

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



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 55, No. 1

WINTER 2013

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## Left Behind:

George Cleveland,  
George Fred Tilton  
& the Last Whaler  
to Hudson Bay

## Lagoon Heights Remembrances



## The Big One: Hurricane of '38

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### TO OUR READERS

THIS ISSUE of the *Dukes County Intelligencer* is remarkable in its diversity. Our lead story comes from frequent contributor Chris Baer, who writes a swashbuckling narrative of two of the Vineyard's most adventurous, daring — and quirky — characters, George Cleveland and George Fred Tilton, whose arctic legacies continue to this day. Our second story came about when Florence Obermann Cross suggested to a gathering of old friends that they write down their childhood memories of shared summers on the Lagoon. The result is a collective recollection of cottages without electricity or water; good neighbors; artistic and intellectual inspiration; sailing, swimming and long-gone open views. This is a slice of Oak Bluffs history beyond the more well-known Cottage City and Campground stories. Finally, the Museum's chief curator, Bonnie Stacy, has reminded us that 75 years ago the '38 hurricane, the mother of them all, was unannounced and deadly, even here on Martha's Vineyard.

— Susan Wilson, editor

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# Left Behind

George Cleveland, George Fred Tilton,  
And the Last Whaler to Hudson Bay

by CHRIS BAER

I'M TOLD THEY'RE HAUNTED NOW. Nobody lives within seventy miles of the ancient wooden buildings which still stand watch over this treeless, rocky, storm-wracked coastline. Temperatures regularly dip below -40°F (and sometimes -50°F) during the long, dark winters. "Hunters refuse to stay overnight as they have experienced eerie sights," writes U., whose grandfather — known to the whalers only as "Madeye" for his piercing blue eyes — spent much of his childhood here. Welcome to Cape Fullerton, Nunavut, the site of a unique meeting in 1917 between two larger-than-life Martha's Vineyard adventurers — George Cleveland and George Fred Tilton — who met here to unravel the mysterious fate of the last, disastrous whaling voyage to Hudson Bay.

George Cleveland (1871-1925) was born on Hatch Road in the part of Vineyard Haven once known as "The Neck." His father was a young Vineyard Haven minstrel show musician whose day jobs over the years included harness-maker, livery driver, fisherman, and peanut vendor. His mother was a teenager who spent a fair part of her childhood in the New Bedford Orphans Home. George grew up poor, nearly illiterate, and born far too late to be involved in Vineyard whaling, but found work nevertheless aboard transatlantic merchant ships as a young teenager.<sup>1</sup>

1 The last whaling office in Vineyard Haven sold its ship the year Cleveland was born. J. M. Taber's agency for the whaling brig *Mercy Taylor* also doubled as a Main Street clothing store. During the late 1860s Taber published help-wanted ads in the *Gazette* to man his voyages, next to his advertisements for "Gent's Under Garments" and "Belle Monte Patent Hoop Skirts."

Chris Baer teaches photography, design, and technology at the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School, and writes occasionally for the *Dukes County Intelligencer*. His great-great-grandmother Fannie and her sister Ann (George Cleveland's mother) grew up together in the New Bedford Orphan's Home before moving to Martha's Vineyard. Chris maintains a website documenting George Cleveland's story at [www.oldtimeislands.org/Cleveland/index.html](http://www.oldtimeislands.org/Cleveland/index.html).

In 1895 Cleveland was assaulted in New Bedford, knocked unconscious, thrown in a boat, and shanghaied. He woke up on a 17-month whaling voyage to Hudson Bay, leaving behind his wife and two children, aged two and five. Eight months after an arduous arctic adventure he was shanghaied again on a second arctic-bound whaler. He eventually developed a reputation in the north as a skilled harpooner.

In 1900, after a shipwreck and a misunderstanding with his New Bedford employers, Cleveland was abandoned at Wager Inlet — almost two thousand miles from home — to starve alone in the arctic tundra wilderness of Nunavut. Rescued and adopted by the nomadic Aivilingmiut people, Cleveland learned the survival skills, Inuktitut language, and customs of his indigenous rescuers. He had several years of incredible adventures — polar bear attacks, storms, shipwrecks, famine, epidemics. He once drifted lost at sea for five days on a slab of ice without food, and upon returning to shore became an accidental cannibal after mistaking a grave for a meat cache. The ex-whaler from Martha's Vineyard became the magnificent and eccentric Sakuuaqtiruniq ("the Harpooner"), a northern legend.

Cleveland eventually joined up with a Scottish whaling and trading firm which arrived in Repulse Bay in 1902. The Scots had a feverish sailor aboard and his illness — possibly dysentery — raged through the Aivilingmiut at Repulse Bay as Cleveland watched helplessly. It exterminated the entire population of the mysterious Sadlermiut on nearby Southampton and Coats islands. The shy, reclusive Sadlermiut were not Inuit at all but the last survivors of the Dorset, a stone-age people who lived throughout eastern Canada and Greenland and had once greeted Vikings. Their culture had been driven to near extinction as the Inuit slowly pushed eastward from Alaska before 1500, and the 1902 epidemic finished them off. They were remembered by the Inuit as speaking in odd "baby voices," wearing their hair in topknots, traveling in inflated skin boats and living in stone houses. An Inuit legend held they were descended from a race of giants. Their passing left both Southampton and Coats islands uninhabited by humankind.

