in particular -- underlying similarities: the same number of principal stories; the same three bay width; the same side hall plan; the same location of the main entrance; and the same one-story porch extending the width of the facade (and beyond in the case of the Smith House). There is but one major difference between them. The orientation of the Smith House is more urbanized in that the gable end is turned toward the street, a siting that yields a more imposing facade. The landscaped setting and rolling expanse of lawn recall the site's rural heritage.

John Frederick Smith/Dorothy Valentine Smith

Born in Manhattan, the son of Charles H. and Mary Ann Vredenburg Smith, John Frederick Smith arrived on Staten Island when he was an infant.⁴ While still in his teens he entered a Staten Island insurance firm. Promotion to a partnership role in the firm coincided with the construction of his Clove Road house and soon thereafter he assumed sole

control. Remaining active in this business he also became a leading figure in banking and real estate circles. He was a prominent member of many civic and charitable organizations and was known for his abiding interest in Staten Island's history, an interest passed on by his daughter.

His Clove Road house became the lifelong home of his daughter, Dorothy Valentine Smith, the younger of his two children.⁵ Like her father, she was active in many of the island's social service, cultural and civic groups including the Visiting Nurses Association, serving as the president of its board of trustees for fifteen years. A passionate student of Staten Island history, she was the author of several books on the subject including Staten Island: Gateway to New York and numerous articles. She was a generous contributor in many ways to Staten Island's historic village, Richmondtown. A founding member of Richmondtown Restoration Inc. and a trustee of the Staten Island Historical Society, she also undertook her own restoration of the adjacent John King Vanderbilt House. It stands as tangible evidence of her interest in the buildings which embody Staten Island's history. Through her writings and her activities with the Richmondtown Restoration and the Staten Island Historical Society, Miss Smith helped Staten Islanders to recognize the importance of their heritage.

Description

Occupying a slightly elevated location on a corner lot, the Dorothy Valentine Smith House is set some distance back of the bounding streets, Clove Road and Victory Boulevard. The principal facade fronts on Clove Road. The land slopes gently downward from east to west with the higher portion of the property lying along Victory Boulevard. The vista from this street is of a dwelling seeming to nestle into the surrounding terrain -- a wide expanse of rolling lawn dotted by occasional shrubs and fruit trees. As seen from Clove Road, the Smith House is framed and enhanced by its landscaped setting. A cluster of pine trees is set close to the street on the southeastern side. Further back on the opposite side near the driveway, the canopy of a mature tree provides partial shelter for the dwelling. Flowering shrubs, lawn and expanses of ground cover also contribute to a setting which is appropriate to the date of the house and evokes the more rural epoch of its construction.

The original section of the house consists of a gabled two-and-a-half story main section which is rectangular in plan; a similar setback wing is attached to the rear of the main section and forms with it a structure which is L-shaped in plan. A 20th-century two-story hip-roofed addition is attached to the rear of the wing section. Black asphalt shingles now cover the roofs of all sections. On the southeastern elevation a tall brick chimney is set in the angle formed by the main and rear wing sections. A second, equally tall, chimney rises above the southeastern slope of the rear addition.

The original exterior cladding -- wood shingles arranged in bands of contrasting shapes -- appears in the peaks of the gables of the original portion of the structure. Below this level white aluminum siding simulates clapboarding, both in the original sections and addition. Shingle cladding may once have been used more extensively than the present aluminum cladding

suggests.

Window enframements are unadorned throughout. In the later addition one-over-one sash is used. Elsewhere single-light lower sash contrasts with the decorative treatment of the upper sash; here small square and rectangular panes and multiple muntins form a decorative border around the center pane. Louvered shutters painted dark green are used throughout; a number of the ground story shutters were recently removed. The two diamond-shaped windows on the northwestern elevation of this section appear to be later additions.

The principal facade is three bays wide; the main entrance is located in the westernmost bay. At the second story level a pair of slightly narrower windows marks the center bay, a motif which is repeated in the attic windows above. The peak of the gable is filled with decorative wood trim which features a small sunburst. The door enframement is modestly embellished. An elliptical four-pane fanlight is enclosed by a rectangular frame; the spandrel sections are adorned by raised panels. The sidelights and panelled sections beneath them are exceptionally narrow. The handsome multi-panelled solid door is partially obscured by a modern screen door.

