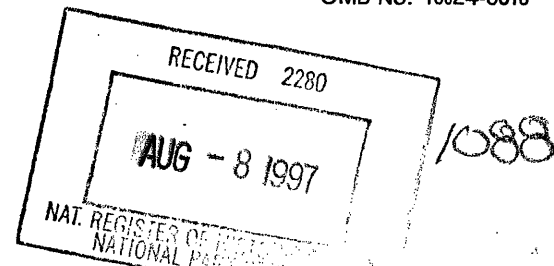


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and 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 from 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 Sweeting Homestead

other names/site number Sweeting Plantation

2. Location

street & number [REDACTED] ☒ not for publication

city or town Biscayne National Park n/a ☐ vicinity

state Florida code FL county Dade code 025 zip code 33090-1389

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby 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.)

Ronald M. Greenberg 8-6-97
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
National Park Service
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Julie L. Petty, DSHPO 7-10-97
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Florida State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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

Date of Action

Sarah J. Fitt 9/19/97

Sweeting Homestead

Name of Property

Dade Co., FL

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	
0	0	buildings
1	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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Single Dwelling

Agriculture/Subsistence: Agricultural
Field

: Animal facility

: Fishing facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Landscape: Park

: Conservation area

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

n/a

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation

walls

roof

n/a

other

Narrative Description

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

Sweeting Homestead

Name of Property

Dade Co., FL

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

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Exploration/Settlement**Archeology: Historic-Non-aboriginal****Period of Significance****1882-1930****Significant Dates****n/a****Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a**Cultural Affiliation****American****Architect/Builder****n/a****Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

Biscayne National Park**Peg Niemiec**

Sweeting Homestead
Name of Property

Dade Co., FL
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 239.8 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 [REDACTED]
Zone Easting Northing
2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]
Zone Easting Northing
4 [REDACTED]
☐ 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 Peg Niemiec/Barbara E. Mattick, Historic Preservationist Supervisor

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation (Florida) date July 1997

street & number R.A. Gray Bldg., 500 S. Bronough St. telephone (850) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state FL zip code 32399-0250

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name Biscayne National Park, Jim Adams (contact)

street & number 9700 S.W. 328 St., P.O. Box 1369 telephone (305) 230-1144

city or town Homestead state FL zip code 33090-1369

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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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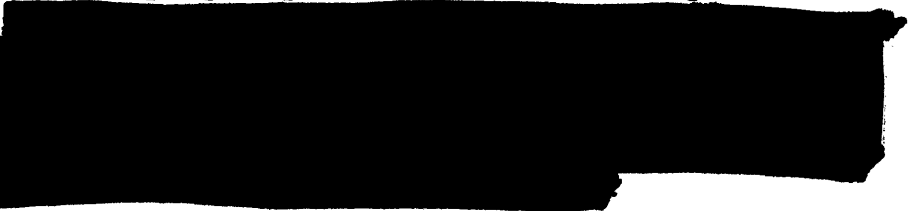
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Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

SUMMARY

~~The Sweeting Homestead property is located in Biscayne National Park (BNP),~~ 

In May 1882, Asa Sweeting claimed 154.4 acres as a homestead on  He received his Patent for the property in 1889.² The Homestead acreage was plotted on the U.S. Survey Map of 1872 by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of Interior³ (See Map No. 2). Asa and his son, George, purchased an additional adjoining 85.4 acres in 1896,⁴ increasing their land holdings to 239.8 acres.

¹Homestead Application for Asa Sweeting, 10 May 1882, Homestead Application No. 10289, Homestead Patent File 6512, 29 Jun 1889, Gainesville (Fla.) U.S. Land Ofc., R.G. 49, U.S. Archives, Wash., D.C.

²Homestead Certificate (Patent) for Asa Sweeting, 29 June 1889, Patent File No. 6512, Gainesville (Fla.) U.S. Land Ofc., R.G. 49, U.S. Archives, Wash., D.C.

³Land Survey Plat of 1872, Township 57 South, Range 42 East, Tallahassee Meridian, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Eastern States Ofc., Alexandria, Va.

⁴Indenture between John Lowe, Jr., and Mary E. Lowe to Asa Sweeting and George Sweeting, 9 July 1896 (Recorded 10 Oct. 1896) Dade County, Fla., Deed and Mortgage Index, Beginning to 1900, A-Z, Reel 1, Deed Book Q-Z, pp. 284-285, Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla.

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Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

SETTING

The Biscayne Bay or inner side of the northern Florida Keys consists of sheltering mangrove swamps. The Atlantic Ocean side is an outer barrier of coral limestone. On the seaward side of the Keys shoal water extends out several miles. Very little sand has drifted south of Biscayne Bay, consequently, the shores of [REDACTED] are mostly coral rock with few sandy beaches.⁵ The Sweeting property borders the shoreline, and at low tide a sandy beach of about 100 ft to 200 ft wide becomes visible almost the full length of their property (Photos 1 & 2).

In 1887, after living on [REDACTED] for five years, Asa Sweeting described his property as hammock land, small timber, and ordinary agricultural land most valuable for growing fruit and vegetables. However, the land was so rocky it could not be plowed and had to be worked by hand with axes and hoes. He also stated that he had cleared about thirty acres and planted it in bananas, pineapples and tomatoes with a value of \$2500. Eventually, the family developed a one hundred acre pineapple plantation. They planted lime groves and grew other crops.⁶ During the establishment of homestead settlements on the Florida Keys, many large trees were cut and the land was burned and pineapples and key limes were planted.⁷

⁵Proposed Islandia National Monument, Fla., April 1964 (Report) U.S. Dept. of Interior, National Park Service, Southeast Region, p. 10, 11.

⁶Oral History Narrative: A visit by former residents of Elliott Key to Convoy Point Headquarters, Biscayne National Park (BNP), Homestead, Fla., 1 July 1989, p. 3. Original in Convoy Point Headquarters Office.

⁷Nordt, Jane, *Elliott Key Park, A Profile of History Compiled by Islandia-Historian*, Miami, Fla.: Metro Dade County Park and Recreation Dept., Public Information Office, (not dated) p. 7. (Original given to Bill Hudson, BNP Park Ranger, by Virginia Tannehill, 26 Feb. 1992, who gave copy to Peg Niemiec. Original copy in Convoy

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Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

At the present time, the property is covered with trees and woody vegetation. Ruins found on the property include piles of rubble at house sites, two standing concrete cisterns, and three broken cisterns lying in chunks at their original locations. Senegal date palms, coconut palms, and a seagrape tree are present on the property in the same locations as when the family resided there. In 1992, Hurricane Andrew devastated [REDACTED] and destroyed the tree canopy on the island. It is beginning to recover: however, it will be many years before it returns to the same density it had prior to the hurricane. (See Landscape Photographs 1 through 5.)

DESCRIPTION OF BUILDINGS DURING THE HOMESTEADING YEARS

[REDACTED], the family built six frame vernacular houses, a school/church building, a general store, a hurricane house, a chicken house, cabins for farmhands, packing houses, cisterns for a fresh water supply, and outhouses⁸ (See Site Plan). Photographs are available for two of the six homes built (Figures 1, 2, & 3), the school/church building (Figure 4), and the chicken house (Figure 5). The photographs seem to indicate that the houses rested on concrete piers. Homes and community-use buildings were for the most part built [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A construction method of ground-pinning the frame of the buildings to the coral rock beneath was used to

Point Headquarters office, Biscayne National Park).