### **The 1913 Voyage of the *A.T. Gifford***

This story begins in 1913, one hundred years ago this spring. Cleveland had temporarily returned to the Vineyard. While he was in the north his estranged wife had died of a mysterious morphine overdose in her lover's Vineyard Haven home<sup>2</sup>, and their two children, abandoned by both parents, had been raised by their grandparents. Whaling was almost completely dead, and was now simply an excuse to trade for furs with the Inuit.

So, in June 1913, a year before World War I began, Cleveland chose to

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2 "Suspicious Case. Death of Mrs. Cleveland to be Investigated" *The Lowell Sun*, Sept. 6, 1901.

go back to the arctic as a fur trader. He was hired by the New York furrier F. N. Monjo to establish a new trading post on Hudson Bay, and was instructed to travel north on Monjo's whaler, *A.T. Gifford*. His assistant or partner was a Mr. Bumpus, about whom little has been learned.<sup>3</sup>

The Monjo company's owner, Ferdinand N. Monjo of Stamford, Connecticut, was a wealthy and successful independent furrier. His business had been founded in Brooklyn, New York by his father Nicholas, a Spanish immigrant from Algiers, shortly after the Civil War. The Monjo company leased an enormous storefront in Manhattan and had a presence in the arctic for many years.

The captain of the *Gifford* was 62-year-old James Allen Wing, a New Bedford native who had worked on board a whaler since the age of eleven.

His father, Capt. Andrew Wing, became a whaling legend in 1854 after he and his shipwrecked crew rowed over 3000 miles to safety across the Pacific in open whaleboats. The younger Wing found his own adventures on the crew of the bark *Belevdere*, trapped off the north coast of Alaska in the infamous "ice catch of 1898." (The *Belevdere*'s third mate, George Fred Tilton of Chilmark, left for California on foot — walking, sledding, and hitching his way back to San Francisco for help.) Described as "courteous and agreeable," by 1913 Captain Wing was



George Cleveland, photographed in 1922 by Knud Rasmussen's Thule Expedition. (All images provided by Chris Baer)

considered an excellent navigator with many years of experience in arctic waters. He had just left his position as master of the steam bark *Gay Head* in San Francisco to come east to take command of Monjo's *A.T. Gifford*, an 83-foot two-masted schooner recently fitted with a newfangled gasoline engine.

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3 He may have been a near family member of Hermon Carey Bumpus, Director of the American Museum of Natural History, who had connections to the Monjo company and a deep interest in the arctic.

The *Gifford* left in June with a crew of fourteen and a large load of lumber to build a home and post for Cleveland. Badly leaking and hobbled by a disabled engine clutch, the *Gifford* limped into St. John's Harbour in Newfoundland twelve days later for repairs. A group of crewmen, alarmed by the state of the vessel, complained to the local Consul, but instead of finding a sympathetic ear they were subsequently locked in the local jail. On July 10th, the repairs complete, the rest of the crew deserted. Wing wrote in his log,

Thursday 10

All ready for sea. Mate Thomas 2nd Mate Briggs Steward Engineer Colins Deserted leaving Mr. Cleaveland + Bumpus for a crew. Got out warrant for Arrest of Deserters. Polise unable to find them.

With the help of a local agent, Captain Wing recruited and hired a new mate, a second mate, and three new crewmen, who were each paid a \$10 advance three days after leaving port. Retrieving the rest of the crewmen from the jail, and paying the police fifty cents for each, they departed.

By the beginning of August they arrived in Hudson Bay. Impossible ice conditions prevented them from reaching Lyon Inlet, a favorite whaling ground and their first choice for the location of Cleveland's new post. Instead, they settled for Cape Fullerton, some 225 miles distant.

Cape Fullerton lies on the far northwestern shore of Hudson Bay in what is today the Canadian territory of Nunavut, and lies just 180 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Early 20th century charts were quite inaccurate for this area, and compasses refuse to work here due to widespread magnetic disturbances. Dangerous shoals, reefs, and sunken rocks make entering tiny, shallow Fullerton Harbour a challenge for even the most skilled navigators during the two or three months each summer when the water is navigable. In the winter, the ice in the harbor often exceeds six feet in thickness. Still, Fullerton Harbour had been a favorite wintering spot for whalers for several decades. Monjo's *A.T. Gifford* had wintered here most recently in 1911-12 under the command of Capt. George Comer.<sup>4</sup>

On August 27, 1913 the *Gifford* arrived at Cape Fullerton and successfully anchored in Fullerton Inner Harbor. This was to be George Cleveland's home for the next five years.

