

Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 58, No. 2

SUMMER 2017

Rev. Daniel Waldo Stevens

And the Sailors Free Reading Room



Isaac Chase

And the Early Years
Of Holmes Hole



One Terrifying Night:

Vineyarders Aboard
The Andrea Doria

— Plus —

Book Reviews, and a Letter from Alexander Graham Bell

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VOYAGING

The defining feature of Martha's Vineyard is that it is an island: a world set apart by the waters that surround it. To arrive here is to cross those waters and, in doing so, to cross from one world to another. We acknowledge that reality light-heartedly—with bumper stickers that warn visitors to “Slow Down: You’re Not on the Mainland Anymore” and talk of “going to America” when our destination is a strip mall in Falmouth—but the levity acknowledges a deeper truth: We are a community of voyagers.

Voyages for which the Vineyard was a starting point or a way station figure prominently in the history and mythology of the Island. Those for which the Vineyard was a destination are more elusive, but they are at the center of the Museum’s summer 2017 “Local Immigrants” exhibit, and of the three articles featured in this issue of the *Intelligencer*.

Sarah Shepard’s profile of Unitarian “missionary to seamen” Rev. Daniel Waldo Stevens and Elizabeth Trotter’s chronicle of Quaker blacksmith Isaac Chase tell the stories of two individuals who, 250 years apart, came to the Island as religious outsiders—suspect simply because they were different—and, in time, were not just accepted but embraced by their adopted communities. Anna Barber carries the theme into the twentieth century with a look at Vineyard-connected passengers who were shipwrecked when the Italian liner *Andrea Doria* sank off Nantucket in July 1956. The subjects of her article were, unlike Chase and Stevens, coming home—travelling through familiar waters, bound for a world they already knew. Their story reminds us that every voyage, no matter how seemingly routine, has the potential to change lives.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

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ISSN 0418 1379

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Unitarian Missionary To Seamen

The Rev. Daniel Waldo Stevens and
The Sailors Free Reading Room

by SARAH GOODALE SHEPARD

REV. DANIEL WALDO STEVENS was given the mission to minister to sailors in Holmes Hole by the American Unitarian Association, which continued to support him for the twenty-three years he was here. He came in 1867, and his stay was administered by the Channing Conference of that denomination. He was to make life more pleasant and spiritually meaningful for the crews of the estimated ten thousand ships plying the waters between New York and Boston as they used Holmes Hole harbor in bad weather or when they needed supplies or repairs. He also established Unitarianism on Martha's Vineyard.

Stevens followed in the footsteps of the famous Father Taylor, a Methodist Episcopal missionary who was supported by many Unitarians. The Methodist Episcopal bishop sent Father Taylor to preach for short times in many New England ports. In 1824 he came to Edgartown as the first missionary to the island's seamen. Father Taylor was widely known as a very colorful character with a gift of inspired, revival-style rhetoric, which incorporated many salty phrases. He was born in Richmond, Virginia, had foster parents, was conscripted to go to sea at age 7, and was unschooled until taught to read in his early twenties by a Methodist minister. Having once been to a church service, he felt the call to preach himself and was doing so to fellow sailors when his talent was discerned by another Methodist minister who taught and encouraged him. Three years after his stay in Edgartown, he became the first chaplain of the Boston Seamen's Bethel. He was well remembered by many Vineyarders.

Rev. Stevens himself was not a sailor. He had been born in Marlborough, Massachusetts, graduating from Harvard in 1846 and the Harvard Divinity School in 1848. He ministered to the Unitarian church in Mansfield

Sarah Goodale Shepard of Vineyard Haven is a longtime member, and historian, of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Martha's Vineyard. This is her first contribution to the *Intelligencer*.

and then became the superintendent of schools in Fall River. He seems to have been a man of independent disposition. Charles Banks knew Rev. Stevens and described him as “a man of strong intellect, unconventional in his methods, and full of enthusiasm.”¹ James H. K. Norton wrote that “Rev. Stevens was a Unitarian minister with a strong commitment to helping merchant sailors whose spiritual and emotional needs were largely unattended while they were at sea.”²

He married Caroline Partridge and they had a son, Daniel Waldo Stevens, Jr. Sadly, Caroline died in 1849 at age thirty. She is buried in the family plot in Vine Lake Cemetery in Medfield. He later married Ann Frances Fairbanks, but it is not clear when she came to the mission he was setting up on the Vineyard. When she did come, they lived in Holmes Hole (“the village”) until the Mission was suitable for habitation.

Norton writes that he “bought the Allen house on Hatch Road, in which Jane Chase’s daughter, Sarah Daggett Allen, began inn-keeping in 1745, for its proximity to passing ships. To it he added a free reading room, library and chapel. His ministry in this first Seamen’s Bethel in the harbor reached many.”³ While writing to the Channing District ten years later, Rev. Stevens mentioned his pride in the state of the mission which he described as beginning “with a sand bank and an old, unoccupied house wholly unfit for anybody to live in.”⁴

During the 1860s the estimated ten thousand vessels yearly plying the waters between New York and Boston needed the larger, outer portion of the harbor to maneuver when seeking safe anchorage. Rev. Stevens must have felt the usefulness of having Lord’s Ships Stores a short distance north of the mission, at the end of Grove Avenue, and (at some time) a tavern in what is now the Jewett house, adjacent to Lord’s store. The Allen House became Rev. Stevens’ home, the Seamen’s Reading Room and Chapel. There was a footpath, later eroded by a storm, along the shore from West Chop to Holmes Hole village at the head of the harbor, which was convenient and heavily used by those walking the mile to the village from “down the neck,” the original term for the area now called West Chop.

1 Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha’s Vineyard* (Boston: George H. Dean, 1911), II: Annals of Tisbury, 49.

2 James H. K. Norton, *Walking in Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts* (Edgartown: Martha’s Vineyard Historical Society, 2000), 85.

3 Ibid.

4 Rev. Stevens’ papers, including correspondence with friends and reports to his superiors, are kept in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library in Cambridge. The narrative of Stevens’ life and work in this essay is drawn from these papers, and (unless otherwise noted) all direct quotations are from materials in this collection. The author wishes to thank curator Fran O’Donnell and curator of periodicals Gloria Korsman for facilitating access to them.

Rev. Stevens had a wharf built where sailors, rowing in to visit the Reading Room or to attend services at the Chapel, could tie up. He was very proud of a well which was arranged to pipe water along the wharf, enabling sailors to row in and to fill casks from their ship. Rev. Stevens later wrote that this water was free and, due to the piping, the casks could be refilled without lifting them in and out of the dories—a benefit not offered by the Lord’s Ships Stores which also “charged ten cents a cask.”⁵ That attention to detail, and concern for the material as well as the spiritual needs of visiting seamen, defined the refuge that Rev. Stevens created on the shores of Holmes Hole Harbor.

Uncertain Beginnings

When Rev. Stevens arrived, Holmes Hole was a village in the Town of Tisbury centered around shipping and merchants. The name was changed in 1871 to Vineyard Haven. Tisbury and West Tisbury were not yet separated, and the center of Tisbury was in the western farming portion of the town. In the early years, there was no church central to the village as Holmes Hole residents were diverse. Charles Banks, in his *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, wrote of the earliest few settlers that one was a Quaker, one a Sabbatarian Baptist, one a Congregationalist and one an Antipedobaptist.⁶ In the early years, services were held in homes. As was the custom in colonial-era Massachusetts towns, churches were supported by taxes, but this was resented and came to a head in 1780 when Holmes Hole residents protested strongly as they were supporting an up-island church they did not attend. They were released from paying these taxes two years later. A Baptist Society was formed in 1780, but there were still Congregationalists in the village, so it was decided to build a Proprietors’ Meeting House to serve both. It was located on the northwest corner of Main and Spring Streets and paid for by contributions from members. Soon there were also Methodists in the village, who also shared the space.

After several years, the Proprietors’ Meeting House was deemed beyond repair and taken down. The Baptists used the meeting house lot to build their first church, while the Methodists built a new structure on Church Street: the building that now houses the Vineyard Playhouse. The Congregational Church, built in 1844, was then a one-story building. It later became the First Universalist Society of Holmes Hole, then the Church of the Unity and, still later, when owned by Capt. Gilbert Smith, Association Hall. Now elevated, with another story built underneath, it is the two-story Tisbury Town Hall.

5 A US Coast and Geodetic Survey chart of Vineyard Haven Harbor in the Museum’s map collection [2017.001.362] includes a notation next to the pier: “Fresh water – free.”

6 Banks, *History*, II: Annals of Tisbury, 31-32.

Seven years before Rev. Stevens came to the Island, Brother Bruce of Sippican, (Mattapoisett) supported by the American Universalist Society, established a Universalist movement in Holmes Hole. In 1860 they met over Peleg Barrows' store and voted to become a congregation, the First Universalist Society of Holmes Hole. They arranged to use the abandoned Congregational Church on Spring Street, and eventually bought it. After a few years, Brother Bruce went away to establish another church on the mainland. The Universalists arranged to send a minister for Sunday services in Holmes Hole but this was often difficult and the Universalists were frequently disappointed to have no minister on Sundays.

The Universalist and Unitarian denominations were similar in theology, both unaccepting of the concept of the Trinity, believing in God but not the Holy Spirit, and revering Jesus as a beloved teacher, but not of virgin birth. Their roots can be traced back to the early church that existed before the Council of Nicaea in 325, when the Nicene Creed was adopted. Questioning the concept of the Trinity began during the Reformation. Universalists became established as an American denomination in the late 1770s and the early 1780s, as a network of mostly rural congregations with less central administration. Tufts University was established to educate their ministers, and Rev. Hosea Ballou was named its first president. The American Unitarian Association, formed in 1825, was more prominent in urban areas; its administration was centered in Boston and its ministers were educated at Harvard. Neither denomination believed in predestination and the old joke of Universalist minister Rev. Thomas Starr King was that the Universalist God was too good to damn anyone and the Unitarians felt themselves too good to be damned.

Hearing of the Universalists' difficulty in finding ministers for their Sunday services in Holmes Hole, a representative of the American Unitarian Association accompanied Rev. Stevens to call upon the Universalist congregation in 1867, proposing that Stevens preach Sunday services on a contract basis. This offer was accepted, so Rev. Stevens took on this responsibility in addition to the duties of his mission.

The Universalists then renamed their congregation the Church of the Unity, thus preceding the national merger of the two denominations (1960) by almost one hundred years. This arrangement called for \$1,000 per year in salary for Rev. Stevens, half to be paid by the American Unitarian Association and half by the Universalists. His duties were to provide fifty Sunday services each year in return. Soon there was difficulty in finding the agreed upon \$500, so the church subscription committee called upon Rev. Stevens, who accepted a lesser amount in exchange for fewer Sundays. The congregation never came up with the agreed-upon sum and finally this arrangement came to an impasse with one member of the congrega-

tion protesting that Rev. Stevens was neglecting the Church of the Unity while “attending to worldly matters” and, at the same time, Rev. Stevens writing in his reports to the Channing Conference that the agreed-upon sum had never been sufficiently paid. There was an acrimonious Church of the Unity meeting during which the majority of members, who supported Rev. Stevens, disagreed with the protestor’s position and one member, who had been entrusted with a letter of resignation by Rev. Stevens, read the gracious letter, which was accepted. The Church of the Unity continued, eventually fading away in 1880.

Meanwhile Rev. Stevens set up his Mission to Seamen, calling it the Seamen’s Reading Room, Li-

brary and Chapel. He had added a wing to accommodate them. It was soon established that he would send quarterly reports to the Channing Conference of the American Unitarian Association, which was administering his activities. His report to the Committee of the American Unitarian Association on the New England states in April 1869, after he had been in Holmes Hole one year, stated that he was the “first distinctively Unitarian minister ever settled on Martha’s Vineyard,” although the Congregationalist minister Rev. Joseph Thaxter, who served Edgartown until 1825, “was in reality a Unitarian.” Rev. Stevens preached two sermons each Sunday, taught a Bible class, and performed “the usual duties of a clergyman.” It went on to note that “for the benefit of the Sunday School, there was a very successful pic-nic, last summer, notwithstanding our school was not invited to attend what was called an ‘evangelical union pic-nic’ comprising all the Sunday Schools on the island, except the Unitarian.” The Unitarian Sunday School Society sent 160 volumes of used, bound books which he added to the Sunday school library.

Rev. Stevens wrote, for his first sermon at the mission, a circular containing some of the leading religious opinions of Unitarians, and had a thousand copies made for distribution. He had given a lecture in a public hall on Unitarianism which was well attended. There had been difficulty, he lamented, in reaching the ships in the harbor to invite the seamen to



Rev. Daniel Waldo Stevens, founder of the Sailors Free Reading Room.

attend the Church of the Unity services. However, he had now received an “unsolicited and unexpected” gift from the Sunday School he attended twenty-five years ago in Marlborough, which enabled him to “purchase a boat to visit the ships to invite them to services, deliver Bibles, tracts and other and other publications useful to seamen.” This small boat also helped in the rescue of a drowning boy. He explained that seamen felt unwelcome in many churches, spending Sundays aboard their vessels. He felt this to be a much-missed opportunity and quoted figures by a Boston Associated Press reporter who estimated that *“fifty-four thousand”* individuals could possibly attend during the year. Rev. Stevens explained to the Channing Conference that sailors have no response to piety, but responded to practical Christianity “with a warmth of devotion.”