⁸Photographs, detail of buildings, and information about life on the Homestead were provided by family members in letters, oral interviews, telephone conversations, and diagrams between Charles Theron Lowe, Carlton Lowe, Roxie Brooks Newcomer, Katherine Sweeting Roberts, and Peg Niemiec between 1990 and 1994.

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Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

protect them from high winds and hurricanes.⁹ During the early years on the Homestead, barn-type houses were built until more permanent homes could be constructed. Most of the homes had their own docks and sailing craft. Barometers hung in every home to predict weather.

None of the above described buildings remains on the property today. However, there are two cisterns standing intact which measure 12 ft wide x 14 ft long and 5 ft high. They are estimated to be about one hundred years old. The bottom and sides are one foot thick, made of concrete, sea water, and coral rock mixed together. A wooden gable style top enclosure was used to protect the fresh water from debris and contamination, however, only the concrete base stands today. Three cistern ruins lie broken on their original sites.¹⁰ These three structures were levelled by the Army Corps of Engineers when [REDACTED] became part of Biscayne National Monument, which later became Biscayne National Park.

The northernmost home on the homestead belonged to Abner W. Sweeting, Sr., son of George and Mary Sweeting, his wife Cornelia, and their seven children (See Site Plan, Bldg. 1). There is no evidence as to when the house was built. The family lived on [REDACTED] from 1910 to 1924. However, Abner lived on the island as a 16-year old boy with his parents. This is recorded in the 1896 Census of Youth of School Age in School District No. 4, [REDACTED] Dade County, Florida.¹¹

⁹Nordt, p. 8 (See Ref. # 7)

¹⁰Visits made to the Sweeting Homestead property (See Major Bibliographical References in Section 9, page 15).

¹¹1896 Census of Youth of School Age, School District No. 4, Elliott's (sic) Key, Dade Co., Fla., Series 298, Vol. 2, p. 7, line 5, Florida State Archives, Dept. of State, Tallahassee, Fla.

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**Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL**

Two photographs of Abner and Cornelia's house exists. One photograph of the house was taken from the dock (Figure 1). This two-story home measured about 25 x 30 feet, and had a low side-gabled roof made of wooden shingles. Three symmetrical one-piece crossbuck style doors on the front side of the house, and one door on the rear side allowed ocean breezes to pass through. Hinged, one-piece crossbuck style shutters hung at the windows and provided protection from the rain, wind, and sun. It appears from the photograph of the house that there were screens on the exterior doors. On the south side and to the rear of the house stood a cistern with an attached gutter pipe leading from the roof of the house. On the north side of the house stood a small building which appears to be an outhouse. The front yard is clear of vegetation except for what appears to be grass. Clusters of coconut palms still identify where the homes were located. A second photograph shows Abner and Cornelia and their children standing in front of this home (Figure 2).

The first floor of the interior of the home was basically divided into thirds. The middle section served as the living and dining room, and a stairwell led up to the second floor. The left section of the first floor contained the kitchen, and the right section a bedroom (Diagram 1). The second floor had two bedrooms (Diagram 2).

A chicken house stood to the rear and right of Abner and Cornelia's house (Site Plan, Bldg. 2). An undated photograph depicts Cornelia Sweeting in front of a chicken house with many white leghorn chickens at her feet (Figure 5). A cabin for the farmhands was located nearby (Site Plan, Bldg. 3). Packing houses were behind Abner's home near the fields.

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Sweeting Homestead Dade County, FL

Proceeding along the shoreline, there was a one-room frame building which served as a grocery store for the family and residents of the island (Site Plan, Bldg. 4). This store was owned by the Sweeting family, and items were sold to anyone on the island who wished to purchase them. Staples such as flour, sugar, grits, canned meats, and other items, including candy for the children, were sold. Store supplies were transported from Miami or Key West by schooner or other boats.

Next in line along the shore lived Asa E. Sweeting, his wife Lillian, and their four children (Site Plan, Bldg. 5).

In the next house along the ridge lived William B. Parker and his wife, Rosa Parker, half-sister to Mary Sweeting, and their children (Site Plan, Bldg. 6).

In the central part of the island and behind Abner and Cornelia's home, stood a wooden building nestled in a wooded area on high ground. It was used by the families as a hurricane house (Site Plan, Bldg. 7). This location was protected from high winds and high tides, and away from the edge of the ocean where their homes stood.

Next to the Parker's home was the Seaside School/Church building (Figure 4), a one room board and batten building with a gabled roof covered with shingles. It was used for school and church services (Site Plan, Bldg. 8). A piano was transported by schooner from Key West for use in this building. School desks and benches were used for students attending school as well as for Sunday school.

John and Nellie Sweeting Russell and their six children lived at the next location (Site Plan, Bldg. 9). No detail for the home is available.

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Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

George and Mary Sweeting lived in the next to the last house on the southern end of the homestead property (Site Plan, Bldg. 10, Figure 3). This house was typical of the American, two-story box type, New England colonial house. It measured about 30 x 40 feet and included an extended kitchen. Wood shingles covered the side-gabled roof. Initially, the house had an open wood trough attached to the house roof gutters which led to two cisterns on either side of the house. They were located twenty or thirty feet from the house. Later on, metal gutters replaced the wood trough. The house had 6/6, double hung sash windows, arranged symmetrically. The windows were screened. The house was painted white, and had dark green shutters which were closed to block out the sun during the day, and during high winds. Figure 7 shows a portion of the front of the house before hurricanes had an impact on it. It appears to be elevated one to two feet above the ground. Lattice filled the space between the ground and the lower part of the house. Mary Sweeting brought pink roses from Key West, and planted the roses, white and pink periwinkles, and hibiscus plants to landscape her home.

Figure 6 is believed to have been taken after the 1906 hurricane. It shows George and Mary Sweeting standing by a battered palm tree near the house. The house appears to have structural damage and is tilted. It was lifted off the foundation by the water surge during the hurricane and moved fifteen feet. The first floor extension housing the kitchen is shown on the left of the house: it was damaged and removed after the hurricane. Figure 3 shows the house after the 1926 hurricane.

The interior of the home had a center-hall plan on the first floor, with a parlor, a kitchen, a dining room, and a guest bedroom (Diagram 3). Six or eight rocking chairs surrounded the

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Sweeting Homestead Dade County, FL

living room table. This ornate table was made of "good" wood with a marble top. The large family Bible rested on top of the table. A round wagon-wheel type chandelier with five or six spokes holding kerosene lamps hung above the table. The chandelier was raised and lowered by a pulley for filling, lighting, and extinguishing the lamps. A hand-wound phonograph stood on a table in a corner of the room. In the hallway just outside the parlor hung a barometer. Across the hall to the front of the house was a guest bedroom. The lower mattress on the iron bed was filled with straw and the top mattress was filled with down and feathers. Bed linens were snow white, starched, and ironed. The kitchen had a wood-burning stove, shelves, counter space for food preparation, and a sink. A large marble slab was used for kneading bread. A large kitchen table with benches stood in the middle of the room. A stairwell in the kitchen led to the second floor. A pantry under the stairwell stored staples and supplies. Across the hall from the kitchen was the family dining room with table and chairs. A large china cabinet with round glass doors held chinaware. Shelves extended along one wall.