### **The Police**

The only other white residents of Fullerton in 1913 were two mounties, Edgerton and Conway, who lived across the small inner harbor. They had

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4 Captain Comer, a renowned whaler and amateur anthropologist who was recently the subject of a major exhibition at the Mystic Seaport, was once described as Cleveland's "arch enemy." Cleveland held Comer partly to blame for his abandonment in 1900. They later had a fistfight on the beach, which Comer got the worst of.

arrived the previous September. The Royal Northwest Mounted Police had established one of its most isolated outposts here in 1903, both to establish Canadian sovereignty as well as to keep an eye on foreign whaling ships to ensure they were properly licensed and taxed by the Canadian government. The police collected customs and did their best to extend the reach of Canadian law into the region.

William Edgerton was a calm, black-haired Englishman in his mid-thirties who was short a few teeth. His younger partner Patrick Conway was a heavyset redheaded Irishman with a taste for liquor and a thick disciplinary record that grew thicker whenever he left the arctic. Two Inuit assistants also worked at the post, named “Oog-Joug” and “Dooley”. Their true names were not recorded — the Fullerton police, like the whalers, assigned the Inuit nicknames like “Molasses,” “Billy Brass,” and “Billy be Damned” (all of whom had

worked for the Fullerton detachment in the early 1910s).

The four men spent their days hunting for dog food; maintaining their boat, sleds, and buildings; making lengthy patrols to visit natives and obtain news from the south; running mail to and acquiring supplies



Police barracks at Fullerton Harbour.

from Chesterfield Inlet; ensuring that musk ox hunting rules were followed; and making lengthy reports to the divisional headquarters. They spoke no Inuktitut. Edgerton wrote in May 1913, shortly before the *Gifford* arrived, “Fullerton, during the winter, has been very lonely. Constable Conway, myself, and the two natives, being only persons here; most of the time one police and one native only, the other two being away on patrol.” When Cleveland and the *A.T. Gifford* arrived in August, Edgerton and Conway had just finished painting all their buildings “ordinance blue.”

### Fall 1913

The police were happy to see the *Gifford* arrive, for a number of reasons. First, it justified their presence. Second, they were running low on provisions, and nearby Chesterfield Inlet had even less. Captain Wing gave them

four barrels of bread from the *Gifford's* supplies, totaling 300 pounds.

Chesterfield Inlet, some seventy miles south as the ptarmigan flies, was and is the nearest permanent settlement to Fullerton. Today a community of about 330 people, in 1913 it consisted of a small Hudson's Bay Company post and a new Roman Catholic mission, neither of which had found much success so far. The post attracted a large but transient population of Inuit families. In summer, when sailing conditions are fair, Chesterfield is accessible by boat from Fullerton. In winter, if the weather cooperates, it's (at best) a three or four-day journey with a team of dogs and a sled. But weather rarely cooperates at Cape Fullerton, and Fullerton is completely cut off from the south for six weeks or more each fall while the inlet freezes over.

The *A.T. Gifford* at anchor, Cleveland borrowed the ship's steam launch and four crewmen to sail south to Chesterfield Inlet to recruit local staff for his station, as there were no workers available at Fullerton other than the two natives employed by the police. Cleveland departed in a heavy downpour and returned after a week straight of hard rain and squalls with a new boat, a new crew and a team of dogs.

Cleveland and his new crew hauled lumber ashore from the *Gifford* and started construction on a point of land on the inner harbor, directly opposite the police barracks. Another week of "very nasty" weather followed — rain, snow and wind. On Monday Sept. 15, 1913, Wing discharged Cleveland and Bumpus to take charge of the new station. As Wing prepared to depart, winds grew into a stiff gale. "*Hell of a Hole Fullerton*" the captain concluded in his log.

In the back of his logbook, Wing recorded a long list of food supplies titled "For Mr. Cleaveland." It included 700 lbs. of sugar; a long list of fruits and vegetables; coffee and tea; pork, beef, ham, sausage and bacon; Irish Stew, apple jelly, molasses, rolled oats and buckwheat; allspice, nutmeg, cloves, and curry; pickles, tripe, and oysters; and much more. This was probably as much for trade as it was for Cleveland's consumption.

Captain Wing departed the next day, and two days later anchored for the winter at Marble Island, some 110 miles to the south.<sup>5</sup> The ship and the station remained in occasional contact by dogsled during the winter. By October, almost all the Aivilingmiut had left Fullerton to their wintering grounds in Repulse Bay, Rankin Inlet and Baker Lake — each well over one hundred miles from Fullerton to the north, south, and west. Only

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5 Roughly the size of Chappaquiddick, Marble Island was another favorite wintering spot for whalers, including some Vineyarders. Captain Wing undoubtedly visited the monument erected there in the memory of John C. Randall of Vineyard Haven and his crewmates, for instance, who were lost on the ice in 1874.

a very few stayed behind with their families to work for the police or at Cleveland's new trade store.