An 1875 flier Rev. Stevens distributed to ships in the harbor reflected the approach he took from the start. Under headlines that declared “Welcome to Seamen” and announced the existence of the “Reading Room, Library, and Chapel, on Union Bluff, Vineyard Haven,” it continued:

All seamen, of whatever nation, and the public are earnestly invited to visit the above named institution, and to attend public worship there Sunday forenoons and Thursday evenings. Free seats. Free Gospel. No contribution-boxes. Bell rings half an hour before the service. No respect to persons on account of dress, color, or religious opinions. “The word of God is not bound” to any sect, party or nation. In front of the premises there is a wharf affording about seven feet of water for landing; also at the head of the same there is a well of fresh water and all means for filling casks in boats. The Reading-room is supplied regularly with twenty-five different newspapers, including dailies, semi-weeklies and weeklies, giving the marine news for the Atlantic coast, besides representing the religious views of several Christian sects. Adjoining the Reading-room arrangements have been made for a Museum. All sailors and others are earnestly invited to aid in securing for it marine shells, minerals, fossil remains and curiosities from all parts of the world. Indian relics and all things related to the early history of Martha’s Vineyard are especially desirable. The Library contains over eleven hundred bound books, including some of the latest publications, with pamphlets, charts and other documents useful to seamen. All the conveniences for writing letters, including stationary, etc, at hand, and a U. S. Mail-box is confined at the gate from which letters are carried daily to the post-office. All seamen, yacht clubs, and the public are cordially invited to make use of all the privileges mentioned above, free of charge. U. S. Coast Survey Charts and Tide Tables, direct from Washington, for sale at Government prices. Citizens and visitors to the Vineyard are invited to take books from the Library for two weeks at a time, without compensation. A drive has been opened from the Reading-room to the main road, leading to the village and the lighthouse.⁷

7 Thanks to Marian Halperin for showing me the flier.

Rev. Stevens began by recognizing the intelligence, good education and practical experience of the sailors and had given thought to how best to serve them.

Establishing a Sailors Free Reading Room and Library in the deserted and dilapidated home he had purchased required funds, which the American Unitarian Association was unable to provide, so he appealed to private individuals who responded generously and often anonymously. With these funds and the help of sailors, a sixty-foot flag pole was erected in front of the Mission on the July 4, 1868. A United States flag was hoisted and, from then on, the Mission was open to the public. Boston newspapers were provided and the Sailors Free Reading Room was opened. On August 25 the building was dedicated, with the donors and the Secretary of the American Unitarian Association in attendance as well as the Rev. Dr. William Channing Gannet, former American Unitarian Association President, to whom he expressed gratitude for much valuable help.

Rev. Stevens was not yet living in the house, which still required much renovation. He walked to the mission from the village to open and close it. The Reading Room was enhanced by Professor Benjamin Pierce of Harvard University who donated charts of the Coast Survey. A "Commodore Blake" provided lists of beacons, buoys, light-houses, floating lights, etc. on the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts of the United States. A standard mercury barometer was added and, later, a telescope. The U. S. Weather Service sent daily reports which were posted under glass outside the Mission door. The library had about two hundred fifty bound books and several hundred pamphlets, along with twenty-five newspapers that gave all the marine news from St. John, New Brunswick to Baltimore, Maryland. Periodicals representing the religious views of eight Christian sects and several general monthly magazines were also available. All that was needed for the sailors to write letters, (paper, ink, a box from which letters were taken to the village post office twice a day), was in place.

A wharf, which extended 117 feet from the shoreline in front of the Mission, was completed in the first year, and a grant from the legislature to extend it another hundred feet was obtained. It would have a red light on dark evenings. This might cost as much as one thousand dollars. Further improvements were planned with donations by "liberal Christians," for which Rev. Stevens was personally responsible. "Should I attempt to express my gratitude for the early and timely aid of the Channing Conference, my language would appear extravagant." According to an article in the March 1873 issue of *Word and Work*, a Unitarian periodical, "a rich, deep-toned bell, the gift of a lady in Providence, announces all special services" at the Reading Room.

Rev. Stevens reported he had, aside from his duties at the Mission and at the Church of the Unity, attended educational meetings and taken part in

the meeting of the Dukes County Educational Association, delivering the address. He had “recently closed a course of seven lectures on literary and scientific subjects, in a public hall in the village.” All this activity kept Rev. Stevens continually busy, and he bemoaned having no help that would have allowed him to “go hunting, fishing, or even to dig for the petrified bones of extinct monsters on Gay Head.” He ended this first extensive report by issuing a cordial invitation to members of the American Unitarian Association to “come and see.”

In 1870 he wrote to Brother Lowe, Secretary of the American Unitarian Association: “I am alone as I had to remove my faithful wife (Ann Frances Fairbanks Stevens) from the Vineyard on account of her rapidly failing health,” A change of air was prescribed and she went to her father’s home in Mansfield. However, she must have returned, as in March of 1871, he explained to Lowe that he was unable to attend the Boston meeting “as my wife is dangerously ill and the doctor advised me not to go,” On May 12, his wife was “expected to die in a few days” and his daughter was also sick. There was a heartbreaking series of events. On May 18, he took his wife’s body to the ferry, from which she would be conveyed to Mansfield where her funeral was to be held that same day. The son of his first marriage, Mr. Daniel Waldo Stevens, accompanied his stepmother’s body, while Rev. Stevens remained on the island to care for their daughter, Caroline. The child died the same day and he made plans to take her to Medfield the next. Ann Frances was 39 when she died, and Caroline 3 1/2. The epitaph on their shared tombstone in Medfield’s Vine Lake Cemetery reads: “They made home happy. Their departure left sorrow, but sorrow shall be turned to joy.” He never remarried.

In his report of November 22, 1871, Rev. Stevens wrote: “Our mission work here is prospering beyond my expectations. Last Sunday evening the chapel was crowded full. Extra seats were brought in. Then many had to stand at the open door and I was told today that four boat-loads left for want of room. At this time a great many boats were in the harbor.” At the time, tracts were often distributed by those espousing different causes and the number of these given out were widely quoted by the distributors. Many were “tucked under doors or scattered in public places,” a practice that always annoyed Rev. Stevens. “That a great many tracts are wasted nobody but a fool will deny. That a great many ought to be wasted is equally evident.” However, he asked for 1,500 copies of “Why I Am a Unitarian,” a sermon by Dr. William Channing Gannet, then recently deceased. The printing cost was paid by Miss Mary C. Bryant, a member of Dr. Gannet’s congregation.

The next report included information about the beginnings of other activities and tasks taken on by Rev. Stevens. The sloop-of-war *Marion* visited and he entertained the officers after the Sunday service. He was invited to be a guest on the steamer *Hassler*, where he was given a donation of \$5

for the mission and agreed to send turtles from the Island to Cambridge at the request of the renowned Harvard biologist, Professor Louis Agassiz.

He did all his own work (except, perhaps, cooking). He prepared for the services, lit his own fire, hoisted the flag, and rang his own bell thirty minutes before the beginning of services. Another time he reported doing three services a week (two at the Mission and one at the Church of the Unity), he “dug out” the Reading Room, tended nine lamps twice a week, moved settees for services, manned the gate for those arriving with horses and carriages, opened the library to townspeople who wanted to borrow from his collection of 600 books, fired cannon salutes in the summer when steamers passed laden with summer tourists, and entertained visitors, “some college educated and some sailors clothes in filth and rags.” In another report, he mentioned mopping his own floors “as sailors tend to spit.” In the fall of 1872, because a fair wind came up unexpectedly and led to the sudden departure of a ship anchored in the harbor, he entertained the Captain’s maid from 3 AM until 8 AM, when she could board a ferry and begin her return home. He did not, however, play the Chapel’s organ, recruiting musically inclined citizens of Holmes Hole instead. Writing of one such lady, he stated: “She was necessary as I don’t know one tune from another.” The trip to the village was one mile down and one back, and Rev. Stevens reported sometimes going three times a day to the Post Office, the Church of the Unity and the Marine Hospital.

His expenses were diverse. They included printing of invitational fliers advertising the mission to sailors; an organ stool; subscriptions to newspapers, periodicals and books for the library (from all major denominations as the library aimed to be ecumenical), sheet music, coal, half a cord of wood, a stove pipe, a flag, stationery (free to sailors using the Reading Room), a ladder, and a weather vane. He mentioned the need to have an especially heavy coat and long boots for rowing out to the ships in foul weather. The American Unitarian Association presented him with a “carryall and harness” in 1872, but a suitable horse had to be found. As he walked to the village to take and receive mail and attend to the Church of the Unity, he lamented that he had no horse but, if he had one, he would then have to take care of it.

Not all expenses, however, were so mundane. In the winter of 1873 Rev. Stevens acquired Sciopticon slides for evening shows.⁸ John Forbes of Naushon contributed \$50 to this effort as the slides cost \$2.75 each and the whole project would cost \$300. Local residents, including Dr. Daniel Fisher of Edgartown, and Boston friends contributed another \$230, and the remaining \$20 was obtained by means “which should not be included in a

8 A Sciopticon was a type of magic lantern: a device for projecting images painted or printed on glass slides. It was widely used, in the late nineteenth century, for both entertainment and education.

public report.” By April he reported he had given ten free lectures illustrated by the Sciopticon. Attendance increased and at a lecture on temperance people had to be turned away. On another occasion, however, he was careful to note that he only lectured on temperance “when invited to do so.”

Inevitably, there were moments of tension. Neighbors—not members of the Church of the Unity, but some Baptists, Methodists and YMCA members—opposed his work in the beginning and provided aggravations such as little boys making noise under the window of the Chapel during services. The Methodist minister of Holmes Hole stated that “he would rather go to a dance hall than attend a Unitarian service,” but his successors, Rev. Stevens noted, had “more spirit of Christianity.” Soon the opposition diminished and it was not long until we read of a Christmas tree being provided for the sailors, a Christmas present given Rev. Stevens, and the Church of the Unity having a Christmas tree at Capawock Hall in the village.⁹

There was a “fearful disease near the Reading Room and Chapel” in 1872, attributed to chicken pox with scarlet fever by the physicians, but Rev. Stevens privately believed it was smallpox. Quarantine was established, a red flag placed on the homes of the sick. Two in the neighborhood were ill, one died, and Rev. Stevens was asked not to have services in the Chapel. He did, however, keep the Reading Room open. The quarantine remained for three weeks. When it was done, with no further deaths in the neighborhood, the Church of the Unity was invited to attend service one Sunday at the Chapel.

Thanks to Rev. Stevens’ unceasing efforts, the Mission flourished. The persons who had provided the slides also provided more books for the library, “seventy volumes were lent to young persons last week” and a librarian volunteered her time. Rev. Stevens noted the dissolution of his ministry to the Church of the Unity freed him for other endeavors, and that he was not sorry, as more people were attending the Chapel than the Meetinghouse. He became the Marine Hospital chaplain, provided twice a day weather measurements to the Smithsonian via telegraph, traveled to Edgartown to visit a sick soldier at the request of the boy’s mother, and gave some talks about the Mission to off-island Sunday schools. He published accounts of his work, making the Mission more widely known. Letters of gratitude were received and, when Rev. Stevens wrote his quarterly reports, he copied them verbatim. Some were verbose from those more educated, and some were expressions of heartfelt gratitude from simple sailors.

Despite this popularity, the unique challenges of living on an island periodically intruded. Rev. Stevens noted “household expenses here are

9 Capawock Hall was the old Methodist meeting-house, built in 1833 at the southeast corner of Church and William Streets, converted into a public hall when a new church was erected (on the site of the present one) in 1845 (Norton, *Walking*, 146).

more than in the City of Boston and taxes are increasing.” He went off-island to a Conference but the return boat did not run. “My detention reminds me very strongly of the many inconveniences of living on an island,” he reported, but “all kinds of missionary work cannot be done in a well-furnished parlor.” The winter of 1875, which brought a frozen harbor and diminished attendance, was a case in point. Rev. Stevens rowed two miles looking for a ship, as requested by telegraph, but found, two days later, that it had been ice-bound elsewhere.

Money for repairs and improvements to the Mission, as well as day-to-day expenses, was a constant concern. Because of shifting sands, the conduit taking water to the boats had to be extended in the summer of 1873, and the Reading Room and racks for the periodicals needed to be painted. Two years later, the hard winter did much ice damage to the wharf, which was now 417 feet long. Donations were generous, however, and Rev. Stevens scrupulously documented them. The Misses Wigglesworth, friends of the late Dr. Gannet, sent \$100, and the AUA and the Channing Conference donated as well, along with two local residents: Capt. Gilbert Smith and Alex Smith.

Other donors offered to expand the Mission’s facilities. Miss Ann D. Williams, “without solicitation” (Rev. Stevens often stated that no solicitations are made though many donations were gratefully received), offered to pay for a room to be attached to the chapel and “fitted up” as a museum for the shells and curiosities that seamen had donated to the Mission. Mrs. Sarah Gray and Miss May Bryant donated a larger organ. Reports from the late 1870s now mentioned a horse that, by pulling the previously donated carriage, allowed him to “go to the post office and fetch the organist in bad weather.” The Reading Room’s library expanded to 1,200 volumes, along with and twenty-five different newspapers and several magazines, including the illustrated titles particularly popular with sailors. Not all proffered help was as welcome, however. In the 1880s, Rev. Stevens turned down the donation of a billiard table and a proposal to put a ship’s store at the end of the dock, on the grounds that “these do not lead directly to the uprightness of character and purity of heart.”