A one-story porch extends across the width of the facade and one bay beyond it; it is continued along the southeastern elevation of the main section to the rear wing. It has been severely vandalized since Miss Smith's death in 1984. Turned posts are set on tall plinths; the taller plinth to the right of the approach stair appears to have been taken from the small gabled porch on the southeastern side of the rear wing. The replacement plinth and the present rails and crossbars are the result of very recent repairs. Only one section of the original low balustrade remains in place; it is located on the northwestern side of the porch. The decorative slatting beneath the porch is intact.

There is a small lean-to structure attached to the rear or northeastern elevation of the 20th-century addition; another forms an enclosed porch for the rear doorway of the original main section.

There are two outbuildings located on the property. A small modern one-car garage lies behind the house close the northwestern property line; further northeast and southeast there is a small tool shed.

Report prepared by
Shirley Zavin, Research Department

Report edited by
Marjorie Pearson, Director of Research

NOTES

1. Dorothy Smith, "The Clove and Its Valley," Staten Island Historian, 17(July-September, 1956), 25.
2. History of later land owners summarizes information obtained from the following: Charles W. Leng and William T. Davis, Staten Island and its People: A History, 1609-1929 (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1930; 1933), III, pp. 202-203; V, pp. 121-126; Marjorie Johnson, "Genealogy: Vanderbilt, Vredenburg, Smith Families," Unpublished ms. submitted to Landmarks Preservation Commission at public hearing, September 29, 1987; Morris Bricks, "John King Vanderbilt," Unpublished ms. submitted to Landmarks Preservation Commission at public hearing, September 29, 1987.
3. Smith, "The Clove and Its Valley," 26.
4. Leng and Davis, Staten Island and its People, III, pp. 202-203.
5. "Island Historian Dorothy Valentine Smith Dies At Home," The Staten Island Advance, June 14, 1984, p. A11; "In Memoriam Dorothy Valentine Smith (1906-1984)," Staten Island Historian, 1 and 2 (Summer-Fall, 1984), 20.