It was a tough winter. Fur was scarce, but the Chesterfield HBC post was almost out of provisions and ammunition to trade, so Cleveland had little commercial competition. The police detachment was running short of provisions too, and drew from Cleveland's supply. Edgenton and Oog-Joug made a patrol fifty miles north to relieve a group of starving Aivilingmiut at Salmon River. Cleveland took his own trip inland to Baker Lake, perhaps to hunt musk ox.

Upon his return, Constable Edgenton became seriously ill and feverish and left for the Catholic mission at Chesterfield Inlet for care. Father Turquetil (Oomilik, "the Bearded One") and Father LeBlanc (Idgalik, "the one who wore glasses") had opened a mission there in 1912, but were unsuccessful in converting any of the Inuit to Christianity until years later. Father LeBlanc would eventually commit suicide in 1916.

### **Cape Fullerton**

Cape Fullerton — known in Inuktitut as "Qatiktalik" — is a low, rocky, treeless tundra. Interconnected freshwater ponds full of salmon and char crater the countryside so densely that "landscape" is almost a misnomer. Twice a year, typically March and November, polar bears cross through, while tundra wolves howl at night. Caribou, white fox, ground squirrels and hares are commonly seen, and musk ox roam the tundra within hunting range.

In 1913 only about 1100 Inuit inhabited the vast regions north and northwest of Hudson Bay, divided among a half dozen nomadic groups often separated by hundreds of miles. The Aivilingmiut (sometimes known as the "Aivilik" or "Iwilic"), numbered about 125 people, and would travel to Fullerton regularly from as far north as Repulse Bay, drawn by the promise of trading or finding work with the whalers. The men and women were both heavily tattooed, traditionally covering their face, shoulders, wrists, and legs after marriage. They spoke a dialect of Inuktitut, the native language understood from Alaska to Greenland.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Edgenton and Conway's predecessor, Fullerton policeman C. N. C. Hayter, had been tasked with taking the 1911 census. Singlehandedly travelling 1500 miles by sled to fill out census forms, the police finally concluded "Owing to the nomadic character of these natives in that part of the country it was useless to try and fill up the regular census forms, and a statement was made as accurately as possible from information obtained. These people have no idea whatever of their age. Old and young is as near as they can get at it, and of course they know nothing of our divisions of time. They are sometimes polygamists, sometimes polyandrists. They are fond of children but change them about, adopting some or giving their own away according to convenience, so that it is hard to reckon by families." This census has since been lost.

## 1914: Murders and Departures

In the late spring of 1914, constables Edgerton and Conway left on an murder manhunt and never returned. Three weeks before the *A.T. Gifford* arrived, a trader known as “Cow-Muck” had brought news to Edgerton of the killing of two explorers named Radford and Street at Bathurst Inlet, some six hundred miles inland. It was dismissed as a “yarn” until a second traveler from the region corroborated the story. By the winter of 1913-14, the RNWMP were gearing up for what was to be one of the most extensive manhunts in the history of the Canadian police force. The decision was made to temporarily close the Fullerton police post and consolidate forces in preparation for the murder expedition. Cleveland and his staff became the official caretakers of the post and its supplies in their absence.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, after a fruitless season of floe whaling near Marble Island, the crew of the *A.T. Gifford* sawed and blasted away the ice trapping their ship in mid-July 1914, and the ship was finally freed from its winter lodging. Captain Wing cruised Hudson Bay for whales and returned for a brief visit to Fullerton Harbour on July 27th, 1914, only to find that the harbor was still frozen with three feet of solid ice. They visited two or three more times that summer and finally departed for good in late August.<sup>8</sup> The Aivilingmiut reportedly nicknamed the *Gifford* the “Puffing Gimlet” on account of its gasoline engine.

Wing made a few notes at the back of his logbook, including a list of skins Cleveland had obtained through trade over the winter:

### Skins Cleaveland

22 Musk Ox

8 Bear

251 Fox

8 Wolf

3 Wolverine

He also noted that the Station had obtained 200 lbs of ivory. Overall, it was a very poor haul.

The *A.T. Gifford* returned to New Bedford without Cleveland in September 1914 after a very rough 21-day return passage. Upon passing Gay Head, Captain Wing tucked his loose notes and correspondence together with the engine’s manual into the back of his logbook and concluded, “So ends one of the worst and poorest voyages I ever made in 50 y[ears].” Wing returned to his home in Berkeley California and to his old vessel, the *Gay Head*, rather than continuing his employment with Monjo on the *Gifford*.

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7 The mounties finally got their men in 1917. Two Inuit men confessed and justified their actions in self-defense. They were let go with a stern warning.

8 Monjo had also tasked Wing with returning with two live white foxes for breeding purposes. It is unclear whether he was successful.