Pillar of the Community

Holmes Hole, and the Island, changed greatly during the twenty-three years Rev. Stevens was in his post. Sailing ships were gradually replaced by steamships which had less need to wait in harbor for changes of wind and tide. Railroad lines along the coast were handling more of the cargo that had once been shipped by sea. Whale populations were becoming depleted at about the time oil was found in Pennsylvania, sending the whaling industry into decline. The growth of New England manufacturing brought

new prosperity, however, and with it waves of travellers with money to spend, seeking vacation sites.

Methodist camp meetings, begun on West Chop in the 1830s, moved to Cottage City (now Oak Bluffs) a decade later. The Campground grew steadily, and attracted crowds of visitors every summer. In 1871, the extension of Beach Road and the construction of a bridge across the opening to Lagoon Pond reduced the trip from Holmes Hole to Cottage City from eight miles to only three, encouraging attendance. Cottage City offered secular attractions, as well as religious ones, making it—particularly in August, during the camp meeting—an irresistible attraction.¹⁰ Other churches in Vineyard Haven closed for the month, but Rev. Stevens kept the Chapel open and offered Sunday services to the sailors and the townspeople. The only exception was “Big Sunday,” the climax of the camp meeting season when, according to an 1875 issue of the *Seaside Gazette*, 7,730 visitors attended the service in the Campground.

Local attitudes toward Rev. Stevens and his ministry were also gradually changing. His report of April 1877 stated: “If one extreme follows another, your missionary will eventually be on the trough of the sea, so far as popularity is concerned in town, for at present he is on the crest of the wave—a dangerous place.” In the beginning he had been excluded from other pulpits and ignored on other occasions on account of his theology—but this was no longer true. He preached at the Campground twice and once lectured on temperance. He was invited again, but declined as he did not want to be open to the criticism that he might be trying to supplant the Methodists by preaching too much liberal religion, and thus cause a backlash. The local Methodist minister invited him to exchange pulpits one Sunday which, a few years ago, would have “created a fierce sectarian howl.”

Thanks to Rev. Stevens’ connections with Dr. Brown of the Methodists, the Cape Cod Conference of Unitarians held its 1880 meeting at the Tabernacle in Cottage City.¹¹ Several Unitarians from Vineyard Haven attended, and Rev. Stevens himself gave the welcoming address. When an expected speaker backed out he was also invited to give, without preparation, an account of the mission to seamen, which was much praised by those present.

Rev. Stevens’ growing acceptance extended to secular as well as religious matters. Once he had been denied a position on the School Committee, but within a few years, he could write in one of his reports that he had control of all the public schools in the neighborhood of the Mission. In 1878 he

10 On the growth of Oak Bluffs, see Henry Beetle Hough, *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort, 1835-1935* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1936).

11 The Tabernacle was only a year old that summer, a brand-new wonder of the modern age; this extraordinary ecumenical gesture suggests the esteem in which Rev. Stevens was held.



The Mission as it appeared in the 1880s, seen from Hatch Road with the harbor beyond. The two-story main house, much enlarged, is now a private residence at the corner of Main Street and Locust Lane.

received “the largest number of votes ever cast for a Tisbury school committee member, with three cheers following the vote.” Eventually, he became chairman of the Vineyard Haven School Committee, a position from which he stepped down to become President of the Dukes County Educational Association. At the town meeting, he was “by unanimous vote” chosen to be the moderator. He was asked to run for selectman, but declined.

Education remained one of his staunchest commitments. In the spring of 1876, the Dukes County Educational Association had its meeting in the Chapel, which lasted three days and hosted “distinguished educators from off-island,” stating that “all such things add to the character and influence of the Mission which at present is respected by our citizens.” Rev. Stevens noted that it was the Massachusetts Statute in which “it is made the bounden duty of every minister of the Gospel in the state, whether on the school committee or not, to exert his influence and use his best endeavors that the youth of the town shall regularly attend school.” In the fall of 1878, he arranged for carriages donated by the local stable to carry all the students to the Mission, parading them through the town, and entertained once they arrived with a sing in the chapel, supper, a Sciopticon show and a carriage ride home. He became the agent for the Shaw Asylum for Mariners’ Children, a charity founded to help the children of a destitute seafaring families. He took these duties very seriously and often made it possible for children of deceased sailors to attend school by buying them shoes. In one reported instance, he arranged for the Shaw Asylum to send \$25 per quarter to assist the family of a sailor who drowned off Gay Head. By 1883 he was distributing \$800 annually in sums of \$5 to \$25, explaining to each recipient that Robert Shaw was a “good Unitarian.” In 1889 Rev. Stevens received a letter from a grate-

ful beneficiary of the program. His father had died in the Marine Hospital, the writer explained, and Rev. Stevens had used Shaw Asylum funds to send him to school. He had become a bank teller in West Newton. Rev. Stevens was not paid for being the Shaw Asylum agent nor for the Marine Hospital chaplaincy.¹² Such letters, however, may have been payment enough.

The village's steadily improving opinion of Rev. Stevens extended beyond the schools. Looking back in a report after eleven years in his post, he noted many signs of good will: invitations to do weddings, funerals, attend public gatherings and private entertainments. He remained chaplain of the Marine Hospital, and became president of the recently formed Vineyard Haven Literary Association, which met in Association Hall. Of the thirteen evening lectures given at the Mission in the spring of 1876, four were by Rev. Stevens, two by the Methodist minister, and the rest by guest speakers—some from off-island and all willing to speak even though they were compensated only for their expenses. The lectures, free and well-attended, were a further sign of the community's growing appreciation for Rev. Stevens, as was an 1883 decision by the young men of the newly formed Vineyard Haven Brass Band to march nearly a mile to play their first serenade to him at the Mission.

Many of visitors to the Mission wrote articles about it, and it became a place to visit for those who came to the Vineyard. An 1889 visitor to East Chop, for example, wrote of seeing the Mission across the harbor with a spyglass, and in a description of a later visit described the surprise of seeing, "on the veranda, a huge piece of whale vertebrae. The visitor was honored by Rev. Stevens producing, from his study, a rare "Breeches Bible" and a copy of John Eliot's Algonquin-language edition of Thomas Shepard's catechism *The Sincere Convert*."¹³ The visitor related that Rev. Stevens was "an enthusiastic antiquary, especially in the Indian history of the island, and showed us many relics which had had secured, giving us a lecture on each with a gleam in his eye and eloquence on his tongue showing us how completely he was absorbed in his fascinating study."

12 The Marine Hospital which Rev. Stevens served was the one established in 1879 in the old Holmes Hole Lighthouse building at the head of the harbor. It was added to the rear of the new hospital building erected on the site in 1895, and used as residential space for the staff for more than forty years before being torn down in the late 1930s.

13 The so-called "Breeches Bible" was a variation of the mechanically printed Geneva Bible, issued in 1599 and thus predating the King James Bible by twelve years. The name comes from its version of Genesis 3:7, which reads: "Then the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened and they beheld that they were naked and they sewed figge tree leaves together and made themselves breeches." The King James Bible used "aprons" to describe the makeshift clothes, rendering the "Breeches Bible" a curiosity.



The interior of the Mission, where Rev. Stevens offered “free gospel” to seamen of all denominations.

The Channing Conference asked, in 1879, for accurate facts about the mission activities, so Rev. Stevens sent careful records: 419 sailors visited the Mission during the last month; 50 to 60 sailors from the harbor attended the two services on Sundays; and 522 barrels of free water were given to boats. The next summer, someone he had hired to keep count reported that 6,740 barrels of water had been supplied to 200 vessels, and 248 sailors used the reading room. He also reported that the library was the largest in the county, the only free one, and that it was used by the youth in the town, who walked a mile to get their books. Rev. Stevens had, by this time, widened his goal. The Mission was not now only for sailors, but to “scatter Unitarian views all over the world” by presenting them to the increasing number of visitors coming to see the mission as part of their summer pleasures.

Grace Church was built, early in 1883, on the edge of the village, and Rev. Stevens was concerned that it might diminish the number of people coming to services at the Mission during the summer. His worries, however, soon proved groundless. More people were visiting the Vineyard in summer than ever, and many—Unitarians and others—stopped by the Mission out of curiosity and respect. Visitors came from Honolulu, India and Texas. “One guest,” Rev. Stevens noted, “was a former Vice President of the U.S.” Some guests stayed two or more hours and all found him a gracious host. In September of 1885 he reported the reception of 270 sum-

mer visitors plus sailors during the summer. He offered both categories a tract: "Why I Am A Unitarian."

The Literary Association, of which Rev. Stevens continued as President, aimed to promote education, literature and science on the Vineyard, and the Mission's growing fame also helped to serve that goal. The library increased in size with contributions from the Smithsonian, the Commissioner of Education, the U. S. Coast Survey, the Hydrographic Office in Washington and the State House in Boston. Lectures were given during the past winter by leading state intellectuals. Later library contributions were made by Rev. James Clark of Boston, Unitarians in Worcester, and the Union of Christian Work in Providence. Sen. George Hoar, a Harvard classmate of Rev. Stevens, donated twenty books for the library collection.

In 1883, Rev. Stevens wrote a private, year-end letter to Brother Reynolds of the American Unitarian Association, a man he considered a good friend. He was feeling tired and dispirited and had a bad cough. He had had an uncharacteristic spat with G. W. Eldridge, who had written to the American Unitarian Association to complain about Rev. Stevens. If so, this letter is not in the archives. Mr. Eldridge published local tide charts, which were sold in the Lord's Ships Stores. Rev. Stevens' Mission sold, at cost, charts put out by the U. S. Government. Somehow the argument had to do with these sales, horse trading, and the refusal of a requested loan. He stated that, during the time he had been in his Mission post, the Baptists and Methodists had been served by seventeen different ministers. He lamented the need to pay for his own heat, horse, rooms and organist, and noted that he had received more benefits while Superintendent of Schools in Fall River. His friend evidently offered him comfort, for a subsequent letter to "My dear Reynolds" thanked him for a "very restful" reply.

Three years later, in a year-end report to the Channing District, Rev. Stevens looked back over his time on the island and offered a list of "conditions of Missionary work." He cautioned that "too many parlor enjoyments" are not to be expected during the first three years of the Mission, and advised those who would follow in his footsteps "to say 'here' every time duty calls." Other lessons reflected his experiences on the Island, such as an admonition to "rely more on the influence of your work rather than the magnitude of your building" and a reminder that "preaching and praying may be over-rated, sometimes a bag of flour is more appreciated and remembered." Above all, he concluded, "be as Christ commanded, 'As wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove.'"

The boom in secular tourism that had begun in Cottage City after the Civil War was, by the late 1880s, expanding to other Island towns. In 1887 Rev. Stevens wrote that a Boston company had introduced a water works and bought 600 acres of land at West Chop for housing lots. That Decem-

ber there was a dinner for distinguished guests, the Lieutenant Governor and other Bostonians, “some Unitarian,” in celebration of the Water Works and Rev. Stevens was invited to make the address at the dinner. Homes were built and a wharf where ferries from the mainland could dock, a convenience for visitors to the new summer colony and citizens of Vineyard Haven alike. There was also a “first class” hotel and cottages—the beginnings of today’s West Chop Club.¹⁴ “It looks like they intend to have a watering place of the first order,” Rev. Stevens wrote, adding (with a missionary’s eye): “Some of the Company are Unitarians.”

Two years later the Sons of Martha’s Vineyard—Islanders, mainly from Boston, who had gone to the mainland to seek their fortunes—held a reception at Edgartown on July 4, at which guests were expected from all five towns. There was a tent for one thousand on Starbuck’s Neck where Edgartown ladies provided lunch for off-island guests. Tables were available for those on-island. After the lunch, there was “baseball, a catboat race, etc. before fireworks,” Rev. Stevens gave the welcoming address. Two years later, in 1891, the Harbor View Hotel would open near the site of the reunion, beginning Edgartown’s own rise as a summer resort.¹⁵

Death and Legacy

Tired and feeling old after twenty years in his post, Rev. Stevens wrote to the Channing District in 1886 that he hoped to “hold the fort” for a few more years before being replaced by a younger man. He resigned as town treasurer, chairman of the Vineyard Haven school committee where he had served six years, and president of the Dukes County Educational Association. Even as he slowed down, however, he was planning for the future. In October 1890, he wrote the American Unitarian Association: “The time is not far distant when our denomination should have more than a mission to seamen on Martha’s Vineyard, particularly in Vineyard Haven. What has been gained here for our cause should not be lost to posterity. There should be at least one Unitarian Society in Dukes County with a minister suited to the place, young and full of missionary vigor.” His last report to the AUA stated: “I will try to hold the fort a short time longer with your assistance.”

The end, when it came, was sudden. The *Vineyard Gazette* of October 9, 1891 declared: “The death of Rev. Daniel Waldo Stevens on Thursday, October 1st, is a great shock to all his friends here. He had been to Saratoga Springs and on his return to Boston was too ill to reach his home in Vineyard Haven and was taken to Mass. General Hospital, where he passed

14 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 229-232.

15 Nis Kildegard and Alison Shaw, *Harbor View: The Hotel That Saved a Town* (Edgartown, MA: Vineyard Stories Press, 2014).

away after a few days. Rev. Stevens was well known by the summer visitors as well as the residents of Vineyard Haven and will be greatly missed in the community. For many years his home, with its collection of antiquities and curiosities, has been open to the public and in the summer of 1890, over 300 visitors were registered. The funeral took place at Marlboro on Monday. The internment was in the family plot in Medfield. Mr. Daniel Stevens of Boston arrived, the guest of Capt. Gilbert Smith. Capt. Gilbert Smith left on Saturday to attend the funeral of Rev. D. W. Stevens."