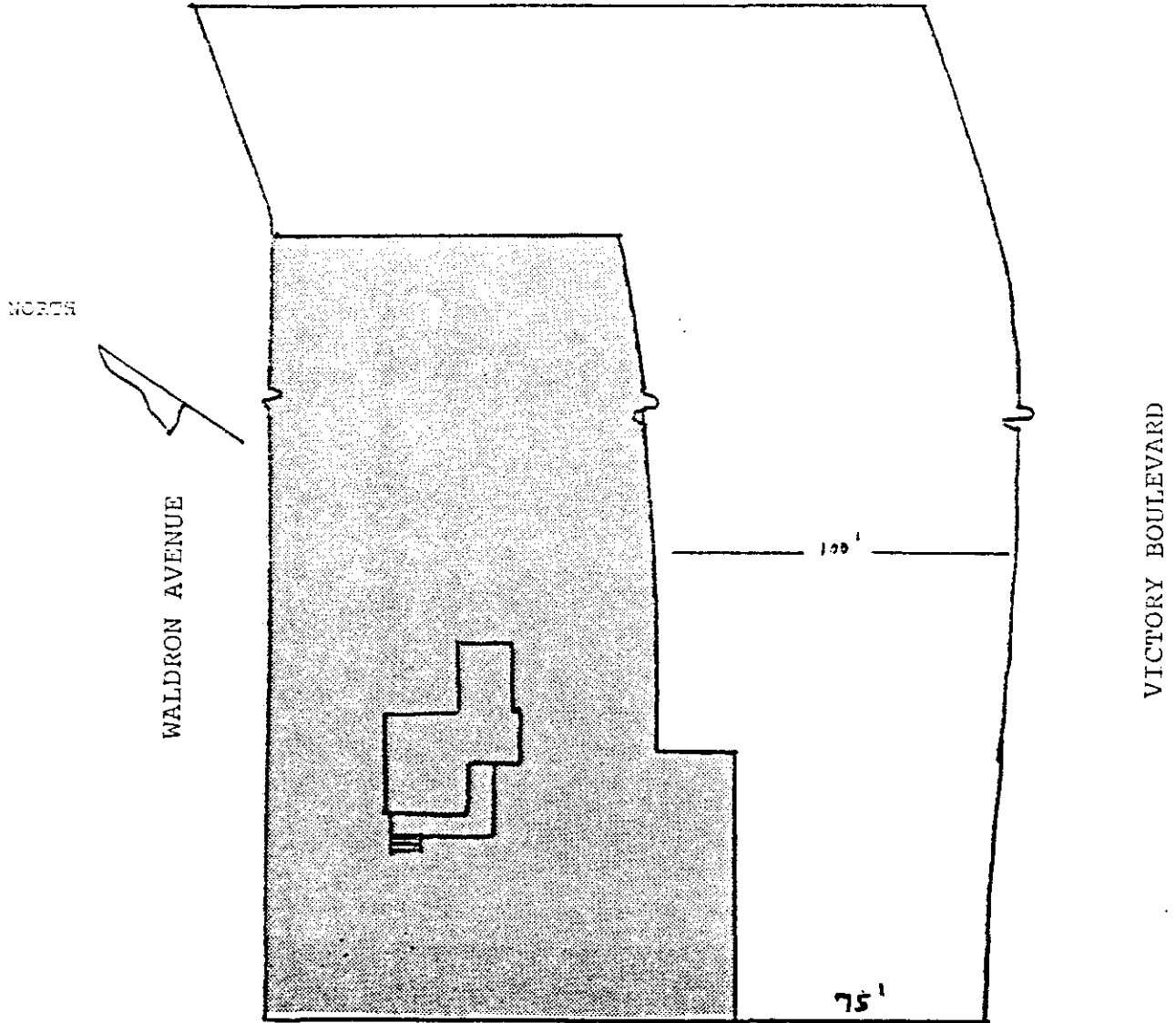
FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Dorothy Valentine Smith House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Dorothy Valentine Smith House, constructed by John Frederick Smith, Miss Smith's father, in 1893-95, stands on land which during the 18th century was part of a farm owned by successive generations of the Corson family to which she is related; that Dorothy Valentine Smith was also related to the subsequent owners and occupants of this property, all members of the interrelated Vanderbilt and Vredenburg families; that the distinguishing features of this house in the Queen Anne style as used in the United States include the original L-shaped plan and asymmetrical massing, decorative window treatment, ornamental gable shingles and wrap-around porch; that it is a relatively modest, restrained version of the Queen Anne style on Staten Island; that as such it is a compatible companion to the adjacent John King Vanderbilt House constructed in 1836; that certain aspects of its plan and facade are similar to those of the John King Vanderbilt House; that the Smith House is framed and enhanced by its landscaped setting, which is appropriate to the date of the house; that Dorothy Valentine Smith, like her father, was an influential leader in many of Staten Island's cultural, social and community organizations; and that her knowledge of and appreciation for the history of the Borough of Staten Island and those buildings which embody it was an enduring concern that has enriched the lives of countless Staten Island residents.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534 of the Charter of the City of New York and Title 25, Chapter 3 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Dorothy Valentine Smith House, 1213 Clove Road, Borough of Staten Island, and designates Tax Map Block 247, Lot 38 in part consisting of the property bounded by a line at the eastern end of the property which is the southeasterly extension of the line dividing Tax Map Block 246, Lot 35 (133 Waldron Avenue) and Tax Map Block 246, Lot 39 (139 Waldron Avenue), said line extending to a point 100 feet north of the southeastern property line fronting on Victory Boulevard, a line extending southwesterly at a distance of 100 feet north of the southeastern property line to a point that coincides with an imaginary line extending southeast from the south corner of the house, a line extending southeasterly 25 feet, a line extending southwesterly to the southwestern property line at a distance of 75 feet from the southeastern property line, a line extending northwesterly along the southwestern property line fronting on Clove Road, and a line extending northeasterly along the northwestern property line, fronting on the mapped, but uncut Waldron Avenue, to the point of beginning as shown on the attached site plan.

DOROTHY VALENTINE SMITH HOUSE
1213 Clove Road, Staten Island
Landmark Site: Tax Map 247
Lot 38 in part



(not to scale)

CLOVE ROAD

Landmark Site:



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bricks, Morris. "John King Vanderbilt." Unpublished ms. submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission at public hearing on September 29, 1987.
- "In Memoriam Dorothy Valentine Smith (1906-1984)." Staten Island Historian, 1 and 2 (Summer-Fall, 1984), p. 20.
- "Island Historian Dies at Home." The Staten Island Advance, June 14, 1984, p. All.
- Johnson, Marjorie. "Genealogy: Vanderbilt, Vredenburg, Smith Families." Unpublished ms. submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission at public hearing on September 29, 1987.
- Leng, Charles W. and Davis, William T. Staten Island and Its People: A History, 1609-1929. New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1930, 1933.
- Smith, Dorothy. "The Clove and Its Valley." Staten Island Historian, 17 (July-September, 1956), pp. 25-27.