(This was a prescient decision as well as an easy one.) Records of Mr. Bumpus, Cleveland's assistant, end in spring 1914; he almost certainly returned with the *Gifford* as well.

The expedition was a significant financial loss. Only two whales were seen during the entire voyage, and none caught. It was said to be the worst fur season in Hudson Bay in at least seventeen years; the winter's yield of furs was deeply disappointing. In their absence the fur market in Europe and the US had collapsed, and a world war had broken out. Cleveland later claimed he didn't learn about the war for another two years.

### Family Life

Cleveland was now alone with the Aivilingmiut at Fullerton Harbour. The building that was his home and store was a 22 by 25 foot square wooden house partitioned into four cramped rooms. Assuming his partner Bumpus had indeed left on the *Gifford*, one can imagine the prospect of sharing a 500 square-foot dwelling with Cleveland in forty-below weather might have something to do with it. Cleveland would have made, by most accounts, an abominable roommate. He has been described by various sources as "loud" and "imposing." He kept lemmings as pets, running loose about his cabin at night. He ate with knives rather than a fork. His taste for alcohol was legendary, and his "parties" are the basis of many colorful and outrageous stories about him.<sup>9</sup>

Archie Hunter wrote of him in his memoir *Northern Traders*, "Cleveland was a big, bombastic man who, whatever the topic, was certain he was always right. There was no way you could argue with Captain Cleveland."

Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen, who encountered Cleveland on a visit to his post in the early 1920s, was a bit more generous: "He had been through all manner of adventures, but neither shipwreck nor starvation, not to speak of the other forms of adversity that had fallen to his lot, could sour his cheery temper or impair his steady, seaman-like assurance of manner."

Jakob Olsen, a Greenlandic Inuk on Rasmussen's team, described:

...a white American Trader called Mr. Cleveland — 'him with the big nose' as they said... The people there called him 'Sakkuartuerneq' (the former harpooner) because he had at one time been a harpooner on a whaler when the English still came up there after whales, but has given this up owing to advancing old age. He had lived amongst them for more than 30 years and spoke the local language pretty well, although not really fluently. It was a pleasure to visit him because he wasn't at all 'high-falutin' and, although he was pretty old, he was lots of fun.

Peter Freuchen, another member of Rasmussen's team, wrote many colorful stories about Cleveland.

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<sup>9</sup> See Peter Freuchen's *Men of the Frozen North* (World Publishing Company, 1962) for one colorful account of spending Christmas Eve at Cleveland's post.

He was an enormous man with a far-reaching voice. He was the only white man in the district, and he lived like a native in that he had three wives. He received us with open arms, apologizing that he had lived in a country where a man could get only six bottles of liquor a year — ‘for medicinal purposes.’ ... The Danish expedition arrived with what seemed to be a bottomless amount of liquor — for us Danes, that is; not for captains from Martha’s Vineyard.

By the time he arrived in Fullerton in 1913 at the age of 42, Cleveland had already fathered at least a dozen children — two on Martha’s Vineyard and at least ten more in the arctic, birthed and raised by six Inuit women scattered across the north. Like many northern whalers, Cleveland engaged in traditional spouse-sharing customs and probably also a form



Cleveland’s son Kripanik, born at Fullerton.

of prostitution during times of famine.<sup>10</sup> He may not have had long-term relationships with some of the women, but others he lived with for many years, often sharing them with a second husband. Because no written birth records exist it’s not always possible to pinpoint the exact birth years of all his children, nor is it always possible to determine paternity with certainty,<sup>11</sup> but there is strong evidence that during his five years in Fullerton he fathered at least three more children with three different women:

**Kripanik.** Kripanik was born about 1916, the son of Cleveland and an Aivilingmiut teenager named Arnaujaq. Arnaujaq’s half-sister Kiatschuk had also been fathered by Cleveland, ten years earlier.<sup>12</sup> Arnaujaq’s biological father was Scottish whaler Alexander Murray, Cleveland’s old employer and one of the men responsible for accidentally bringing the epidemic

which killed the Sadlermiut on Southampton and Coats islands in 1902. Kripanik is remembered as a man who spoke his mind, and as one grand-

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10 One of Cleveland’s grandchildren wrote, “Our grandmother...stated that she was pushed to have sex with Cleveland by her husband.”

11 Peter Freuchen expressed a level of certainty in his book *Vagrant Vikings*: “There could never be any doubt about the paternity, all these little Eskimos had Cleveland’s nose, which was larger than any nose ever seen in the Arctic.”

12 Their mother was Kasugiaq, who had a relationship with Cleveland during his time at Wager Inlet and Repulse Bay years before.

child writes, “My grandfather always had something to say about anything and everything.” A niece writes he “was an exact mirror image of our grandfather George.” Kripanik and his wife had eleven children and adopted five more. He died in 2004, and may have been the last surviving child of George Cleveland.

**Anulik.** Anulik was born roughly 1916, the daughter of Cleveland and an Aivilingmiut woman known as “Topsy.” Anulik became an Igloolik sculptor. She had four children and adopted a fifth.