On the second floor (Diagram 4), a master bedroom occupied by George and Mary Sweeting contained an iron bed with two mattresses. A pitcher and bowl set and a towel used for washing hands and face sat on top of a large marble-topped chest of drawers. Shelves ran along part of one wall, and clothes were hung on large hooks attached to the wall. Large wooden containers placed on the floor held clothing and other belongings. The rest of the second floor was a large dormitory-type room used by the children for sleeping. Pallets were used as needed. A round-top sea chest stood in the corner and held George Sweeting's documents and papers.

A cabin for farmhands (Site Plan, Bldg. 11) was located near

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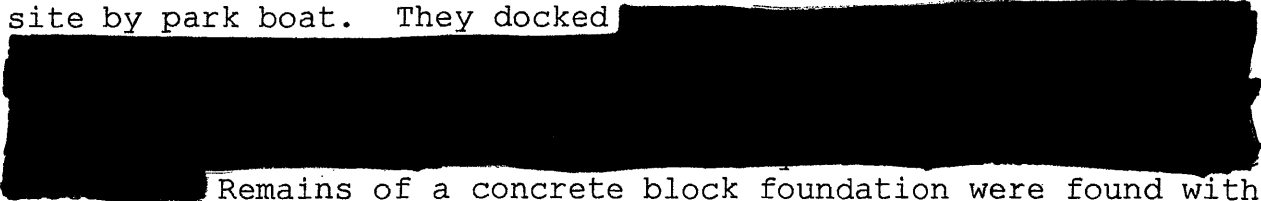
Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

George and Mary Sweeting's home. There is no detail layout plan available for these cabins. However, each family owned a cabin for their farmhands who lived on the Homestead during harvest time.

The first house built on the Homestead was a one-story dwelling house. This southernmost house on the property was called the "old house" (Site Plan, Bldg. 12). It measured 16 x 24 feet, was made of pine lumber, and was habitable at all seasons of the year. Its estimated value in 1887 was \$250.¹² Thomas Sweeting, son of George and Mary Sweeting, and his wife Mary Ann and their children occupied this house during the early years of the Homestead.

INVESTIGATIONS

The Sweeting Homestead site has been visited five times in order to gain information about the physical remains. On Wednesday, February 28, 1990, Peg Niemiec; her husband Lee; and Bill Hudson, Park Ranger made the first visit to the homestead site by park boat. They docked



Remains of a concrete block foundation were found with its perimeter measuring 14 x 30 feet. (This structure was built after 1932 when the Sweetings had left the island. Concrete was not used for constructing buildings on the Homestead.)

¹²Homestead Testimony of Claimant Asa Sweeting, 12 Nov 1887, pp. 2,3. Patent File No. 6512, 29 June 1889, Gainesville (Fla.) U.S. Land Ofc., R.G. 49, U.S. Archives, Wash., D.C.)

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Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

On Wednesday, May 26, 1993, a second site visit was made to the property. Members of the group included descendants of the Sweeting family: Peg Niemiec, Katherine Sweeting Roberts, and Charles Theron Lowe. David Brewer, archaeologist, Southeast Archaeological Center, NPS; Marilyn Haus-Loftus, Chief Interpreter, BNP; and Juan Rodriquez, park ranger, BNP; and Lee Niemiec also attended. Four cisterns were identified. Only one intact concrete cistern was located near the "old house" built on the homestead in 1882. Ruins of three cisterns lay in rubble on the ground. Large Senegal date palms, and coconut palms still grow near the former home sites. The progeny of lilies and pink and white periwinkles grow profusely near the location where George and Mary Sweeting's house once stood.

On Friday, May 6, 1994, the third site visit was made to the property. Included in the trip were Peg Niemiec; Marilyn Hause-Loftus, chief interpreter, BNP; Lili Forni, BNP ranger; and Jay Forni, BNP volunteer. A second intact cistern was found in dense underbrush near house #10 on the Site Plan. There are no photographs of this cistern.

On Tuesday, March 28, 1995, a fourth site visit was made to try to identify and pinpoint homesites, other buildings, and other cultural features using the Global Positioning System (GPS) (Model - Navy 5000). The group included Peg Niemiec; family members; Richard Curry, BNP; Christine Rogers, BNP ranger; and three BNP volunteers. GPS readings were made of the cisterns, and Charles Theron Lowe, a family member who lived on the island in the 1920's indicated where the homes and other buildings were located. Readings from the GPS are available from Peg Niemiec.

A January 1996 trip to the site by Peg Niemiec; David Brewer; and Barbara Mattick, the National Register Coordinator in

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Continuation Sheet

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Sweeting Homestead

Dade County, FL

the Florida State Historic Preservation Office, had to be postponed because of the shutdown of the federal government. In spite of extreme mosquito conditions in the summer, the trip to investigate and photograph the archaeological remains of the Sweeting Homestead was rescheduled for Tuesday, July 9, 1996. When they arrived, the staff at Biscayne National Park was

preparing for the arrival of Hurricane Bertha. The visit to Elliott Key, therefore, was limited to only a couple of hours.

Dense vegetation covers the island, making it extremely difficult to locate sites. Palm trees and relic mother-in-law tongues, however, made it possible to identify the locations of the major sites and rubble from the historic buildings. These findings confirmed the information that had been provided by family members who had lived at the site.

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Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

SUMMARY

The Sweeting Homestead is significant at the local level under **Criterion A** in the area of **Exploration and Settlement**. In the late nineteenth century, pineapple cultivation was perceived as the key to the interest in homesteading and agricultural development on the subtropical barrier islands in South Florida and its coastal areas. Most of the physical evidence of this development has been destroyed due to subsequent urban development. The Sweeting settlement is a significant example of this part of the history of Florida. Even though there are few standing structures and encroachment of natural vegetation on the home sites and agricultural land, the site retains the integrity of its location, setting, materials, and design (layout of homestead). The Sweeting Homestead site offers a rare opportunity to interpret the settlement of Southeast Florida at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Sweeting Homestead is also significant under **Criterion D** for its potential to yield information about the daily life of the settlers that is not available through the written record, and to show how they were able to adapt to the hostile environment of a barrier island and successfully farm and support families.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

In 1866, Asa Sweeting and his family immigrated from Harbour Island, Eleuthra, Bahamas to Key West, Florida.¹³ Later, they

¹³1870 U.S. Census, Monroe Co., Fla., p. 52, Dwelling 342, Family 348, lines 28-32, National Archives M593,

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sailed to Plantation Key, Florida where Asa's son, George, worked for William Curry as a ship salvager.¹⁴ After five years on Plantation Key, the family returned to Key West. In the 1870's, word began to spread through Key West and the other Florida Keys about the Homestead Act of 1862 signed by President Abraham Lincoln. The decision to file and acquire a Patent for a homestead in Florida was no easy task. The difficulties and circumstances were in many cases insurmountable because of the constant change in the geographical and political boundaries of the developing state. For some people, the office of the Clerk of Dade County was a long distance from where they resided. His office was difficult to reach as there were no public roads or modes of transportation. There was little knowledge or information available as to how and where applicants for homesteading should go to file. Homesteaders were required to live on the land for five years and to be a U.S. citizen. The applicant's testimony had to be filed stating improvements made since settling on the land. Numerous other documents had to be presented in order to receive final ownership of the property. It was a long and tedious process. However, the early pioneers were self-disciplined and determined. They pursued their goal to own their own land, and to try to make a better life for themselves and their families. By the turn of the century, every lot [REDACTED] and most of the northern Florida Keys had been claimed¹⁵.