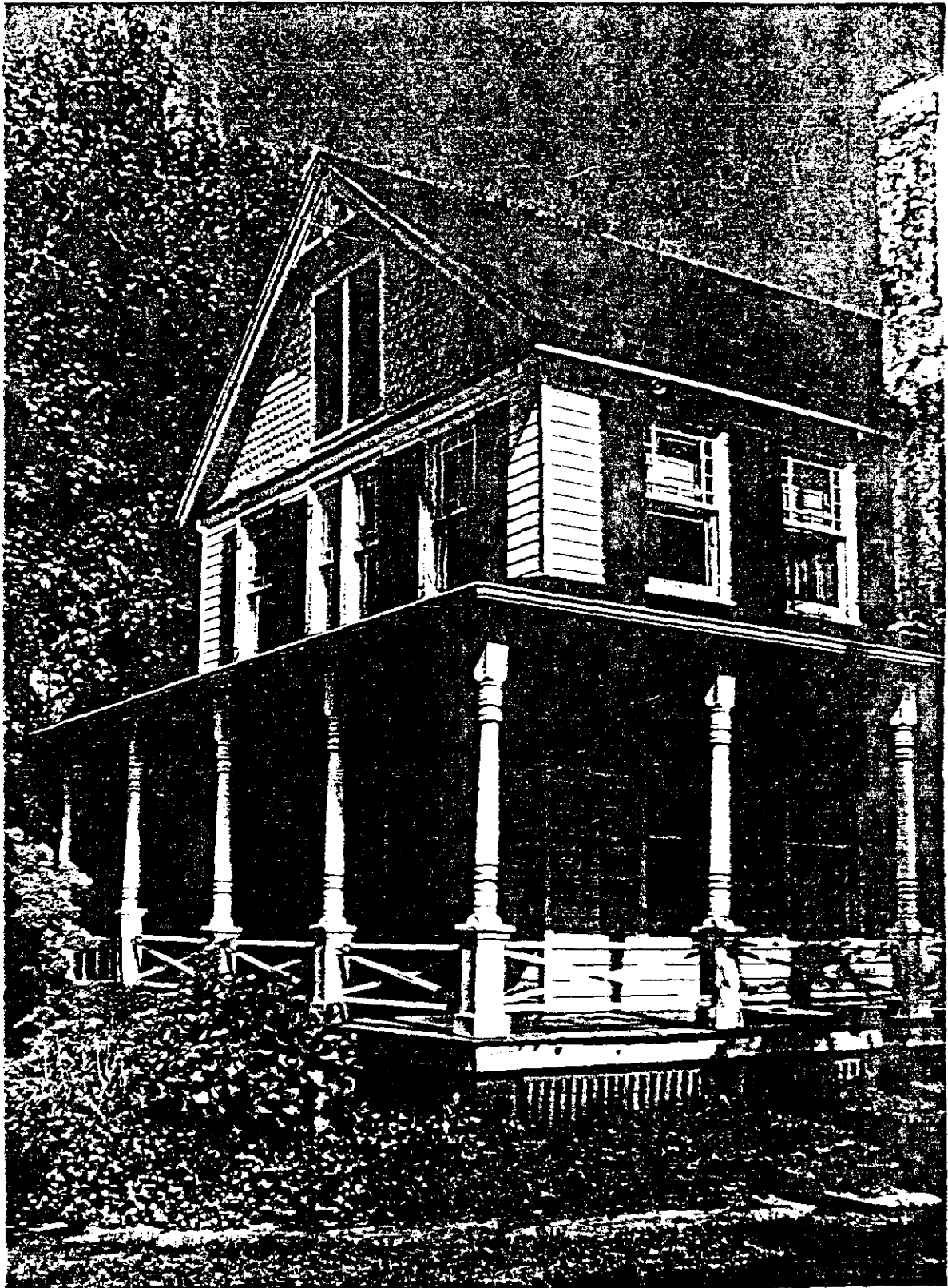


Photo Credit: Carl Forster
Landmarks Preservation
Commission

DOROTHY VALENTINE SMITH HOUSE
1213 Clove Road
Date: 1893-95

Architect: Unknown



Photo Credit: Carl Forster
Landmarks Preservation Commission

DOROTHY VALENTINE SMITH HOUSE
1213 Clove Road
Date: 1893-95

Architect: Unknown