**Ipiksaut.** Ipiksaut was born about 1918, the daughter of Cleveland’s long-term wife Taututtiaq and was the youngest of five children conceived by Cleveland and Taututtiaq during their many years together in the north.<sup>13</sup> Two of Ipiksaut’s older brothers, Nangaat Issigaitok and Siusarnaat — both biological sons of Cleveland — fell through the ice and died tragically, possibly during his time at Fullerton. Ipiksaut became an artist and raised a family of eleven children.

During his years at Fullerton, Cleveland undoubtedly also had ongoing familial relationships with a number of his other children and their mothers as well, including Sapinaq, with whom he had fathered a son named Amiimiaqjuk about 1910 and with whom he was living with in the early 1920s. He was probably also in regular contact with his teenage son Qinguq (“Madeye”) and his mother Tukitakik, his daughter Inukpaujaq and her mother Qalingaq, and his daughter Arnaquasaq and her mother Olepeka.

Greenlandic Inuk Jakob Olsen described Cleveland in the early 1920s:

This white man had three wives, all with husbands already, and he let them take turns coming in to him. He also had several children from his third wife. It was amusing to us that, whenever he wanted any of our goods, he had to have three of the same thing. He had his meals in the house along with his helpers and his wives and children.

By 1918 Cleveland had conceived at least thirteen children with eight different Inuit women. One of his Inuit great-granddaughters clarified his nickname in an uncomfortable email to me:

It’s a strange feeling to write this, but, I guess I have to... Perhaps, “Sakuatiruniq” was given to George Cleveland as he couldn’t stay with one partner too long, instead of being referred to as a good harpooner....This is one elder’s explanation....I realize you are considering that indeed this is a complex and sensitive topic. As the younger generations perhaps are not aware of who is related to who, but, on the other hand, it’s not a bad idea either to know their ancestry. I

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<sup>13</sup> Taututtiaq’s other husband was a hunter named Qillaq, also known as “Johnny Cleveland.” Qillaq, the son of a Portuguese whaler, was a longtime working partner of Cleveland’s and was described as “honest, hard-working and fiercely loyal” to Cleveland and his company.

know that it would bring up deep personal issues with some of the elders. I know it was a very sensitive topic for my own father.

## Trading

Cleveland hired the Aivilingmiut to hunt and trap for him — mostly white fox, but also wolverine, polar bear, and musk ox. A good white fox pelt could sell for \$40 or more in New York during the 1910s, although the Inuit hunter who caught one was only paid the equivalent of about fifty cents in trade goods.

Jakob Olsen continues:

I looked forward to the trading because I wanted to see how it would be conducted. Well, toward evening they came in carrying a sackcloth bag filled with foxes. As they came in, the big white man [Cleveland] asked them how many foxes they had. Since they didn't know, he counted them himself and told them how many there were. At last the bartering began. 'Namik, namik?' ['What, what (do you want)?'] the white man simply repeated. They would point to the merchandise they wanted, and taking it, would say, 'Qujannamik, alianai!' ['Thank you, great!'] Before they had collected in goods the equivalent value of the foxes they were selling, the trader said, 'Tagva quit nunguttualuit' ['There, the money's all used up'] and that was the end of the deal.

## The Last Voyage of the *A.T. Gifford*

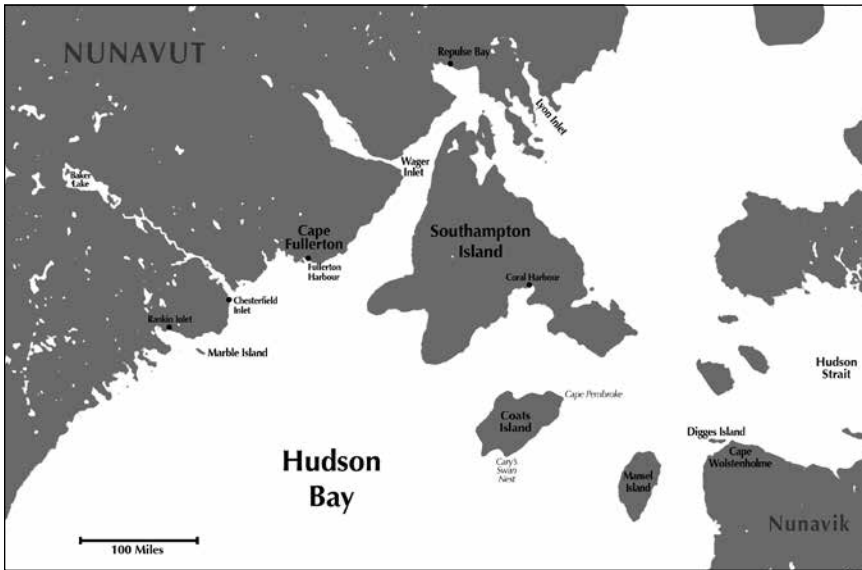
Cleveland sent a letter via the Chesterfield HBC post to the Monjo company during the winter of 1914-15 stating that he had been "successful in securing some furs" during his second winter season at Fullerton. In April, the newspapers announced Monjo's intentions to send the *A.T. Gifford* north once again to pick them up and deliver supplies. *The Boston Globe* noted "The *Gifford* will not winter in Hudson Bay as has been the custom." The fur market was still very weak.