Roll 132, Wash., D.C.

¹⁴Oral History Narrative: (See Ref. # 6))

¹⁵State of Florida Tract Book Logs of Property, Elliott Key, Fla., and Vicinity, Florida Dept. of Natural Resources, Tallahassee, Fla.

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HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

In April 1882, Asa Sweeting and his family, including his sons, George and Thomas, sailed to [REDACTED]. They filed a homestead claim for 154.4 acres.¹⁶ Five years later in 1887, Asa Sweeting filed and received his Final Affidavit for his property.¹⁷ In Asa's Testimony for the Homestead, he stated that his family lived with him on the homestead, and that they had built a frame dwelling house 16 x 24 feet. He also stated that he had cleared thirty acres of land and planted tomatoes and pineapples. Improvements on the land had been assessed at \$360 and the taxes were paid to the Collector of Taxes, Dade County, Florida. He said that he had voted in [REDACTED] voting precinct twice.¹⁸ In 1884, [REDACTED] was Dade County's Precinct Three. John H. Saunder's home, which was south of the Sweeting Homestead, served as the voting place. For the general election of 1884, a county commissioner, Henry Filer, hauled the ballot boxes by boat between the county courthouse at Ft. Dallas in Miami [REDACTED]. He was paid \$5.70 for the trip.¹⁹ In 1889, Asa Sweeting received his Homestead Patent giving him full ownership to the property.²⁰ In 1896, Asa and George Sweeting purchased an adjoining 85 acres increasing their land ownership

¹⁶Homestead Application for Asa Sweeting (See Ref. # 1)

¹⁷Final Affidavit of Homestead Claimants, 12 Nov. 1887, Homestead Patent File No. 6512, R.G. 49, U.S. Archives, Wash., D.C.

¹⁸Homestead Testimony of Claimant, Asa Sweeting, 12 Nov. 1887, pp. 2-3, Patent File No. 6512, 29 June 1889, Gainesville (Fla.) U.S. Land Ofc., R.G. 49, U.S. Archives, Wash., D.C.

¹⁹Peters, Thelma, *Lemon City, Pioneering on Biscayne Bay 1850-1925*, Miami, Florida, Banyan Books, Inc., 11976, p. 114.

²⁰Homestead Certificate (Patent) for Asa Sweeting (See Ref. # 2).

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to 239.8 acres.²¹ In 1897, Asa deeded the entire property to George Sweeting,²² and in December 1897 Asa died.²³ He was buried behind the schoolhouse on [REDACTED]²⁴

Although the family homesteaded on [REDACTED] they never broke their ties with Key West, in Monroe County, where they maintained a residence and businesses. During most of the 19th century, Key West was the wealthiest city per capita in Florida. The town offered cultural activities and was the hub of a bustling maritime center. It was a stop-over port for vessels sailing between the Gulf Coast cities, Mexico, and the rest of the world. In 1889, it was the largest city in the state. The city began to organize early in the 19th century and had an established economic and government organization which was lacking in Dade County where [REDACTED] was located. The family maintained a residence at 311 Elizabeth Street in Key West.²⁵ The Key West city directories and the U.S. and Florida census records reflect some of the economic activities in which George Sweeting and the family were engaged in [REDACTED] and in Key West. During the years between 1870 and 1914, George was listed as a seaman,²⁶ a farmer,²⁷ a planter,²⁸ owner of a coffee

²¹Indenture between John Lowe, Jr., and Mary E. Lowe to Asa Sweeting and George Sweeting, (See Ref. # 4)

²²Indenture between Asa Sweeting and George Sweeting, 6 July 1897 (Filed 20 Jan. 1898) Deed and Mortgage Index, Beginning-1900, Deed Book Q-Z, pp. 299-300, Miami, Fla., Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla.

²³"Wills," (Letter dated 15 April 1898), p. 652, Probate Court Files of Dade County, Fla., Clerk, Circuit & County Courts, Dade County Courthouse, Miami, Fla.

²⁴Oral History Narrative (See Ref. # 6)

²⁵Indenture from John Lowe, Jr. and Mary E. Lowe to George Sweeting, 22 July 1897, Monroe Co., Fla., Deed Book R-R, pp. 140-141, Clerk of Court, Key West, Fla.

²⁶1870 U.S. Census, Monroe Co., Fla., p. 40, Dwelling 253, Family 258, line 8, National Archives Microfilm 593, Roll 132, Wash., D.C.

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shop,²⁹ a grocery store proprietor,³⁰ and a partner in a ship chandler's business.³¹ George Sweeting sold 800 coconut trees to Henry Flagler for one dollar each. Flagler used these trees to landscape the grounds his huge Royal Palm Hotel in Miami which opened in 1897.

Eventually, the family developed a 100-acre pineapple plantation [REDACTED]³² In 1860, Captain Benjamin Baker showed that pineapples could be grown successfully on the rocky south Florida Keys. The warm climate was frost-free, and the porous coral bedrock held moisture and provided phosphate for the pineapples. The growing of pineapples spread rapidly, and by 1890, they were grown from the Florida Keys up the coast to Ft. Pierce.³³

Because the South Florida climate permits early crops, the growers had a ready market for northern cities. George Sweeting

²⁷1880 U.S. Census, Monroe Co., Fla., p. 3, Dwelling 24, Family 27, line 3, National Archives T 9, Roll 131, Wash., D.C.

²⁸1885 Fla. Census, Dade Co., Fla., p. 13, line 17, National Archives Microfilm 845, Roll 1, Wash., D.C.

²⁹*Bensel's Directory of the City and Island of Key West, 1887*, p. 153, Stack 42, Local History and Genealogy Room, Library of Congress, Wash., D.C.

³⁰1910 U.S. Census, Monroe Co., Fla., Sheet 2-A, 311 Elizabeth St., Dwelling 29, Family 31, line 30, National Archives, T 624, Roll 165, Wash., D.C.

³¹*Key West City Directory, 1914-1915*, Vol. 3, p. 239, R.L. Polk and Co., Columbus, Ohio, Library of Congress, Local History and Genealogy Room, Stack 42, Wash., D.C.

³²Oral History Narrative (See Ref. # 6)

³³E.D. Vosbury, *Pineapple Culture in Florida*, Farmer's Bulletin, p. 3, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1926.