A week later, in its October 16 edition, the *Gazette* wrote: "A concourse of friends completely filled the Seamen's Chapel on Sunday morning, come together for the memorial services in honor of its late minister, Rev. D. W. Stevens. Rev. J. F. Moors, of Boston, conducted the services. His remarks included excerpts from the funeral address of Rev. Mr. Woodbury, paying the highest tribute to the character of the deceased. The son and niece of the deceased were here to attend the services. The music was conducted by Mrs. Henry Flanders at the organ, Mrs. Belle Dunham, Miss Abbie Cromwell and Mr. Arthur Smith singing appropriate hymns." Daniel Waldo Stevens, Jr. of Boston came to this service, hosted by Capt. Gilbert Smith, then Capt. Smith returned with Mr. Stevens to the service in Marlborough.

In his last days, Rev. Stevens requested that Rev. Augustus Woodbury, his colleague and friend of forty-years, give his funeral address in Marlborough. The *Daily Enterprise* newspaper of Marlborough reported: "The funeral services of Rev. Daniel Waldo Stevens took place in the Unitarian Church on Monday. Rev. Dr. Woodbury of Providence, Rhode Island, officiating. Among those present was Rev. Farwell Moore, prominent in missionary work and a warm friend of the deceased. The remains were then taken by H. S. Fay to Medfield for internment on Tuesday morning." In this address, Rev. Woodbury quoted Rev. Edward Everett Hale, former president of the American Unitarian Association, who had publicly pronounced the Mission at Vineyard Haven the "most valuable that our central Association has sustained." Rev. Stevens was buried in the historic Vine Lake Cemetery in Medfield beside his two wives and his very young daughter.

The next year, Rev. Woodbury was asked to address the Channing Conference on the occasion of its twenty-fifth year since formation. His remarks included fulsome praise of the Mission to Seamen in Vineyard Haven, again lauding the Channing Conference for its vision to provide the Mission and calling it "The chief enterprise in which the Conference has been engaged, and that we can regard with a considerable measure of satisfaction."

The age of shipping by sail was waning by 1891, and efforts by Unitarians to continue the Mission during the next two years were not successful. A new Seamen's Bethel was built by the Methodists in the inner harbor, at the foot of Union Street, to serve steamships. In time the need for it also waned. This

Chapel is now part of the Martha's Vineyard Hospital and the main hall is an addition of the American Legion building on West Spring Street. The original building of the Seamen's Reading Room and Chapel were moved to the corner of Locust and Main Streets and is now a private home.

Charles Banks wrote, in a footnote, that Rev. Stevens' "splendid collection of stone implements made by the aborigines" was "removed from the Vineyard by his son after the death of Rev. Stevens and placed on deposit with the Rhode Island Historical Society. It is a matter of great regret that this unique collection was not donated to a local museum."¹⁶ When I visited the Bristol Historical Society to inquire about this collection, they had no knowledge of it. The library in the Reading Room, a point of pride to Rev. Stevens who often stated that it was the largest and the only free library on the Vineyard, fared better. Most of his books were given to the (then) newly formed Vineyard Haven Public Library.

As the number of seamen visiting the mission diminished and the number of townspeople and summer visitors increased, Rev. Stevens had written of his desire to have a Unitarian congregation on Martha's Vineyard, and to that end he willed a piece of land to the American Unitarian Association on the condition that they build a chapel on it within the next two years. This did not happen. Hoping to achieve his father's desire, Rev. Stevens' son and namesake offered a similar piece of land to the Channing Conference, on which they built Stevens Memorial Chapel in 1896. It was located "on a pleasant knoll" on Old Lighthouse Road, just inland from where the Mission had been. It was dedicated with ceremony, fanfare and many off-island guests, including Rev. Stevens' grandson, newly graduated from Harvard.

The Vineyard Haven Unitarian Society formed as a formal body two years later with Rev. Stevens' close friend, retired whaling master Capt. Gilbert L. Smith, as its first president. Capt. Smith served in the role for the next twenty-nine years. When the Episcopal congregation of Grace Church relocated to the corner of William and Woodlawn Streets "to be closer to the village" in 1904, Stevens Memorial Chapel moved to the old Grace Church site—now 238 Main Street—where it stands today.

The Unitarians and Universalists merged nationally into the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1960, and the Unitarian Society of Vineyard Haven became the Unitarian Universalist Society of Martha's Vineyard in 1963. Stevens Memorial Chapel's congregation continues—vibrantly moving into the twenty-first century. A portrait of Rev. Stevens has pride of place on the wall.



16 Banks, *History*, II: Annals of Tisbury, 49.

Documents: Alexander Graham Bell Visits the Mission

Alexander Graham Bell visited the Mission in December of 1885, during trip to the Island to investigate the causes of the high rate of hereditary deafness in Chilmark. Bell focused his research on the genealogy of Island families, which he believed might hold the key to the problem, and after consulting the Chilmark vital records, he turned his attention to those of Tisbury, which then included present-day West Tisbury. The Tisbury records had been damaged by the Great Fire of 1883, but Rev. Stevens, also a genealogist, had copies, and Mr. Bell visited the Mission to transcribe them for his studies. After his visit, he wrote a long letter to his wife, Mabel, which included a private, vivid description of the mission as he saw it.¹

“On the shore of Vineyard Haven there is a queer little sprawling house—so old that no one knows when it was built. It has been built horizontally instead of vertically. If I remember rightly it is only one story high and though small covers a good deal of ground on account of its horizontal extension. One door is labeled with the name of ‘Stevens’ and another door at a considerable distance away—for the one house looks like a row of cottages—bears the sign ‘Sailors Free Reading Room’. The whole place has a flavor of a museum about it.”

“On the porch are the bones of whales and the figure-heads of extinct whaling ships—and over the roof is a ship-weather cock.” “On the shore below there is a solitary pier. Vineyard Haven itself is full of schooners of all sorts and sizes at anchor. It is a veritable ‘Haven’. They are not here permanently. They come and go but the harbor seems always full like the conjurer’s drinking cup which is never empty however much you drink.”

“When the schooner is safely anchored and the men hunger for news of the outside world—a boat is let down and headed for the lonely pier that shows the locality of the ‘Sailors Free Reading Room’. There they find the files of the Boston and New York papers and the papers of New Bedford and other places with all the shipping news that they want to know. And there they find a venerable man—the Revd Stevens—a Unitarian minister—who takes a personal interest in each one—welcomes him voyage after voyage—and discourses about the affairs of this world—and I suppose the next. And there they find beside the door an open box as large as a trunk—filled with old numbers of Harper’s Monthly—Scribner’s—the illustrated Weeklies—

and odds and ends of novels- and (not a few religious tracts)—contributed by the inhabitants of the Island for free distribution to the sailors.”

“They read the news of the day and back they go to their ship—each man with a number of books or magazines under his arm—to wile away the weary hours on board. And they bring to Mr. Stevens relics from off shores to show their esteem until now he has quite a museum of curiosities stowed away in the house. A quiet happy looking man—living a quiet - unobtrusive life. One of his rooms is fitted up as a Chapel for sailors to which all are invited irrespective of creed. A conspicuous notice is posted up ‘Free seats. Free gospel. NO CONTRIBUTION BOXES. No respect to persons on account of dress, color or religious opinions. ‘The Word of God is not bound’ to any sect, party or nations.”

“The place seems to be supported by some Unitarian Society who pay Mr. Stevens a salary (I suppose) to superintend it. He has been there for seventeen years and I have no doubt is doing good and useful work. The religious element was quite subordinate.” Maybe Mr. Bell was not there at the time of services.

“I sat in the Reading Room for about three hours working while the sailors came in and out. Mr. Stevens spends a portion of his time in his study in a different part of the house and pops into the Reading Room every now and then to talk to the seamen. It was really very interesting to hear what went on. They would tell him from what part of the world they had come all about their cargo, etc. and he would help them to select books and magazines from the box at the door. Altogether I was very much impressed with the usefulness of the Reading Room.”

“Mr. Stevens directed my attention to a curious fact that impressed me powerfully at the time. It was this—that although the water in the Harbor was perfectly still—and the sea outside perfectly calm so far as one could see—we could hear the breaking of huge billows against the shore. The unmistakable surging of huge waves in a storm and yet the water was quiet.”

“Another point was that the sound came not from the sea side of us but from the land to the south—and he assured me that it was due to the waves dashing on the other side of the island—more than nine miles away! It was caused by the ocean waves of the storm of the preceding day. He said that it was a regular occurrence during the stormy winter months and that the sight of the south shore was a grand one. I am inclined to think that the sound must have been transmitted through the ground instead of the air—as it would be an extraordinary thing If such a sound could be transmitted nine miles through the atmosphere and then be audible.”

Endnotes

1 Bell’s letter is part of the Alexander Graham Bell Papers in the Library of Congress. The author wishes to thank Chris Baer for supplying her with a copy.

The Man Who Owned West Chop

Isaac Chase and Early Years of Holmes Hole

by ELIZABETH W. TROTTER

WHEN SHOWING SOMEONE around our old house, I am inevitably asked: “Do you believe in ghosts?” While I am not inclined to such a belief, I certainly can appreciate a sense of being haunted: not by spirits, but by an awareness of the past echoing into the present. What we learn from these echoes, what we take forward from this knowledge, is what haunts me—so much so that I often feel compelled to do research to understand the lives of these “ghosts.” What they whisper as their histories are revealed gives me pause. They make me wonder at my own bravery, my own impulses; what would I have done if I had lived their life in their time?

Perhaps you can understand my quest when you realize that the house I live in has a creation story that dates back to 1698. It was built in the center of what was then Holmes Hole, and moved two miles to its present location in 1922, nearly 100 years ago.¹ My husband and I are the latest in a line of fourteen owners that spans six families and touches five centuries. The house’s ties to Island history date back to the early settlers of the 1600s. Our stewardship of the home has encouraged me to search out the stories surrounding the owners who came before. The details of their lives complement the more visible, more familiar elements of Vineyard culture, and reveal things about the development of Island life that we could otherwise only imagine. If we listen closely, they even speak to us today.

Isaac Chase came to the Vineyard in 1673, when (at least in their own eyes) Thomas Mayhew and his family reigned supreme. He made a name for himself, in the years following, independent of the Mayhews, becoming a prominent citizen and the head of a family prominent in its own

1 Walter E. Flanders, Interview with Irving Warner, September 22, 1972, “Great House (Tisbury)” Vertical File [VREF 1150.001], Martha’s Vineyard Museum Library. Flanders, while “flaking” (dismantling) the house for its 1922 move, observed a second-floor joist marked with the initials of two individuals—presumably the builders—and the date “1698.”

A graduate of McDaniel College with a BA in social work, Liz Trotter did extensive work with the elderly, followed by 15 years as a human resources executive. After moving to the Island, she began to research the history of her 17th century house and its ties to Vineyard lore, which led her to the Museum.

right. His many business ventures were among the first of their kind. Using the profits from them, he bought land until his holdings extended the entire length and breadth of today's Vineyard Haven. Long before all that, however, he was a young man with a new bride who, along with a few friends and their families, sought a new life as they landed on this island in 1673. This is the story of Isaac Chase, who built a house—and helped to found a village—on the shores of Holmes Hole Harbor.

A Quaker from Hampton

Isaac Chase's story begins in Hampton, New Hampshire. Town land-grant records show that, in the 1640s, there were 70 families living in this village, then part of the colony of Massachusetts Bay. Two of those grants, awarded in June of 1640, were held by brothers Thomas and Aquila Chase, then single but looking forward to the day when they would marry and start families.² The process began, for Thomas, in the year 1645, when he wed Elizabeth Philbrick, the daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Philbrick. The elder Philbrick had been among the original settlers of Watertown in 1636 and likely knew Thomas Mayhew, Sr., who had resided there until—having bought the settlement rights to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket from the Earl of Stirling—he turned his attention, and moved his family, southward. The Chase brothers took it upon themselves to settle and build homes in the village center of Hampton. Thomas Chase situated his residence directly across from the Philbrick home, near the village green, and it was in this house that Isaac Chase—the man who would eventually build my house—was born on April 1, 1650.

Isaac's eldest brother (older by seven years) was, following family tradition of the time, named after his father, Thomas. A second son, Joseph, was born in 1645; James in 1649; and the youngest, Abraham, on August 6, 1652. This band of brothers would grow up in Hampton and have an effect on the new town's history, but their early days were marked by tragedy: the loss of their father on October 5, 1652, when Isaac was only two years old. Elizabeth was left alone to raise her growing sons and a newborn with the support of village neighbors until she remarried in October 1654 to Hampton resident John Garland.

Isaac's oldest brother, Thomas, was confirmed as his legal guardian on April 9, 1667 according to Hampton court records. Isaac, who had just turned seventeen, would have been nearly self-sufficient but not yet an adult in the eyes of the law; taking nominal responsibility for him may have been a way for Thomas, twenty-four but not yet married, to help his mother, who was busy

2 Joseph Dow, *History of the Town of Hampton, New Hampshire*, 2 vol. (Salem, NH: Salem Press, 1892), 18. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009792840>

with three more sons born to John Garland as well as the Chase boys. At this time, eldest brother Thomas was becoming enamored of the newly burgeoning Quaker religion and Isaac appears to have taken up this faith as well.