By June, Monjo had recruited a new captain to replace Captain Wing: Capt. Arthur O. Gibbons, a deeply experienced 56-year-old whaler from Norwich Connecticut. He was described as both "a skipper of the old school" and "unusually short" — by one account, he was the shortest man on the crew.<sup>14</sup> In addition to briefly serving as captain of the famous *Charles W. Morgan*, among his many other commands, he had also served as master of the *Francis Allyn* in 1897 — the arctic voyage on which young George Cleveland had been shanghaied for the second time.

The biography of Rev. Charles Thurber of the New Bedford Seaman's Bethel, *And God Caught an Eel*, describes the start of the 1915 *Gifford* expedition:

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14 A number of previous crew lists record his height at 5'7" — not particularly short — so this may have been storytelling flourish. Nevertheless his physical dimensions become relevant later in our story...



Cape Fullerton and vicinity.

Whenever a whaler was going to leave New Bedford, Reverend Thurber wheeled several barrows of magazines and Bibles to the ship, along with the sewing kits that the Ladies' Branch of the Port Society had made up. The magazine most popular with the men was the *Ladies' Home Journal*. They liked the pictures that reminded them of the women-folk they had left behind them.

Often Reverend Thurber was called upon to hold divine services on the deck of a ship the day she sailed. He would trundle the little melodeon in his wheelbarrow down Johnny Cake Hill so that Mrs. Humphrey could play the hymns. The choir from the Bethel came to sing, and a good part of New Bedford turned out, too.

When the whaler *A.T. Gifford* was being fitted out for a cruise in Hudson Bay, four young men, on leave of absence from the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, stayed at the Mariner's Home waiting for the ship to be ready. They were eager, well-mannered young men whom the Thurbers enjoyed having, for they were full of fun and had along with them a flute, guitar, and some harmonicas.

Within a few days the ship was ready to go, and Reverend Thurber had taken his loads of magazines down, and on the last Sabbath in port wheeled the melodeon down for Mrs. Humphrey to play. As the people flocked along the dock they started up the hymn-singing.... A few days later the ship was towed out of the harbor to Hen and Chickens Lightship, where her sails were unfurled and hoisted for the voyage. The quickest she could be expected back was late September or October. If she did not get back in October, she would be ice-locked in Hudson Bay, even though she was fitted up with an auxiliary gasoline engine to push her through the slush ice, and had gasoline drums lashed on deck along the cabin walls.

The *A.T. Gifford* left for Hudson Bay in June 1915 with a crew of about fifteen men.<sup>15</sup> “The schooner was equipped with a motor and had 3000 gallons of gasoline aboard, which would send the schooner along a mile on a gallon” reported the *Boston Globe*.

On board was John Gorton, who had been hired to construct and operate a new trading station for Monjo at Lyon Inlet, the whaling ground east of Repulse Bay, with the help of one of Cleveland’s Inuit assistants and \$1000 of spruce lumber and supplies. Gorton was a last-minute substitute for his brother Joseph and his wife, who so angered Monjo with demands for additional money to pay bills that they were left at the wharf. (“Gortons Weep as Ship Sails” read the newspaper headlines.)

The rest of the crew included Thomas Stokes (who served as mate); Thomas Sullivan (the steward, a native of St. Helena island who had made four voyages to Hudson Bay including at least two with Cleveland); Joseph Gomes; William Van Patten; and Jack Morgan. Sullivan had packed several buckets of candy for his female Aivilingmiut friends, together with cloth, thread, and glass beads. Also on board were four dories; the newspapers noted that this was “the first time that these craft have found their way to Hudson Bay.”

The *A.T. Gifford*, under Captain Gibbons’ command, arrived at Fullerton Harbour without incident in September 1915. After dropping off Cleveland’s supplies and picking up the winter’s catch of furs, the ship departed for the whaling grounds. It was the last southern whaler to cruise Hudson Bay.<sup>16</sup> Cleveland wrote letters to his friends as well as to his mother in Vineyard Haven mentioning that the *A.T. Gifford* had picked up his furs and left on September 23rd. The letters would eventually arrive at their destinations on the Vineyard the following summer.

When the *Gifford* did not return to New Bedford by November, it was assumed they were forced to winter somewhere. While they did not intend to winter in Hudson Bay, Captain Gibbons had wisely prepared for this possibility and carried one full extra year of rations. Meanwhile, fur prices were soaring again in the United States — even the First Lady was wearing fox now — and the cargo of fur had spiked in value.