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owned his own fleet of schooners,³⁴ which transported his produce to northern markets as far away as Boston.³⁵ Before the railroads were built in Florida, transportation depended largely on streams and coastal waters. Overland travel was difficult as the land routes were little more than paths and commerce was conducted mainly by sailing craft.³⁶ In 1896, the Flagler railroad was extended to Miami. It charged high and discriminatory rates to some growers and paid rebates to favored customers. Some were foreign growers from the West Indies. The Florida State legislature tried to regulate rates and practices without success.³⁷ Consequently, many of the Key's plantation owners went out of business because of the added obstacle of higher railroad rates to their profits. Because George Sweeting owned his own fleet of schooners, he did not have to depend on the railroad to ship his produce.³⁸

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sailing craft was a very important mode of transportation. For those who lived on the Florida Keys, it was their only means of contact with the outside world. Thelma Peters stated in her book, *Biscayne Country 1870-1925*, that George Sweeting was a well-known Conch sea captain and plantation owner.³⁹ During the off periods of farming, the family engaged in several seafaring

³⁴Nordt, p. 11. (See Ref. # 7)

³⁵Lowe, Carlton S., "I remember," *Heraldette*, Jan. 1986, pp. 8-9. Miami Herald Publishing Co., Miami, Fla.

³⁶Writer's Project of the W.P.A., *Florida, A Guide to the Southernmost State*, State of Florida Dept. of Public Instruction, Tallahassee, Fla., 1939.

³⁷Tebeau, Charlton W., *A History of Florida*, Coral Gables, Fla., University of Miami Press, 1971, p. 295.

³⁸Nordt, Jane. p.11 (See Ref. # 7))

³⁹Peters, Thelma, *Biscayne Country 1870-1926*, Miami, Fla., Banyan Books, Inc. 1981, p. 76.

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endeavors. These included coastal trading of merchandise and produce, transporting passengers, carrying mail, salvaging wrecked ships off shore, and commercial fishing. The Sweeting men were Master seamen. The family owned several wind-driven, sailing schooners, and a gas engine boat. Jane Nordt, in her article on Elliott Key, stated, "George Sweeting built three sizable ships, one of 44 tons to transport his farm produce from the island to the markets on the mainland and on the lower Keys."⁴⁰ However, only two licenses have been found for schooners built on the island. Four schooner licenses and a gas engine boat license belonging to the Sweeting's have been documented.

In 1898 in Key West, George Sweeting purchased the new schooner, the *Two Brothers*, which was 36 feet long, weighed 12 tons, and was used for coastal trading.⁴¹ In 1901, George Sweeting brought shipbuilders from Key West [REDACTED] where they built the *Mt. Vernon*, a schooner weighing 49 tons, and measuring 65 feet long.⁴² This was probably the largest sailing vessel built outside of Key West.⁴³ In 1902, another schooner, the *Mount Pleasant*, was built [REDACTED] and weighed 20 tons and was 50 feet long.⁴⁴ The *Centennial* was purchased in 1910,

⁴⁰Nordt, p. 7 (See Ref. # 7).

⁴¹License of Sailing Vessel, *Two Brothers*, 19 Mar. 1898, Collector of Customs, Key West, Fla., Official File No. 145762, R.G. 41, Civil Division, National Archives, Wash., D.C.

⁴²License of Sailing Vessel, *Mt. Vernon*, 6 April 1901, Official File No. 93114, R.G. 41, Civil Division, National Archives, Wash., D.C.

⁴³John Viele, "Sailing Craft of the Florida Keys," *Tequests*, Vol. LII, 1992, p. 15.

⁴⁴License of Sailing Vessel, *Mt. Pleasant*, 3 May 1902, Official File No. 93253, R.G. 41, Civil Division, National Archives, Wash., D.C.

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was 36 feet long and weighed 18 tons.⁴⁵ In 1918, the family purchased the *Vole*, a gas engine boat used for coastal trading, and for family trips to the mainland.⁴⁶

Marine salvaging was an important industry on the Florida coast as early as the 1840's. Early in the history of Florida, pirates who used Key West as their base, preyed on foundering ships. In order to insure that individuals who went aboard these distressed ships were men of integrity, the U.S. Superior Court required salvagers/wreckers to be licensed. This was intended to prevent pirating of grounded or wrecked ships in the waters off the Florida coast.

Before settling on [REDACTED] around 1880, George Sweeting worked as a ship salvager for William Curry on Plantation Key.⁴⁷ In 1905, George Sweeting was issued a wrecker's license for his schooner, the *Mount Vernon*.⁴⁸ His son, Abner W. Sweeting, Sr., was listed as Master. Abner assisted in the effort to rescue the Spanish steamship, the *S.S. Alicia*, which had grounded in 1905 on [REDACTED]⁴⁹

⁴⁵License of Sailing Vessel, Centennial, 9 Sept. 1910, Official File No. 125479, R.G. 41, Civil Division, National Archives, Wash., D.C.

⁴⁶License of Vessel, Vole, 9 August 1918, Official No. 161662, R.G. 41, Civil Division, National Archives, Wash., D.C.

⁴⁷Oral History Narrative (See Ref.# 6).

⁴⁸Wrecker's License for Mt. Vernon 11 May 1905, Wrecker's License Register 1862-1921, U.S. District Court, Key West, Fla., No. 35, R.G. 21, National Archives, Southeast Region, East Point, Ga.

⁴⁹"Cargo S.S. Alicia," U.S. Admiralty Court Records, 1 May 1905, Southern District of Florida, Key West, Fla., Microfilm 1360, Roll 19, P. 95, National Archives, Wash., D.C.

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Life [REDACTED] changed abruptly when a hurricane struck on Friday, October 19, 1906. An eight-foot storm surge inundated the island with water, destroying all the pineapple plants and rendering the soil infertile for future plantings. George and Mary Sweeting's house was lifted from its foundation and moved 15 feet from its original location. The attached kitchen was seriously damaged and later demolished. Fortunately, the waters surrounding the Florida Keys are a fisherman's paradise. After the loss of the pineapple fields, commercial fishing became the main occupation for the family.⁵⁰ The perishable seafood was delivered by boat to local markets on the mainland. Because there was no refrigeration, longer trips were not feasible.⁵¹ Since fishing in sub-tropical waters was abundant year round, it provided the family with a source of income throughout the year. Fishing continued as a source of income until the Great Depression.

In 1919, George and Mary transferred seventy-five acres of the homestead to four of their children and a relative who lived on the Homestead^{52, 53, 54, 55, 56}. George died in 1920. The

⁵⁰Oral History Session Narrative, p. 6 (See Ref.# 6).

⁵¹Nordt, p. 9 (See Ref. # 7).

⁵²Indenture between George Sweeting and Abner W. Sweeting, Sr., 25 Aug. 1919, Dade Co., Fla., Deed Book 223, pp. 382-384. Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla.

⁵³Indenture between George and Mary Sweeting and Asa E. Sweeting, 25 Aug. 1919, Dade Co., Fla., Deed Book 223, pp. 374-376, Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla.

⁵⁴Indenture between George and Mary Sweeting and Nellie B. Russell, 25 Aug. 1919, Deed Book 223, pp. 380-382, Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla.

⁵⁵Indenture between George and Mary Sweeting and Lizzie Brooks, 25 Aug. 1919, Deed Book 223, pp. 378-380, Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla.