It was, in mid-17th-century New England, a dangerous path to follow. The Quaker religion was seen as a serious threat to the dominant Puritan culture and practitioners of it as rebels against Puritan values. “The first Quakers that came to New England were two female preachers, who arrived at Boston in July, 1656, bringing with them a considerable number of their books. At first, they were not permitted to land, but their books were taken from them and burned in the market place.”³ Later they were taken ashore, imprisoned and then shipped back to England. On October 21 of that year, a law was passed “prohibiting masters of vessels from bringing any of this sect within their jurisdiction, under heavy penalties; and subjecting every Quaker arriving here from foreign parts, to Imprisonment, stripes and hard labor, and requiring him to leave the country as soon as practicable.” Quakers who entered the colony anyway were summarily punished in even more extreme ways: cutting off ears, boring the tongue with a hot iron, whipping on a cart’s tail, and banishment. Even so, by 1662 many of New England towns were being forced to adapt to the presence of what they termed “vagabond Quakers.”⁴

The two sects clashed at the most fundamental level. At the heart of the Quaker doctrine was a belief that individuals were guided by the light within themselves, rather than by external forces—even those born of the Bible and Jesus’s teachings. Quakerism’s emphasis on personal growth and collaborative decision-making encouraged its followers to openly question the governance of the Puritan elite, and to take stands against laws that had their basis in narrow, rigid interpretations of the Bible. To the Puritan elite, determined to establish a precisely defined rule of law rooted in what they saw as incontestable scriptural truths, Quakerism was a disruptive force: an affront to the famed “City upon a Hill” that they hoped to build as an example for others. Puritan leaders charged Quakers with countless legal violations: missing Sunday worship, courting a woman without parental permission, drunkenness, dancing, and even picking vegetables on worship days. Quakers, meanwhile, resisted what they saw as oppressive rules with vigor and ingenuity. Hampton Quaker Lydia Wardell, for example, appeared naked at the meetinghouse in April 1663 to “express her contempt for Puritans who insisted that she attend church contrary to her beliefs.”⁵

The Chase brothers’ embrace of Quaker doctrine led, as a result, to brushes with the local authorities. Thomas, for example, was fined on

3 Dow, *History of Hampton*, 55.

4 Dow, *History of Hampton*, 56.

5 The Naked Quaker Diane Rapaport pp 73-75

April 12, 1670 for not frequenting the public ordinances of Christ on Lord's days and using reproachful speeches against Mr. Cotton, a known Puritan preacher. Abraham was charged on March 29, 1673, with "making a bold attempt when the commissioners were seated in the meeting house, by firing off a pistol at the window, burning a hole in the collers and breaking down some of the glass, whereby some of those who stood near were in danger." Like his brother, he was fined, and a year later—April 14, 1674—both brothers were convicted, along with ten others, of holding a Quaker meeting in Hampton.

Isaac (like his brother James) was not charged with such disruptions, but it is all but certain that he was affected by the Quaker spirit that was so strong among his family. It may even have been the basis for his emigration to Martha's Vineyard. Quakers, even those not formally banished from their communities, regularly fled from what they saw as Puritan abuses of power, seeking places with weaker Puritan influences and greater tolerance of difference. Nantucket became a Quaker stronghold as a result, and by 1700 Isaac's contemporary William Penn began to openly encourage Quaker participation in the government affairs of Pennsylvania. Whatever his actual reasons for leaving, however, Isaac had seen ample evidence of anti-Quaker sentiment in Hampton by the time he began a trip to Martha's Vineyard in the year 1673.

Isaac's decision to leave was facilitated by his late father, Thomas, who had left portions of his estate to his still-young children, to be given to them when they turned twenty-one. At the age of twenty-three, Isaac took his share of the money and headed to Martha's Vineyard, accompanied by fellow Hampton residents Samuel Tilton and Jacob Perkins. Distant as it must have seemed to a young man from southern New Hampshire, the island was not an unknown destination. Hampton resident Joseph Merry preceded them in 1670, and Banks speculates that both Simon Athearn and John Hillman lived in Hampton before coming to the island. He writes, perhaps with more certainty than the scanty evidence allows, of "the vicinity of Salisbury or Hampton, whence came so many of the earliest settlers of this island and Nantucket."⁶ What *is* documented is that Hillman, sometime between 1675 and 1678, became the owner of a half-share lot of Vineyard land that had originally belonged to Samuel Tilton, suggesting that they may have known each other in Hampton. The presence of Hillman, Athearn, and Merry—familiar faces, if not close friends—on the Vineyard may have enticed Chase and his group to make the journey south.

Isaac Chase and Jacob Perkins were tightly bound to one another: not

6 Charles E. Banks, *The History of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts* (Boston: George H. Dean, 1911), Vol. II, *Annals of Chilmark*, 30.

just neighbors, but in-laws. Isaac had wed Jacob's sister Mary in Hampton on February 20, 1673, and Perkins' own wife, also named Mary, was a daughter of Isaac's maternal uncle, John Philbrick. The third member of the trio, Samuel Tilton, was notably older, born a decade before Isaac, in 1640. He had been married to his wife Hannah since 1662 and had three young children: Hannah (nearly 10), William (5) and John (3). Banks specifically notes that Tilton arrived on the Island in 1673, and it seems reasonable to conclude, as Banks does, that the families made the trip together, arriving in the midst of the "Dutch Rebellion."

The Dutch Rebellion

The English and Dutch had been in conflict for most of the mid-17th century, and the colony of New York changed hands several times as a result. During the third Anglo-Dutch War, the Dutch ordered attacks on English settlements in the colonies, resulting in their recapture of New York, and English governor Francis Lovelace's ouster from power, in July 1673. With the Dutch in control, proprietary rights established under English rule were called into question, and this included Thomas Mayhew's royal charter for Martha's Vineyard. Mayhew had secured from Lovelace in 1671 a charter complete with the title of "Governor for life and Lord of Tisbury Manor," and dissatisfaction with Mayhew and his title—already present in some parts of the Island's population—had been escalating ever since. Mayhew's family members dominated local political offices and were exempt from taxes. Islanders who were not part of the extended family, already feeling disenfranchised and ill-used, were appalled by Mayhew's use of his "Lord of the Manor" status as an excuse to demand annual rents from those who, as "freeholders," owned their land outright.

Under the leadership of Simon Athearn, twenty dissatisfied families—half the island's European population—used the changing of the guard resulting from the Dutch capture of New York to push for a more democratic form of government on the Island. Rebelling against the rule of the Mayhew clan in general and Thomas Mayhew, Sr. in particular, they composed what Banks terms a "Declaration of Independence against arbitrary authority and irresponsible rulers."⁷ This appeal, signed on October 15, 1673, was sent not to the English government-in-exile in New York, but to Governor Leaveritt of Massachusetts.⁸ The rebels called for a "change in the existing form of government and an adhesion to the Massachusetts system of elections of officers as provided in the original sale

7 Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, Vol. 1, 157-158

8 New York was a proprietary colony giving charters to individuals for land ownership. These individuals could then govern as they saw fit, as Mayhew had been doing. Massachusetts was structured to allow for individuals to be elected democratically from its towns to assess taxes, and serve as commissions.



The “Dutch Rebellion” as imagined by Dr. Charles Banks in one of a series of wooden panels, depicting Colonial-era Vineyard history, that he painted around 1900.

of the island by Forret, thirty-two years before.”⁹

For the next year, Martha’s Vineyard operated under what amounted to two separate governments: the “regulars” who supported Mayhew and the “rump” led by Athearn and Thomas Burchard. The name of the latter, though comically unflattering to modern ears, carried a deadly serious political message: The “Rump Parliament” of the English Civil War had deposed King Charles I, tried him for high treason, and executed him. There were no rebels in Chilmark, a Mayhew stronghold, and Edgartown—home to both Thomas Mayhew and Thomas Burchard—was divided. Tisbury, which then covered the entire center of the Island, was the heart of the rebellion, home to Simon Athearn and seven other signers of the petition.¹⁰ No one in Athearn’s band proposed to put Mayhew on trial, but they called for his resignation (and free elections) within a year, and “proceeded to tear down warrants posted by his authority, abuse the constables sent to serve his writs, and always ‘disdaining so much as any intimation of Right title of interest from his Royall Highness.’”¹¹ Declaration of Independence indeed!

The early rebellion shines a spotlight on the conflicted interests of early settlers as they proceeded to seek out equanimous means of governing.

9 Banks, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, Vol. 1, 155.

10 Banks, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, Vol. 1, 160.

11 Banks, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, Vol. 1, 160.

For one year they acted as their own rogue government. Unfortunately any records kept did not survive the turmoil. The experiment, in any event, was short-lived. Governor Leaveritt of Massachusetts, to whom Athearn had appealed for relief, was occupied with larger problems, notably the simmering tensions between European and Native Americans that would, within two years, erupt into the bloody turmoil of King Philip's War. Leaveritt, on behalf of Massachusetts, politely declined to get involved with Martha's Vineyard's internal affairs, and before long events in the wider world rendered the issue moot. In August 1674, the English reclaimed New York City, dashing the hopes of Athearn and his cohorts.

Edmund Andros, the new royal governor of the Colony of New York, reaffirmed Thomas Mayhew's authority over the Island and authorized Mayhew to bring the "tratcherous" to heel. The autocratic power that Athearn and his men had fought to overturn was now wielded against them. Simon Athearn was sent to New York and found guilty of "High Crime." He was heavily fined, as were Thomas Burchard, William Vincent and others who signed the petition. Other signees were tried for lesser crimes, such as defamation. Those who could not pay the fines departed the Island, and others left on their own to avoid the trials and fines. As word spread of the activity on the island, the rebels garnered sympathy from other colonies. The Reverend Increase Mather of Boston made this note in his diary: "At Martins Vineyard divers honest people are in great trouble: their estates sequestered by reason of Mr. M——complaining to the Gov'r of N.Y."¹² In the end the Island went back to a manorial system run by the Mayhew family, but, viewed in retrospect, the rebels' struggle against arbitrary, autocratic rule anticipates the Revolution that flared to life in Massachusetts almost exactly a century later.

From Outsider to Leading Citizen

Isaac Chase arrived on Martha's Vineyard in the midst of this upheaval, landing with his friends in the year 1673. All too familiar with the hostilities surrounding the emerging Quaker community in Hampton, he found that he had traded them for local hostilities surrounding Athearn's push for independent governance on the Island. Chase, Tilton, and Perkins were not, as Banks pointedly notes, among the signers of the appeal. New to the Island and without land grants of their own, they could not yet claim the title of "freeholder" that was so central to the identity of Athearn and his cohorts. Staying out of the rebellion did not, however, insulate Chase from local politics. The Tisbury town records record that Samuel Tilton was granted a half share of land (22 acres) on February 5, 1674. On the very same day, however, this pointed sentence appears: "The townsmen of Tysbury do not give unto

¹² Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, Vol. 1, 168.

isack chase of Hampton liberty to settle in the town.”¹³

The succinct directness of the note is tantalizing. Why was the gauntlet thrown down? The record is silent, but clearly something happened to warrant such an official record. It could have been as simple as suspicion of Quakers, given Isaac’s strong association with the sect. Since Tisbury was the seat of Simon Athearn’s rebel government, however, it seems more likely that Chase said or did something to support the rebels cause or to infuriate an already frustrated Mayhew.

This first year on-Island was not kind to Chase. Before it was over, his new wife, Mary, was dead. The records do not disclose the circumstances, but if she died in childbirth, as so often was the fate of women in this time, his grief would only have been compounded by the loss of what would have been their first-born child. Now a widower, and landless, Isaac—along with the Perkins family—would likely have had to rely on their good friend Tilton for support until they could gain some sort of advantage. It was an unwelcome beginning for a young man’s adventure in an unfamiliar land.

Chase was, evidently, resilient. He could have turned back to Hampton, or moved on to another shore but he chose instead to persist in his bid to stay on the Island. The following year, 1675, was kinder. On October 5, Isaac remarried, coincidentally to another Mary and another sister of a friend: Samuel Tilton. The fact that the service was performed by Rev. John Mayhew—one of three grandsons of Thomas Mayhew, Sr., who carried on the family’s work after their father, Thomas, Jr., was lost at sea in 1657—presents yet another Chase mystery. Why would a Quaker from Hampton choose to be married, only two years after his arrival on the Island, by the Vineyard’s most prominent Puritan minister? It seems unlikely that, so soon after his arrival, Isaac would choose to shed his Quaker roots. A more plausible explanation involves Mayhew’s insistence on marriages being sanctioned by his minister in order to be recognized by the town—a way to exert authority so soon after the Dutch Rebellion. If so, Chase may have gone along for the sake of compromise and to gain some respect from the current town hierarchy.

Whether or not his choice of minister was a deliberate attempt to bond with his adopted community, Isaac Chase’s marriage to Mary Tilton marked a turning point in his fortunes. On October 11, 1676, a few days after his first wedding anniversary, Isaac and Jacob Perkins each acquired a 1/6 share (the Mayhew and Eddy shares)¹⁴ of Holmes Hole Neck. This was the first allowance to Chase for purchase in the town. The partial share may have repre-

13 William S. Swift and Jennie L. Cleveland, eds., *Records of the Town of Tisbury, Mass.* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1903), 7-8

14 Banks, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, Vol. 2, *Annals of Tisbury*, 14.

sented a cautious testing ground of his reliability. Chase's friends departed Holmes Hole shortly after: Tilton for a newly acquired home lot in Middletown (today's West Tisbury), and Perkins for Falmouth after he opposed the Mayhews in a court case involving Hannah Mayhew and a stolen pig.

Isolated from his fellow Hampton immigrants, Chase and his new wife settled into Holmes Hole, where he evidently enjoyed a steadily improving reputation. The next mention of him in the town records is dated January 16th, 1678, and names him as one of a committee of three appointed to survey and equalize the proportions of (valuable) lowland and (undesirable) swampland in the holdings of Tisbury landowners:

It is agreed and voted by the tounsmen of Tisbury That whereas theare are seaverall men In the toun that have littell swamp or lowe Land In cumparison of others it Is thearfore That willam weke Isack chase and Thomas mayhew shall loock over eveyary mans hous lot In the said toun and shall eaquallise them with swamp and lowe land according to theare beaste undearstandeing and soe eaveary man shall rest satisfied.

