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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Nickels-Sortwell House is a large L-shaped three-story frame house with low hip roof and a notably elaborate facade. The main house is rectangular in shape and has a large slightly lower three-story ell located at the rear northwest corner. The structure is about 45 feet wide and 83feet deep, including the rear ell. The five-bay wide main (south) facade and the east side are flush-boarded and the walls of the other elevations are clapboarded. The entrance door, situated in the center bay of the south facade, is flanked by elaborately mullioned side lights and topped by a wide elliptical fan light. This doorway is very similar to Plate 20 in Asher Benjamin's American Builder's Companion, in the edition of 1806. The door is sheltered by a one-story Corinthian portico with a balustrade on its roof; this Adamesque portico was added as an improvement to the house as a part of the 1917-18 restoration. The two first-story bays flanking the entrance are arcaded and from this base four Corinthian pilasters rise twostories in height. In the second-story of the center bay, above the door, is a Palladian window, and in the third-story, a concentric lunette or semicircular window. Molded architraves frame the flat-arch windows. Thirdstory windows are reduced in height and all windows are adorned by exterior louvered shutters. The main cornice has a double row of dentils. The rectangular portion of the house has a tall chimney at either end and two more chimneys are located in the rear ell.

The house has a modified central hall plan. A hall extends through the center of the rectangular portion of the house and is divided by means of a partition behind the staircase into two sections, with an entrance hall in front and a service hall behind. A third section of the hall continues northward along the east side of the rear ell. The front door opens into an entrance hall that is semi-oval in shape. This room is divided by an arch and beyond the arch is a fine freestanding spiral staircase. The staircase is separated from the center service hall to the north by an elliptical partition. Doors in the east and west walls of the entrance hall lead into the two large parlors that occupy the entire first floor of the rectangular portion of the house. Windows in these rooms have seats and folding interior shutters. The door frames cornices, and mantel pieces are decorated with rope carving and the fireplace in the east parlor has a freestanding post. Opening off the north end of the west parlor, and located in the rear ell, are first the dining room, and beyond this, the kitchen. The rear porch, at the northeast corner, was added in 1900.

The Nickels-Sortwell House is in good condition and is open to visitors during the summer months as a furnished historic house exhibit.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1807-08, the Nickels-Sortwell House is a splendid example of a large and elaborate frame town house designed in the Adamesque-Federal style.

## History

Captain William Nickels, a shipmaster, erected this three-story residence in 1807-08. He died shortly thereafter and the house then passed through many hands. The building was used as a hotel from around 1820 to 1900. The property was acquired by Alvin F. Sortwell in the latter year and the house was restored by Sortwell in 1917-18. In 1958 Miss Francis Sortwell decade the mansion to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

SEE INSTRUCTION

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