⁵⁶Indenture between George and Mary Sweeting and William B. Parker and J.B. Parker, 25 Aug. 1919, Deed Book

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families began leaving the Sweeting Homestead during the Great Depression as it became increasingly difficult for them to sustain themselves economically. Mary continued to live on the island until 1930. By this time, all members had moved to the mainland. Some of the men and their families returned for short periods of time in the 1930's and 1940's in an unsuccessful effort to make a living by fishing. In the narration in *Charlotte's Story 1935-1936*, an unfurnished two-story house belonging to the Sweetings was rented out for eight dollars a month.⁵⁷ In 1945, 180 acres were sold or transferred from the heirs of George Sweeting to new owners.^{58, 59}

In 1968, Biscayne National Monument, which [REDACTED] was established. In 1975, Abner W. Sweeting, Jr. sold the last parcel of the Homestead, 1.4 acres, to the National Park Service.⁶⁰ In 1980, Biscayne National Monument became Biscayne National Park. Visitors to the park can go to [REDACTED] boat. The park maintains a campground, picnic area, and a self-guided nature trail on the island. Back country camping is allowed by permit. The entire park is a wildlife sanctuary.

223, pp. 376-378, Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla. (The Parkers were relatives of Mary Sweeting.)

⁵⁷Niedhauk, Charlotte Arpin, *Charlotte's Story, An Undated Florida Key Diary, 1934-1935*, Pompano Beach, Fla., Exposition Press of Fla., Inc., 1973, p. 47.

⁵⁸Indenture between Abner W. and Cornelia B. Sweeting and other heirs of George Sweeting and Wiley M. Sams, et al, 3 Oct. 1945, Deed Book 2618, pp. 85-90, Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla.

⁵⁹Indenture between Abner W. Sweeting, Sr., and Cornelia Sweeting and all heirs of George Sweeting to Basilio and Constance M. Gonzalez, 9 Oct. 1945, Deed Book 2619, pp. 64-68, Dade County Record Center, Miami, Fla.

⁶⁰Deed of Sale from Abner W. Sweeting, Jr., and Alice L. Sweeting to the United States of America, 19 June 1975, Biscayne National Monument Deed No. 273, National Park Service, Land Resources Division, Wash., D.C.

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CONCLUSION

The Sweeting Homestead Site is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Exploration and Settlement because it is one of the few remaining sites that reflect the early settlement of Southeast Florida. Although there are no standing buildings remaining at the Sweeting Homestead, the site retains integrity in its location, setting, materials, and design. The homestead is [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Now part of Biscayne National Park, which is a wildlife sanctuary, the island remains undeveloped and retains its historic setting in its relationship to Biscayne Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, and in its natural surroundings. The location and setting were two major factors that drew settlers [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The natural elements, such as hurricanes shaped the daily lives of the homesteaders, and continue to be a major factor in life on the island.

The Army Corps of Engineers dynamited and bulldozed the buildings and structures when [REDACTED] became part of the National Park System. Rubble remains, however, still tell of the substantial buildings that once were there. The most intact remnants are those of two cisterns; the rubble of three others has been located. The locations of the cisterns and other ruins can be discerned because of the intentionally planted vegetation, such as coconut trees, date palms, seagrape trees, and mother-in-law tongues, that remain at the building sites. The sites themselves reveal the design or layout of the settlement, demonstrating the spatial relationships of one household to another and the outbuildings to the main houses.

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ARCHEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Because the island receives limited protection as part of Biscayne National Park, and because vegetation covers the sites throughout much of the year, the archaeological remains of the Sweeting Homestead have not been disturbed. The sites still reflect the original locations of the buildings and the developed aspects of the homestead. The Sweeting Homestead Site, therefore, is also significant under Criterion D because of its potential to yield information that is not available through available historic documents, such as historic photographs and through oral histories gathered from the Sweetings' descendants.

Investigations may yield information about how the settlers made a barrier island habitable for families, specifically answering questions about site formation and human adaptation to a catastrophic environment. How did the settlers react to hurricanes and how did the storms affect their daily lives? How was farming conducted in such a hostile environment that has only a thin layer of soil over a coral rock foundation? How were houses constructed on the coral rock able to withstand the storms?

Palynological data could provide a better understanding of the development of the plantations and of the individual households. How did they function as a community? The discovery of middens and the privy in particular could yield information about the homesteaders' diet and daily life. How self sufficient were they, and how much did they trade with local or regional sources? Does the material culture show any differences in social status, particularly between the main houses and the workers' housing?

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Sweeting Homestead
Dade County, FL

Reports

"Proposed Islandia National Monument," Florida, April 1964, U.S.
Dept. of Interior, National Park Service, Southeast Region,
East Point, Ga.

Other Sources

Photographs, detail of buildings, and information about life on
the Homestead were provided by family members in letters,
oral interviews, telephone conversations, and diagrams
between Charles Theron Lowe, Carlton Lowe, Roxie Brooks
Newcomber, Katherine Sweeting Roberts, and Peg Niemiec
between 1990 and 1994.

Visits to Homestead property:

February 28, 1990

May 26, 1993

May 6, 1994

March 28, 1995

July 9, 1996

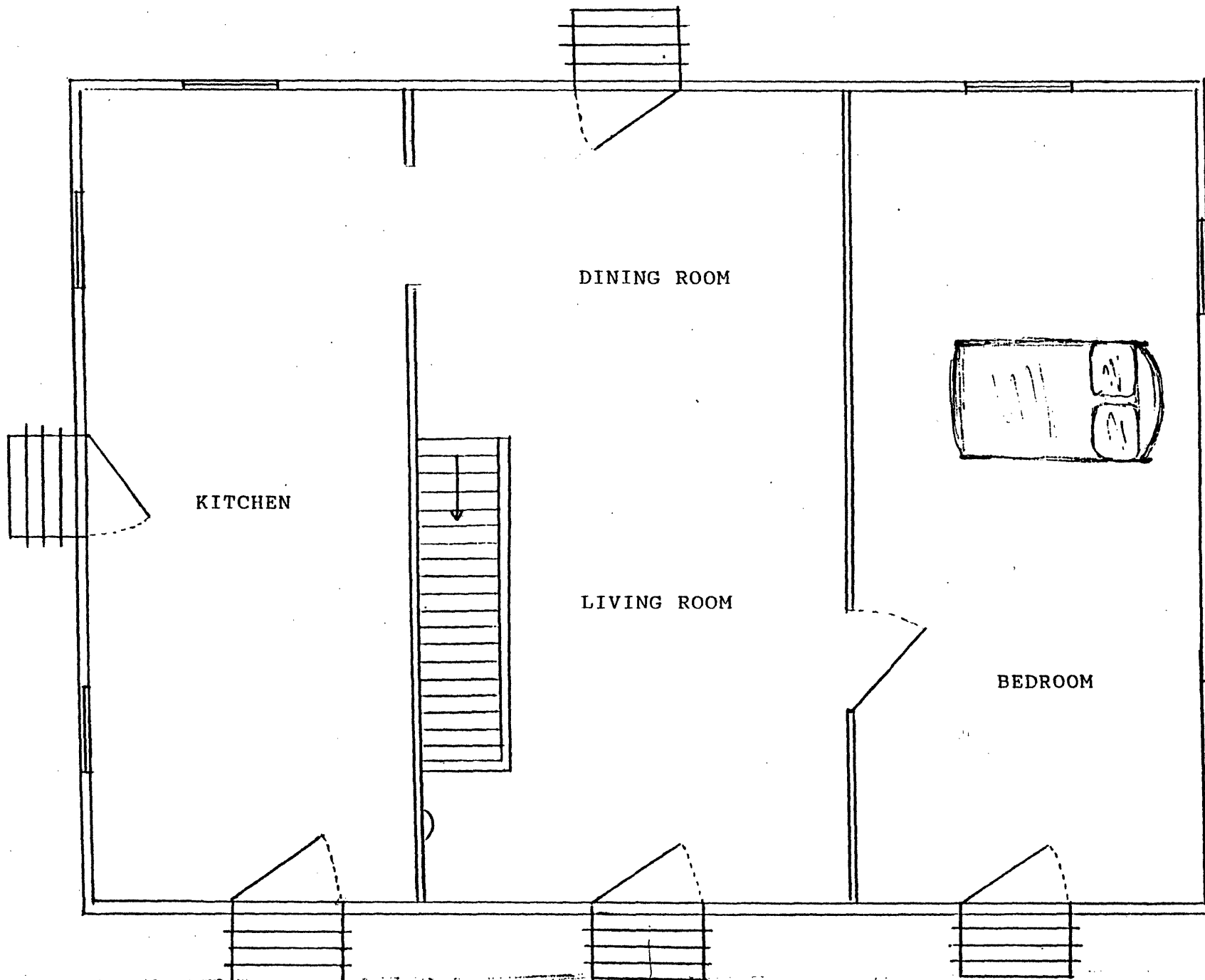


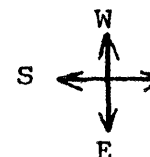
Diagram - 1.

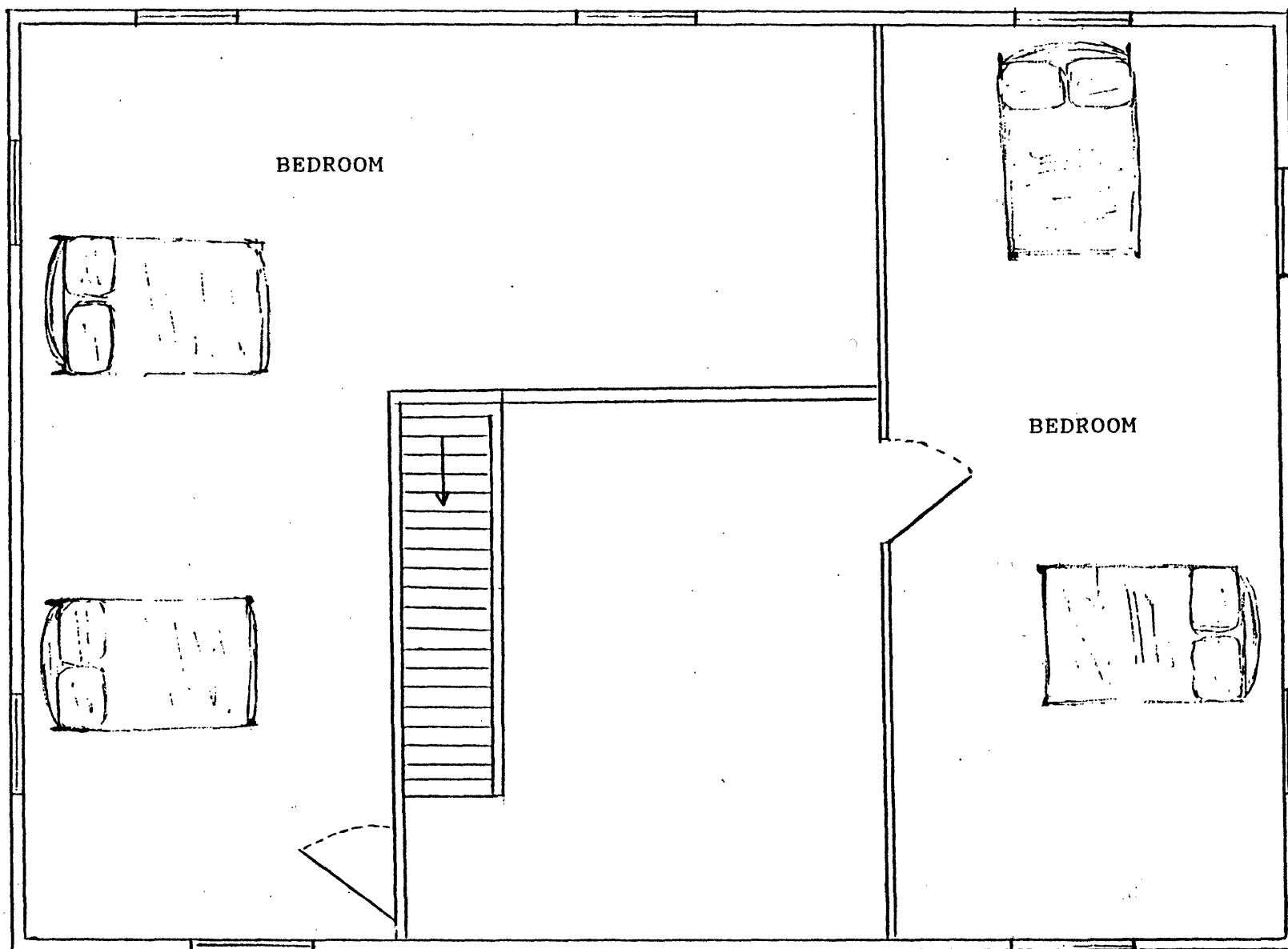
Home of Abner W. Sweeting, Sr., and Cornelia Branch Russell Sweeting

Sketch: First Floor

Not to Scale

Original sketch provided by Katherine Sweeting Roberts,
daughter of Abner and Cornelia.





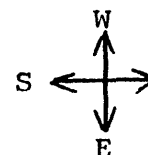
Home of Abner W. Sweeting, Sr., and Cornelia Branch Russell Sweeting