Recordeid by me
THOMAS MAYHEW
Tlarck

Four years later, in July 1682, a more succinct line from the town records suggests that Chase's movement from rejection to acceptance in his adopted home was complete: "[T]he tounsmen of tysbury do give liberty unto Isack Chace to purtch asartain parsel of land it being forty acers ..."

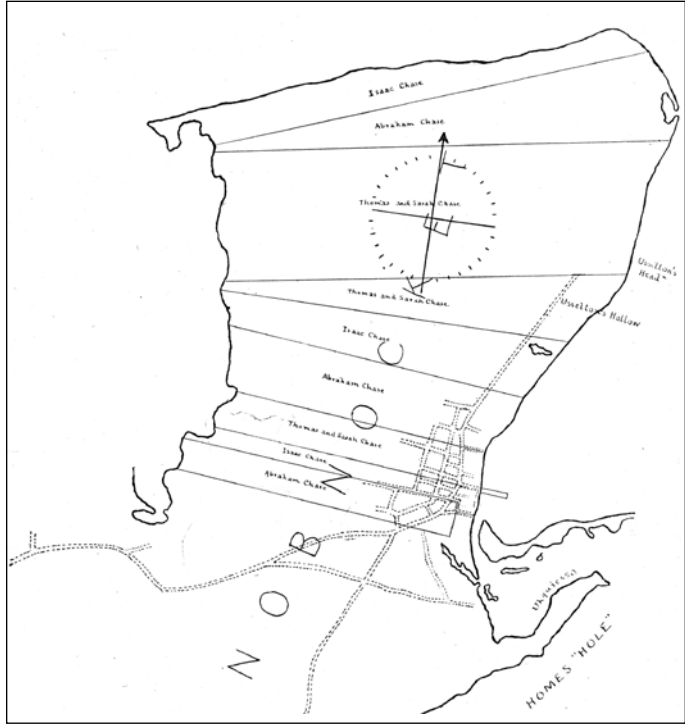
Now a landowner with an reputation established, Isaac Chase became an unstoppable economic force. He bought up shares of land quickly and often until he owned virtually all of Holmes Hole, from the rise overlooking the head of the harbor (today's Mount Aldworth) all the way to the tip of West Chop. His holdings extended from the edge of the harbor in the east to the shores of Lake Tashmoo in the west, as shown on Banks' map of his holdings.¹⁵ Chase's economic activities extended well beyond buying up land, however; he also immersed himself in Island industry. He was a blacksmith by trade, and may—like his friends Perkins (a tailor) and Tilton (a carpenter)—have been drawn to the Island by the prospect that its growing population would provide a market for his skills. More than the others, however, Isaac Chase seems to have had an entrepreneurial spirit. He saw numerous opportunities available in the growing port of Holmes Hole, and had the vision to take advantage of them, racking up firsts when it came to meeting Island needs.

Chase's initial foray into Island business appears to have been a tavern, for which—Banks dutifully records—he was the first on the Vineyard to be granted a license. Notice of this landmark event appears in the Tisbury town records on March 26, 1677/8 and declares that: "Isaack Chase of Hol-

15 Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, Vol. 2, Annals of Tisbury, 17.

mses hole is admitted to keep a publik house of Entertainment & to sell liquor &c by Retail except to the Indians and this to continue for two years at ten shillings per annum.”

Presumably he would have run the tavern from his house, as was then the custom, and operating such a public venue would have made him a prominent and respected figure within the growing community. Taverns played many roles in the late 17th century American colonies. They were drinking establishments for locals, of course, but also places for strangers to find a meal and a bed. The latter function was so important that a Massachusetts law passed in 1656 dictated that each town must keep a “house of entertainment” for the “convenience of strangers,” or risk being fined.¹⁶



Isaac Chase's land holdings at the time of his death in 1727, depicted in a map by Charles Banks, showing how his will divided them among his many children.

Taverns also served as community spaces for conducting town business, sharing news about current affairs, or debating the issues of the day. They did double duty as committee rooms, courtrooms, and substitutes for whatever other municipal spaces did not yet exist in the village.¹⁷ Tisbury's decision to grant Chase a license, like its appointment of him to the land-share committee, suggests his full acceptance into the community.

Isaac's third major business venture involved island transportation. At present we take for granted the ease and accommodation the Island ferry ser-

¹⁶ Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, Vol. 1, 461. The law did not apply to the Vineyard when Chase's license was granted in Tisbury; the Island was still part of New York, and would not be annexed by Massachusetts for another 15 years (1692).

¹⁷ Christine Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13-60.

vice affords. In the late seventeenth century, no such coordinated operation existed. Granted many men had boats and offered to transport passengers and cargo on a case-by-case basis, for a negotiated fee, but reliable, predictable continuous service was lacking, and Chase sought to fill that void. He is credited with establishing the island's first ferry service between Holmes Hole and Falmouth. Court records refer, as early as 1700, "the fery at homes hole,"¹⁸ and a later note, from 1703 town records, confirms Chase's ownership:

Leift [Lieut.] Isaac Chase is apoynted by this Courte to keep a publik fery for the transporting of man and beast from Marthas Vineyard to Sickanesset alias falmouth and the fees allowed for said ferriage viz: six shillings for a man and an hors or three shillings for each person or hors forew'd to s'd Suckanesset: but if he doth cary but one hors over sd ferriage that he shall have the sume of five shillings.

The two enterprises—tavern and ferry—were natural complements. In 1702 Judge Samuel Sewall, (in)famous for his role in the Salem Witch Trials, traveled to and from the Island on the ferry to oversee, on behalf of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the work of the Mayhews and others in Christianizing the Wampanoag. His journal contains several mentions of stopping at "Chase's," his use of Isaac's tavern as a site for both meetings and hospitality.¹⁹

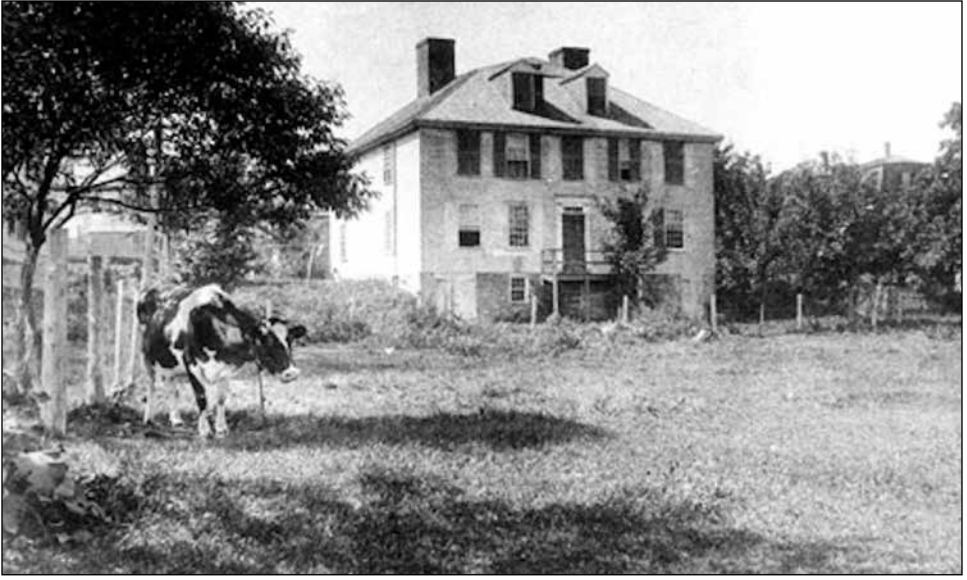
"Chase's" would have been "Great House," built by Isaac in 1698 and situated on what was then the shore of the harbor, and is now the Stop and Shop parking lot. The Wampanoag term "Mashakemmuck" literally translates to "Great House." It is the name used for an abode used for meetings of the sachems, and important ceremonies and rituals,²⁰ just as colonial taverns of the time did for English communities. Isaac's name choice appears as an acknowledgement of the Wampanoag term and a gesture of respect for the native culture, and a suggestion that he was continuing the tradition with his establishment. The moniker "Great House" has stayed with the home through the present day. When it was moved to its current location on West Chop in 1922, it was placed on property that was once owned by Isaac Chase—a pleasing arc for the house's movement through Vineyard Haven.

As significant as his ferry and tavern businesses were, Isaac appears to have been most proud of his title of "Lieutenant." It graces his tombstone in Crossways Cemetery as well as Mary's, which describes her as "wife of Lieft Chase." Early colonial militias were formed to protect new settlements, and a supply of arms and powder were generally issued to every able-bodied

18 Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, Vol. 1, 452.

19 Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729* [in 3 volumes] Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. V, fifth series. (Boston: The Society, 1878): v. III, 397; v. II, 166. <https://archive.org/stream/diaryofsamuelsew01sewaiala#page/n9/mode/2up>

20 Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, Vol. 2, Annals of Edgartown, 18.



The Great House, built by Isaac Chase in 1698, in its original setting in downtown Holmes Hole.

male in a community. On Martha's Vineyard, there is evidence that they existed as early as 1651. Practice days for militia service were common, though usually festive in nature, they were also a time to instruct, drill and parade arms. Participating in county militia musters and drills was part of being a freeholder, and Isaac Chase is noted in town records beginning in 1692 forward as "Lieutenant"—a rank that would have carried an obligation of one year's service. Clearly by 1692 Isaac had taken an oath, or an approximation of one, to serve and protect the Island through its militia.

Oath-taking was required for admittance to serve in the town militia, and the swearing of such an oath—perhaps even more than taking up arms—would seem to have run counter to Isaac Chase's Quaker beliefs. Quakers used Mathew 5:34-37 "...do not swear an oath at all...let your yes be yes and your no be no" as the basis of their "Testimony of Integrity." From it was born the Quakers' refusal to take an oath, which was premised on the idea that their word was true and honest and did not need to be sworn. As a result it was a common Quaker practice not to be sworn into any office, or as a witness, or to swear an oath of allegiance to the King or to God. By 1695 an act was passed of "Solemn Declaration" that would allow Quakers to affirm rather than swear an oath. Perhaps Isaac was an early proponent of this form before it was officially sanctioned doctrine of Quakers, or perhaps the practice was observed informally for some years before it became doctrine. The answer may also be highly individualized: By 1692 Isaac would have been a much respected community member, and his character may have moved him to work around the rule in order to

perform the duty to the community that tradition required of him. In any event, his behavior shifts our traditional idea of Quaker behavior: He not only accepted his military title, but wore it as a badge of honor.

Land and Legacy

In later years Isaac would divide his vast land holdings in Holmes Hole among his family. The strips he carved out for them, running roughly east-west across West Chop between Holmes Hole (today's Vineyard Haven) Harbor and Lake Tashmoo were, in time, sold out of the family and subdivided into smaller plots, but ghosts of their borders are visible in property lines and street layouts to this day. The children of Isaac and Mary who were the beneficiaries of the subdivision process—twelve born over a span of twenty-six years—have stories of their own, but they are also, collectively, part of Isaac's story. Their lives and deaths, marriages and migrations reflect the realities of life in the early years of Holmes Hole, and the ever-more-complex ties that bound the Chases to Isaac's adopted island home.

Eldest son Thomas Chase (born 1677), most likely named for Isaac's father and eldest brother, married Jane Smith on February 21, 1704. She was the daughter of Benjamin Smith, an Edgartown magistrate and carpenter, and Jedidah Mayhew: the youngest child of Thomas Mayhew, Jr. Thomas Chase thus became the nephew-by-marriage of Thomas Mayhew III, whose signature had endorsed many of the critical documents in Isaac Chase's life, and Rev. John Mayhew, who had married his parents thirty years before. Thomas died aboard his sloop *Vineyard* during a coastal voyage in December 1721, but his line lived on. His great-grandniece, Maria Allen, was one of the Liberty Pole heroines, his great-grandson Thomas sailed in John Paul Jones' squadron on the frigate *Alliance*, and Thomas' brother Lothrop—a fifer in the Continental Army—is said to have played the final reveille at Yorktown on the day Cornwallis surrendered.²¹

Eldest daughter Rachel (born 1679) married Samuel Knight on July 19, 1700. They left the Island for Charlestown where their five children's births are registered. Widowed in 1721, she married Samuel Munkley the same year—likely driven by her need for financial stability in a world that offered women few opportunities to achieve it alone.

Isaac's second son and namesake, Isaac (born 1681) wed Mary Pease on April 3, 1702. She was the granddaughter of John Pease, who had taken part in the Dutch Rebellion and been harassed by the Mayhews in its aftermath. Isaac died at sea on October 13, 1716 during a violent storm. Rev.

21 Maria Allen's and Thomas Chase's stories are recounted in the Winter 2015 (pp. 3-18) and Winter 2016 (pp. 3-20) issues of the *Intelligencer*. Lothrop's service is described in Thomas Chase, *Sketches of the Life and Times of John Paul Jones* (Richmond, VA: Charles Wynne, 1859), 32. <https://archive.org/stream/sketcheslifecha00chasgoog#page/n6/mode/2up>

William Homes of Chilmark noted the event laconically in his personal journal: "Isaac Chase was lost this day being in a sloop, was cast away."

