

Rocky Neck Historic Art Trail

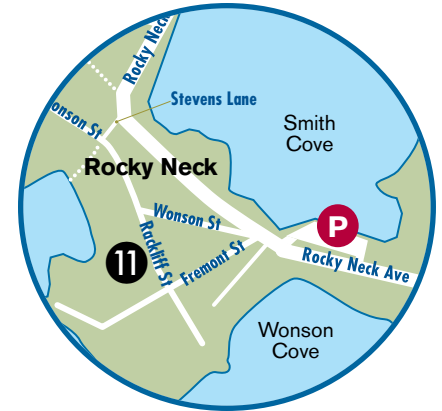
Gloucester, Massachusetts

Trail Site **11** 7 Rackliff Street

The Rockaway Hotel Site

The Rockaway Hotel followed the familiar trajectory of the summer hotel in New England: a boarding house beginning in the 1890s, wooden hotel expanding into many buildings through the 1920s, retraction in the 1930s, the lowest ebb in the 1960s, and replacement with condominiums in the 1980s.

Most of the southern end of Rocky Neck belonged to the Wonson family, but in 1850 they sold some land to William and George Rackliff. William's daughter Dorcas Foster opened a summer boarding house, which then became a hotel. In August 1900, it was thronged with prominent artists who spent their winters teaching in the cities in the East and Middle West and their summers relaxing in Gloucester. Four whose reputations have survived are Duveneck, De Camp, Potthast and Twachtman. In 1902, the Fosters sold to William Alexander Publicover and the glory days of the hotel began. He attracted prosperous middle-class who would settle in for a month or two, the men going on fishing expeditions, the ladies taking painting lessons and everyone playing bridge in the evenings. Until 1922, the Rockaway and its fellow hotels—there were at least four in the neighborhood—held art exhibits in their lobbies. Then the North Shore Arts Association and its rival Gloucester Society of Artists were formed. There was also a strong Little Theater with a theater school on Rocky Neck. Few of the professional artists could afford the Rockaway during the 1920s, but it was full of well-to-do ladies who supported the arts with enthusiasm. When the Depression hit, families who were devoted to Mr. Publicover returned but no new families joined them and the possibility of spending a whole summer at play disappeared.



DIRECTIONS:

From the end of Rte. 128 (second traffic light) go straight up over hill. Follow East Main Street about 1.1 miles, turn right onto Rocky Neck Avenue. At the fork in front of Sailor Stan's Restaurant take a sharp left up hill onto Fremont Street. Rackliff Street is the first right. The former hotel (now residential condominiums) is on the left.



Above: Postcard of the rear of the Rockaway Hotel, tennis courts and fishing dock, c. 1917.

Above right: Postcard of the Rockaway Hotel, c. 1910.

Bottom right: Postcard of the Rockaway Hotel from the air, c. 1930s. All courtesy of Cape Ann Museum.