Sketch: Second Floor

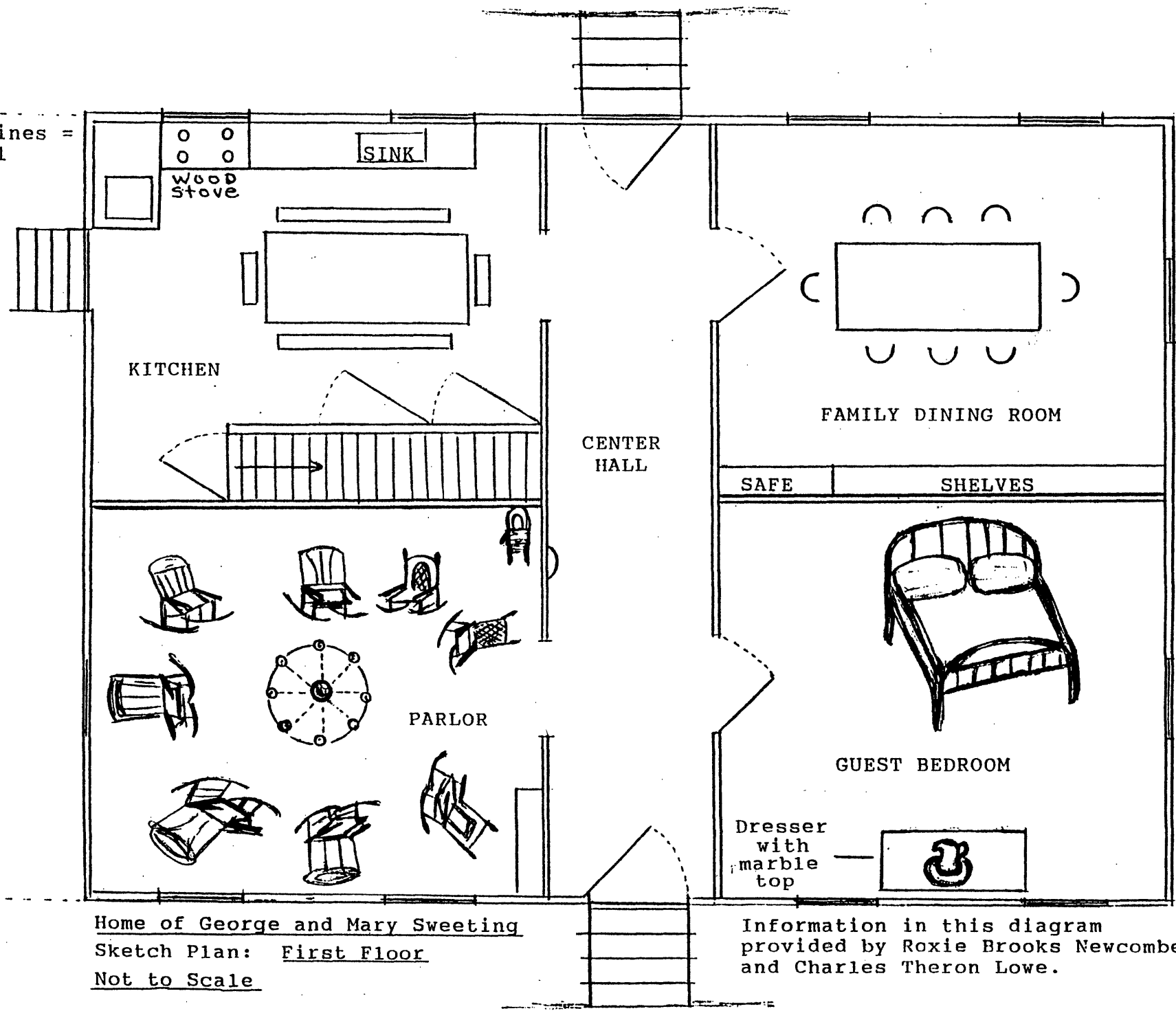
Not to Scale

Original sketch provided by Katherine Sweeting
Roberts, daughter of Abner and Cornelia.

Diagram - 2.



Dotted lines =
original
kitchen



Home of George and Mary Sweeting
Sketch Plan: First Floor
Not to Scale

Information in this diagram
provided by Roxie Brooks Newcomber
and Charles Theron Lowe.

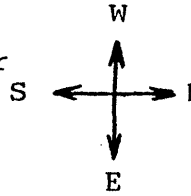
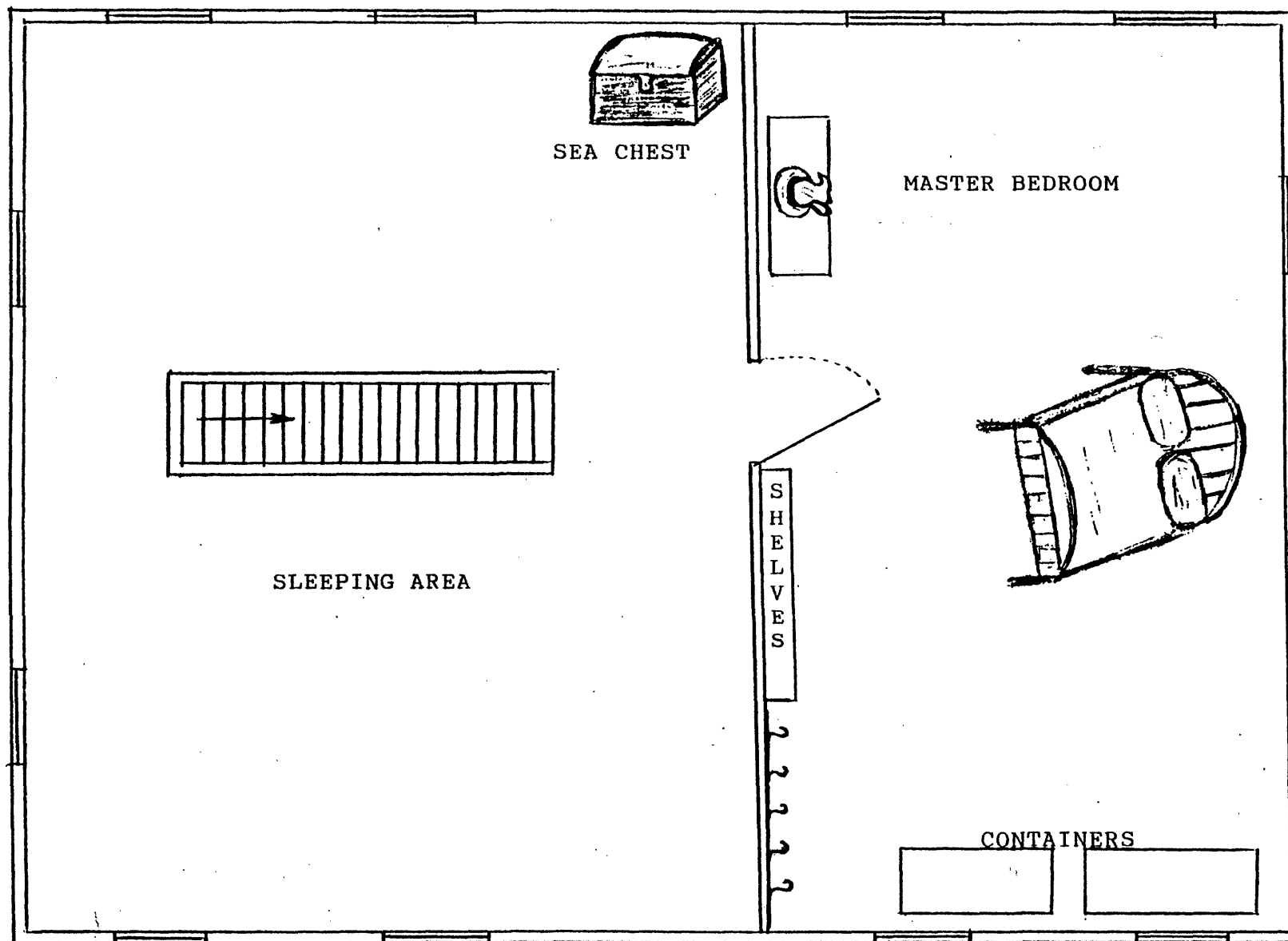


Diagram - 3.



Home of George and Mary Sweeting
 Sketch Plan: Second Floor
 Not to Scale

Information in this diagram provided
 by Roxie Brooks Newcomer and Charles
 Theron Lowe.

Diagram - 4.