Third son Abraham (born 1683), was likely named for Isaac's youngest brother, Abraham, who died at the defense of Marlborough in 1676, during King Phillip's War. He married Abigail Barnard in 1709, thus reinforcing the Chase family's ties to Hampton and to Quakerism. Abigail's father, Nathaniel Barnard lived on Nantucket, but had migrated from Hampton, and her uncle Thomas (who remained there) was active, along with Isaac's elder brothers, in Hampton's expanding Quaker community. It was in Thomas Barnard's house, in fact, that the first Quaker wedding in Hampton took place in 1705. The deaths of Abraham's father Isaac and surviving elder brother (Thomas) in 1721 left him heir apparent to the tavern, ferry and blacksmith businesses. He continued to oversee all three until his own death in 1760.

James (born 1685) was more than likely named for Isaac's brother. He married Rachel Brown, and moved with her to Nantucket, where he died in 1728, aged 43.

Mary (born 1687) married into the Weeks family when she wed Benjamin Weeks on January 14, 1704. She thus became the daughter-in-law of William Weeks, the Edgartown tavern-keeper who had come to Jacob Perkins' aid—selling him property in Falmouth—after his legal dispute with the Mayhews.

Joseph (born 1689), another son named after one of Isaac's brothers, married into a family of Vineyard Quakers when he wed Lydia Coffin. Their eldest son Thomas, born in 1739, played a key role in the run-up to the American Revolution. "Chase and Speakman's" was the name of his Boston distillery, which served as the meeting place for the "Loyal Nine," of which Chase was a member. They led the fight to repeal the Stamp Act in 1765, and in subsequent years expanded to become Boston's "Sons of Liberty." Thomas participated in the Boston Tea Party and later served as Deputy Quartermaster General of Massachusetts' troops.

Jonathan (born 1691) became a vintner, married Mehitable in 1710, and moved to Newport, RI, where he died in 1742.

Hannah (born 1693) married another Pease, Nathan, on December 3, 1712 and moved with him to Nantucket.

Sarah (born 1695) married Sam Cobb on June 27, 1716. He was a farmer and carpenter from Barnstable who had come to West Tisbury in 1715. Sam established himself as an innkeeper, but their personal life was shadowed by tragedy, with all five of their children dying young.

Priscilla (born 1697) married Nathan Folger on November 18, 1716. Nathan was the grandson of Peter Folger, who before moving to Nantucket and converting to Quakerism had lived in Edgartown and worked for the

Mayhews as a teacher to the Wampanoag.²² Nathan's aunt Abiah married Josiah Franklin of Boston; one of their ten children was Benjamin Franklin.

Elizabeth (born 1703) was presumably named after Isaac's mother. She died young, ten days after her sixteenth birthday. Isaac thus witnessed the deaths of at least four of his 12 children before passing away himself in 1727. His wife Mary lived another 19 years, dying on June 14, 1746.

As a young man, newly married, Isaac Chase had left a town embroiled in religious conflict only to find himself in the midst of political upheaval. He weathered the storm and steadily rose to prominence through determination and strength of character, entrepreneurship and creativity. The respect he gained from fellow Islanders, and the leadership he demonstrated by his various duties, established him as a man of distinction in a town that had at first refused to accept him. His tombstone is, today, among the oldest in what was, at the time of his death, Chase family burying ground—a plot donated to the town in 1803 by a Chase descendent and now known as Crossways Cemetery.²³ Bearing his name and the title that he wore with such pride, the stone quietly recalls a great man who built a great house on what we all appreciate as a great island.



Isaac Chase's weathered slate gravestone in Crossways Cemetery, Vineyard Haven. His title, "Lieutenant," is written L^t.

22 For Peter Folger's story, see the Summer 2016 (pp. 35-47) issue of the *Intelligencer*.

23 Catherine M. Mayhew, "Island Cemeteries Tisbury," 2001. Typescript in *Tisbury Cemeteries* binder, Martha's Vineyard Museum Library.

One Terrifying Night

A Chair, a Raytector, and the Vineyarders Aboard the *Andrea Doria*

by ANNA BARBER

ONE MORNING this past winter I walked into my office to find a wooden deck chair leaning against my desk. As a curator at the Martha's Vineyard Museum, I've grown accustomed to curious objects appearing in the office. On any given day, the work table that runs the length of the room is covered with treasures waiting to be processed, rehoused, and added to the museum's growing collection. As I write this, it holds a neon sign from the now-defunct Oak Bluffs "rib joint" Smoke N' Bones, a megalodon tooth, a ginger jar, dairy bottles, and an eel spear made by Chappaquiddick fisherman and blacksmith Milton Jeffers. This bizarre-seeming group of objects has one thing in common: they each tell a story about this Island and the people who live here. Sometimes these stories reach beyond the Island's shores, and sometimes they touch something deeper inside us—something that makes us pause and reflect on the journey that brought them here to the museum. The chair that I found resting against my desk that morning is such an object.

I'd been waiting for this chair. Late last year, I connected with a woman named Sarah Mead who owned a deck chair from the *Andrea Doria*, the ill-fated Italian luxury liner that sank after a collision with the Swedish liner *Stockholm* 75 miles southeast of Martha's Vineyard on the foggy night of July 25, 1956. We were preparing for an exhibition on Martha's Vineyard shipwrecks and she had offered to loan the chair for display. It posed a frustrating, but yet tantalizing question: In what sense, if any, was the sinking of the *Andrea Doria* a Vineyard story?

Sarah and her daughter Carey mentioned, in our correspondence, that the *Vineyard Gazette* had once run an article about the chair. "Doria Deck Chair, Seaweed Encrusted, Is Hauled Ashore," the headline read. Published just over a month after the event, it said:

A deck chair, the first relic of the sunken Italian liner *Andrea Doria* to appear on the eastern end of the Island, was found by Peter Mead and Arthur Sesselberg of Edgartown, yesterday afternoon, on the East

Anna Barber is curator of exhibitions at the Martha's Vineyard Museum.

Beach at Chappaquiddick ... On display at the Mead home at Katama yesterday evening, the chair presented a rather spectral effect, being covered with a hairy growth of whitish seaweed ... Previously reported remains of the vessel have included a life jacket, found on the beach at Lobsterville; a sailor's cap, recovered off South Beach at Chilmark; and a piece of driftwood, possibly from a lounge, picked up by a swordfisherman about twenty miles south of Muskeget channel.¹

That the Meads would put the chair on display in their home was no surprise, for the collision was widely covered by the news media. When the *Stockholm* rammed the *Andrea Doria* in the foggy darkness, twenty

miles west of the Nantucket Lightship, her bow tore a 40-foot-long hole into the *Doria*'s starboard side, killing a total of 46 people on the two vessels. The *Stockholm*, her bow crumpled but her watertight integrity intact, stood by to take on survivors, but the *Andrea Doria* was doomed. She began listing almost immediately, and gradually rolled onto her side, sinking a little after 10:00 a.m. on July 26, eleven hours after the collision. Nearby ships—including the giant liner *Ile de France*, outbound from New York—hurried to the scene, rescuing over 1,000 survivors and preventing any further loss of life, but aerial images of the *Andrea Doria*'s last hours and their aftermath were splashed across newspaper front pages across the country and broadcast to horrified television viewers.



This deck chair from the *Andrea Doria*, recovered on East Beach, Chappaquiddick, shortly after the wreck, is on display at the Museum through December.

I, too, displayed the chair in my office. I unfolded it and laid it out on the floor, measured it and took note of its condition (surprisingly good, all things considered). As I did, a colleague passed by and asked what it was. “*Andrea Doria*, huh?” she said. “You should talk to Tina Miller. Her grandfather was on the ship when it sank.” I followed this new development and tracked down Tina, who confirmed that her grandfather, Richard Miller, was indeed on the ship’s final voyage. Miller, who at the time had not yet moved to the Island, was in Italy meeting with members of their Navy about a radar device he had patented. Called a “Raytector”, it was described as an “electronic “seeing eye” for radar. The device automatically scans a radar screen and when an object is spotted, lets out a wail... [it] also sounds a warning alarm if either it or the radar fails to function properly. Mr. Miller suggested that his invention could monitor radar sets

1 *Vineyard Gazette*, August 31, 1956.

with greater accuracy and dependability than human operators...²

Radar, ironically, played an important part in the collision. As the two ships traveled towards each other, the bridge crew of each ship picked up the other ship on their radar but somehow misinterpreted their relative position. By the time they spotted one another through the thick fog, it was too late to turn out of the way and the *Stockholm* slammed into the *Andrea Doria's* side. When asked later if his Raytector could have prevented the collision, Miller replied:

"I don't know if the Raytector could have prevented the collision. The purpose of the device is to keep the radar operator alerted for any object appearing in the zone he selects. Assuming the operator had set the Raytector to search close in, the appearance of any object within four miles would have set off an alarm indicating that something new was in close." Mr. Miller explained that if for some reason the radar of either of the vessels had been unattended, then, if it had been employed, the Raytector might have warned of an impending collision by its alarm.³

When the impact occurred, Miller was in one of the *Andrea Doria's* lounges talking with fellow passengers. Within minutes the ship was listing at a frightening angle. Scrambling his way down to the cabin, he found the door jammed shut. Inside, along with a life jacket, was his Raytector. It would go down with the ship. After making his way back up to the deck, he grabbed the cushions from a nearby deck chair to use as a flotation device and waited for rescue. Two hours later, he was taken aboard the *Private William Thomas*, a United States Naval ship that had responded to the *Andrea Doria's* distress call. A newspaper account later described his ordeal:

The starboard boats were off, but the lifeboats on the port-side remained attached to the ship as it had listed to such an extent that it was impossible to lower them. The liner's whistle kept blowing, finally an answering blast was heard from afar. In the meantime, only once did the people in Mr. Miller's area of the deck hear any information from the ship's officers, and that included a short bit of advice to "remain calm." He said it was praiseworthy that most of the people displayed fortitude, stayed relatively calm, although "one felt rather uncomfortable" under the circumstances. The launch from the assisting ship took passengers off and was working in bright moonlight but a choppy sea. The ocean's swell made climbing down the Jacob's ladder a risky maneuver...one rather heavy woman fell into the sea and had to be rescued.⁴

In following Richard Miller's story, I discovered that he was not the only survivor on the *Andrea Doria* with a Vineyard connection. Two families from West Chop—Francis and Mary McAdoo and Dr. Robert Boggs, his

2 *York Gazette and Daily*, September 17th, 1956

3 *Waterbury Sunday Republican*, August 26, 1956.

4 *Ibid.* A "Jacob's ladder" is a ladder consisting of two vertical ropes connected by wooden rungs.

wife Barbara, and their two children—also made the fateful choice to book a passage on the ship after vacationing in Italy. Recounting the story for Joseph Chase Allen of the *Vineyard Gazette*, Barbara Boggs described the moments after the collision:

We didn't stop to speak or pause to think. Our first thought was to get Robert [Jr.] out of his room, and we went down as fast as we could. The ship listed heavily, and instantly, so that it was difficult to move on the stairways, and through the corridors. We saw no one at all as we hurried to our room, but the place was filled with oil-smoke and steam. It was difficult to waken Robert, who was under the influence of his medicine [prescribed after a tonsillectomy], and we never thought of saving anything. We wrapped him up, took our life-preservers from the rack, and then went up to the promenade deck.⁵

There was no panic on deck, but also little guidance for the passengers on what to do. The lights remained lit, the pumps churned fruitlessly below decks, and announcements crackled over the intercom—in Italian, and so incomprehensible to most of the American passengers—but no crew members provided direction on what to do next. Unable to stand on the sloping, slippery deck the Boggs lay down “right on the edge, in the scuppers, on the low side.” A fellow passenger, a priest, instructed those around him on the proper technique for leaping into the water—feet-first, holding your lifejacket and covering your mouth—in case the boats could not be loaded in time. Other priests administered the last rites, adding to a sense of foreboding and hopelessness.

At last, after two hours, a sailor appeared and called women and children to the lifeboats. boats. Barbara Boggs and her children crawled up the sloping deck, and slid along a linoleum-covered corridor. “It was frightfully slippery,” she recalled, “and many people fell and suffered broken bones.” Finally, at the rail, reassurance came from an unlikely source: the waiter who had served the Boggs’ table in the dining saloon.

He gave us the first word of cheer I had heard. ‘Don’t worry Mrs. Boggs,’ he said, ‘everything is going to be all right. There is a ship standing by, Nantucket is near, and besides, I was sunk twice in the last war and it’s not nearly as bad as you might think.’ We had to go down a rope ladder which wobbled around frightfully. It was one of the Doria’s boats that waited below, but the ordeal was frightful . . . they literally jammed the lifeboat full of people, and it took close to an hour because of the difficulty in handling the elderly women and children. Some of them cried and declared they couldn’t make it . . . some people jumped from the deck above. But it only took about ten minutes to reach the *Ile de France*...they took us on deck in their arms, provided each one with a deck chair, blankets, and shoes and stockings, and later found us staterooms. They served us coffee and tea and tried in all ways to reassure us.⁶

5 *Vineyard Gazette*, July 31, 1956.

6 Ibid.

The Boggs, the McAdoods, and Richard Miller made it safely back to New York, though Robert Boggs later mused: “I didn’t know that I would ever want to see salt water again.”⁷ After reading about their experiences on that terrifying night, I thought again about the deck chair. Is it possible that Barbara Boggs or Mary McAdoo spent an afternoon lounging on it under the warm July sun? Could this have been the chair Richard Miller pulled the cushions from to use as a flotation device as he scrambled across the listing deck? Most likely not, but this chair was a part of that story, and when it was picked



Deck chairs on the *Andrea Doria* in happier times, shown in an Italian Lines brochure from the 1950s.

up by Arthur Sesselberg and Peter Mead on the beach after floating nearly 100 miles, it carried that story with it. One of the last articles published in the *Gazette* after the sinking of *Andrea Doria* read: “No one is likely to forget the *Andrea Doria* disaster, but even if it should grow dim in the memory of some Americans, it is not likely to go out of mind on the Vineyard for some months to come, or while the relics of the drowned vessel continue to turn up on Island shores.”⁸

As I worked on the Museum’s exhibit, making mounts for the wreckage of the *City of Columbus* and placing objects from the *Port Hunter* in their display cases, I was struck by the similarities between these pieces and the deck chair. They are all mementos of lost ships and reminders of the dangers posted by the sea, collected by Vineyarders who—more than most—are acutely aware of those dangers. In the end, I chose to incorporate the deck chair into the exhibit. The story it tells is one of survival at sea, and that is a Vineyard story.



The deck chair, along with artifacts and stories from other Vineyard shipwrecks, is part of the exhibit Shipwreck! Stories from Beneath the Sea, open at the Martha’s Vineyard Museum through December 2017.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Vineyard Gazette*, September 7, 1956.

BOOK REVIEWS

Peter Colt Josephs, *Tales of the Massachusetts South Seas: Stories of the Cape Cod Archipelago*. Illustrated by Jo Anne Briggs. Chilmark, MA: Published by the Author, 2017.

There is the history that is recorded in deeds and documents, letters and ledgers, photograph and film . . . and then there is the history that lives in the memories of those who witnessed it: the recollections of people and places, events and ways of life, now long gone. The two are, by their nature, complementary. Old letters, tattered graduation programs, and faded news clippings—the fragile paper traces that seem so insignificant, and yet are so vital to preserve—allows us to reconstruct what Dan Larson or Thankful Smith or the members of the irrepressible Alley family did in their time on Earth. The stories told by those who knew them—shared in conversation, captured in recordings, or written down and published—tell us who they *were*. Those stories are, to those of us who reconstruct the past and to anyone fascinated by it, pure historical gold.

Tales of the Massachusetts South Seas, by longtime Chilmark resident and frequent *Intelligencer* contributor Peter Colt Josephs, offers gold in abundance. It looks back over forty years, from 1938 to 1978, ranging from the uplands of Aquinnah to the cobbled beaches of Woods Hole but always returning to Chilmark, Menemsha, and (inevitably) the sea. The author declares, in a brief preface, that “the stories in this collection are basically true,” but that some names “have been partially or totally changed for privacy.” An appendix lists the pseudonyms (fifteen in all), along with the birth and death dates of the individuals they represent, preserving their anonymity for casual readers while enabling future historians to lift the veil.

And what stories they are! Josephs shares reminiscences of hurricanes and hunting expeditions, businesses and beach parties, swordfishing and excursions into corners of the Chilmark backcountry that—even today—summer visitors seldom see. There are profiles of everyone from Edgartown “country doctor” Robert Nevin and West Tisbury police chief Daniel Manter to (pseudonymous) “Morgan H. Poole,” who from his shop on the Menemsha docks “bought and sold virtually everything that swam in the sea or crawled on the sea floor.” There is “Clarence ‘Scup’ Tilton,” aka “Cap’n Swill,” who “always knew where the party was”—and always stayed afterward to bury the embers from the fire—and H. Stanton “Hun” Lair, who as a young man had raced jalopies on

ponds frozen solid by Vineyard winters, losing only one (thankfully in shallow water) in the process. Readers familiar with the homegrown Island folk song “Aphrodite”—the tale of a sleek motor yacht rigged for recreational swordfishing, sung to the tune of “Wabash Cannonball”—can find the story behind it here, along with a version of the lyrics, which (in good folk-music tradition) differ subtly from those recorded by Mark Lovewell on *Martha’s Vineyard Folk Songs*.

The stories are embellished with a range of helpful maps, glossaries of nautical and geographic terms (including Algonquin place names from southern New England), and fourteen pen-and-ink illustrations by Jo Anne Briggs. Printed on a satisfyingly heavy, smooth-surfaced paper and comb-bound with plastic overlays to protect the colored covers, it would make an attractive addition to any Vineyard coffee table—an 8½-by-11-inch portal into a vanished world, by way of the still-vivid memories of one who knew it first-hand.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper



Thomas Dresser. *Hidden History of Martha’s Vineyard*. Mt. Pleasant, SC: History Press, 2017.

In my experience, curiosity feeds knowledge and knowledge, in turn, feeds curiosity. A story revealed, a memorial plaque admired, or a name that reoccurs with genealogical significance then raise the curtain to the hidden world beneath.

Readers wishing to wade into the waters of Island and wet their toes in its alluring sagas will find Tom Dresser’s new book *Hidden History of Martha’s Vineyard* a wonderful place to start. The author’s effusive personality and probing style speak through the pages to demonstrate a heartfelt appreciation for Island life, Island personalities and Island lore. A treasure trove of tidbits awaits, all pointing to the tales seemingly hidden in plain sight all around us. For such a small area of land, and a past that spans back to the early 17th century while encompassing many tales yet to be uncovered but the author does his best, in his fast-paced narrative, to hit the high notes.

The breadth of the material covered in the book is wide, and the topics are diverse, but they wrap around revelations that intrigue the reader. Contemplate a hidden staircase in the old Daggett house in Edgartown while exploring the secret passage of escaped slaves who jumped ship in island harbors, and then were smuggled across the water into the hands of Quaker abolitionists through the use of the islands ties to the Underground Railroad. Discover the stories behind the place names we know

so well—Music Street in West Tisbury, Beetlebung Corner, East and West Chop. Plunge into the ocean depths with a chapter on “Island Shipwrecks,” discovering the tragedies that befell vessels and the heroic rescue attempts by Islanders, crew, and passing ships alike. Explore the mystery surrounding the wreck of the *John Dwight* in 1923 at the height of the Prohibition era, a potential rumrunning scheme gone awry complete with two captains missing among the crew of dead and the ships long boat recovered on Naushon Island. Readers will see familiar Island structures such as the Flying Horses in Oak Bluffs, Harbor View Hotel in Edgartown or the Vineyard Playhouse with fresh eyes, thanks to the insider information gathered by Dresser in diligent interviews with the owners.

Sprinkled throughout the book are photographs from the Martha’s Vineyard Museum archives, along with others taken by the author’s wife, Joyce Dresser, who obviously has a keen eye for detail. Photographs from Connie Sanborn’s beautiful collection adorn several of the pages as well.

The stories in *Hidden History of Martha’s Vineyard* will sate the curiosity of some readers, and encourage others to look further into the depths that brim beneath the surface to the mysteries of the histories that encircle our island world. The author ends by challenging us to push ourselves to discover more about our past, and better understand the origins of familiar things we think we already know. *Hidden History* is an invitation to keep opening the doors that lead into unexpected corners of the past, and can expand our understanding of how our proud Island culture was formed. After all, when we look beyond our knowledge of the present, we often see ourselves in the past that unfolds before us.

— Elizabeth Trotter

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Work of Many Hands

What do a community member, museum volunteer and a staff member all have in common? All are contributing authors to the current *Intelligencer*. To have members of all parts of the Island community participating in the *Intelligencer* speaks volumes about how the Museum's journal is all of ours ... "this is your museum, our museum," and so too the *Intelligencer*. It is, most definitely, all of ours.

I asked Bow Van Riper to look into just how many folks have contributed over the *Intelligencer*'s sixty-six years in print, and the numbers are surprising. From the first issue in August 1959 to the current issue you hold in your hand, the *Intelligencer* has published roughly 440 bylined articles representing the work of 188 different contributors. Twenty-five authors have published four or more articles apiece, with the late Art Railton, editor from 1979-2006, topping the list with 76 bylined pieces. Florence Kern (14), Dorothy Cottle Poole (13), and founding editor Gale Huntington (13) round out the "double-digit club," *but a even more interesting story lies in what internet scholars call "the long tail:"* 126 contributors wrote (or co-wrote) only a single article. Setting aside Art Railton's monu, the average number of articles per contributor is a modest 1.9 . . . which is to say, the *Intelligencer* is, and always has been, the work of many hands.

Many—quite possibly *most*—of the articles are by people whose current or former "day jobs" have nothing to do with history or writing and whose first publications were in the *Intelligencer* (e.g. Sarah Shepard and my dear friend Liz Trotter, from this very issue). The museum's Curator of Exhibitions, Anna Barber, stepped up to contribute when she made an awesome connection between the *Andrea Doria* and the Vineyard, all shown in our current shipwreck exhibit. Come and see!

This diverse lineup of contributors is no fluke. The *Intelligencer* publishes the work of professional historians and professional writers, but is open to anyone with a love of the Island and a story to tell. It welcomes such contributors; in fact, it wouldn't exist without them.



Phil Wallis
Executive Director

Small Things, Forgotten

Asked about the documents stored, in acid-free boxes and folders, in the Museum's climate-controlled archives, I usually talk about the magnificently illustrated log of the whaler *Iris*, or the letters that young men from the Vineyard sent home from the Civil War. They are among the treasures of our collection, and they make the past come thrillingly alive. Documents like the one pictured here—a crumpled almost-rectangle two inches by four, hastily cut from a larger, printed sheet—seem mundane by comparison, but they, too, have stories to tell.

This unprepossessing slip of paper reveals a glimpse of young Uriah Coffin of Edgartown, who (on the afternoon he received it) doubtless hurried home from school, eager to show his parents written proof of his industry and studiousness. It calls our attention to his teacher, Silvanus L. Pease: his belief in the motivating power of praise and his connection (if only passing) to printer Dunbar, of Taunton. It even—for a brief, flickering moment—illuminates Uriah's nameless parents: proud enough of their son's achievements to tuck away the evidence of it away for safekeeping, beginning a chain of improbable

events that (though they would surely have been stunned to imagine such a thing) enabled us to study it in 2017.

We know little of Silvanus, less of Uriah, and nothing at all of his parents, but—thanks to this improbably long-lived slip of paper—we can glimpse a brief moment in their lives.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

REWARD OF MERIT.



Granted to

Uriah Coffin

for diligence and attention to study, and good behavior in school.

Silvanus L. Pease

HYMN.

I thank the Lord who lives on high :
He heard an infant pray,
And cur'd me, that I should not die,
And took my pains away,

O let me thank and love thee too,
As long as I shall live ;
And every naughty thing I do,
I pray thee to forgive.

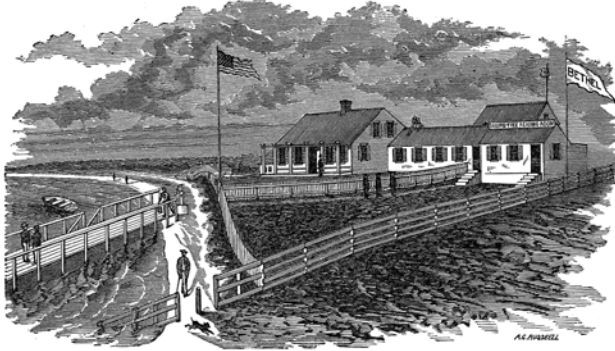
Sold by F. Dunbar, Taunton, Mass.



The Edgartown Harbor Light, built in 1834, looks solid and imposing in this picture from mid-September 1938, but it suffered from rotting timbers and chronic vermin infestations. The Coast Guard planned to demolish it, erecting a modern steel-skeleton tower in its place, but the citizens of Edgartown had other ideas.

The story of what happened next—including a hurricane, a soon-to-be-famous newspaper editor, and an unlikely victory of small-town sentiment over progress—will appear in a forthcoming issue of the Intelligencer.

WELCOME TO SEAMEN.



SAILORS' FREE Reading Room, Library and Chapel, ON UNION BLUFF, VINEYARD HAVEN.

All seamen, of whatever nation, and the public are earnestly invited to visit the above named institution, and to attend public worship there Sunday forenoons and evenings, and Thursday evenings. Bell rings half an hour before service. Free seats. Free gospel. No contribution-boxes. No respect to persons on account of dress, color or religious opinions. "The word of God is not bound" to any sect, party or nation.

In front of the premises there is a good wharf affording about seven feet of water for landing, also at head of the same there is a well of fresh water and all the means for filling casks in boats.

The Reading-room is supplied regularly with twenty-five different newspapers including dailies, semi-weeklies and weeklies, giving the marine news for the Atlantic coast, besides representing the religious views of several Christian sects.

Adjoining the Reading-room arrangements have been made for a Museum. All sailors and others are earnestly invited to aid in securing for it marine shells, minerals, fossil remains and curiosities from all parts of the world. Indian relics and all things relating to the early history of Martha's Vineyard are especially desirable.

The Library contains over eleven hundred bound books, including some of the latest publications, together with pamphlets, charts and other documents useful to seamen. All the conveniences for writing letters, including stationery, etc., at hand, and a U. S. Mail-box is confined at the gate from which letters are carried daily to the post-office.

All seamen, yacht clubs, and the public are cordially invited to make use of all the privileges mentioned above, free of charge.

U. S. Coast Survey Charts and Tide Tables, direct from Washington, for sale at Government prices.

Citizens and visitors to the Vineyard are invited to take books from the Library for two weeks at a time, without compensation.

A drive has been opened from the Reading-room to the main road, leading to the village and the light-house.

Vineyard Haven, Martha's Vineyard, Mass. 1875.



The flyer created by Rev. Stevens to advertise his Mission to Seamen, enumerating a range of attractions from free water and government charts sold at cost to fellowship and spiritual renewal.