## 1916

Another winter passed, and it was a terrible one. An epidemic raged through the Aivilingmiut at the end of 1915, and the police reported a

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15 The exact number of crewmen is not known. No official crew list has been found.

16 Some argue that Comer’s 1919 *Finback* expedition was the last whaling voyage to Hudson Bay. Chartered by Norwegian ethnomusicologist Christian Leden, the *Finback* was wrecked on a reef upon arrival at Cape Fullerton. Fortunately, the entire crew was saved.

“great number dead” among their already thin population. The caribou did not come, and meat was very scarce throughout the district. Even seal hunting was extremely poor; there was near-starvation among the Aivilingmiut. Cleveland fed the families camped near Fullerton continually through the winter with the supplies he had received from the *Gifford* the previous fall. Many of the dogs died of starvation. There was a scarcity of fur-bearing animals as well, and white fox, bear, and musk ox were rarely seen all winter.

Sergeant-Major T. B. Caulkin of the RNWMP visited in March 1916 in a futile attempt to collect duty on Cleveland’s goods. Cleveland put him off with excuses. Upon inspecting the police buildings Caulkin noticed that:

Some things appeared to have been taken away, and others seemed to have decreased in quantities, since the patrol I made there in the spring of 1915. Articles such as rope, lumber for making sled runners, appeared to have gone, also tobacco and ammunition seemed to be reduced considerably in the trade store. There were no lists or books on the detachment, and I could not check over any stores.

Cleveland and his friends were apparently taking liberties. The other police-appointed caretaker, Ooug-Joog, had spent the previous summer filling two hundred sacks of coal (some forty tons) from the police station to be picked up, but by the spring the bags had rotted away. He spent the spring in the north, hunting musk ox.

RNWMP Inspector W. J. Beyts visited in July. He found the abandoned police detachment deteriorating and confirmed Caulkin’s observations. He placed the blame, probably unfairly, on the Aivilingmiut:

I have no list of stores, etc., on charge, but think there will be quite a number of things missing, as the locks seem to have been tampered with. I put a padlock on the detachment, also on the storehouse. Mr. Cleveland has been looking after the place for us, but as his place is a distance from the detachment, and he is also away at times, I think the natives have been helping themselves to things.

One of the few visitors from the outside to periodically visit Cleveland was Christian Leden, a Norwegian ethnomusicologist, who passed through Fullerton during the autumn of 1914, the spring of 1915, and the summer of 1916. Leden, who was the first person to record film in the arctic, had come to Hudson Bay on a three year expedition to record the songs of the Inuit on wax cylinders (and perhaps to play Wagner to them on his gramophone, as he had done on other trips.) He was also searching for the three Swedish adventurers who had disappeared attempting to fly in a hydrogen balloon over the north pole in 1897.<sup>17</sup> Leden later got

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17 He was looking in the wrong hemisphere. The bodies of the three balloonists were found in 1930 in Svalbard.

involved with Nazi racial research, and probably because of this, his anthropological work has largely been forgotten.

### **The 1917 Investigation**

Meanwhile, where was Captain Gibbons and the *A.T. Gifford*? When the schooner didn't show up in New Bedford the first November, few worried. But as a second year approached its end, people became concerned. "Friends of the men have been anxious all the Fall at the nonappearance of the schooner," wrote the *Boston Globe*.

*And God Caught an Eel* continues the story from New Bedford:

In September the Thurbers began to be on the lookout for the *A.T. Gifford*. Every morning when Reverend Thurber rowed out to wash down his sloop *Wesley E*, he would take out his binoculars he kept on board and look at Quarantine to see if the ship were there, and then he would train his glasses on the entrance to the harbor on the chance he would glimpse her coming in. When he took the *Wesley E* out of the water for the winter, on November 16th, he looked toward the harbor entrance for the last time, even though he knew it was too late for her to be seen.

As the spring of 1917 came around, Minnie would often ask her husband, "Charlie, when do you think the *A.T. Gifford* will be in?"

"June, possibly," he answered, wondering to himself why no communication had been received from the ship.

Meanwhile, the Hudson Bay Fur and Trading Company [sic Monjo] had engaged Captain George Fred Tilton, one of the most famous of American whalemens, to purchase a ship in Gloucester, have her fitted for a whaler in New Bedford, and proceed to Hudson Bay to bring back furs, whalebone, and ivory for sale in this country. He bought the *Athlete* [sic *Pythian*] and brought her to New Bedford in order to sail northward during the summer of 1917.

Word got around New Bedford that Captain George Fred was headed for Hudson Bay, and he was urged to try to discover the fate of the *A.T. Gifford*. It was several weeks before he left, for he was on call with the U.S. Navy, and it took many trips to Washington for him to get his release to go north with the *Athlete* [sic]; so many, he said, that he "wore the rails thin, and the railroad would have to replace them."

### **Enter George Fred**

Capt. George Fred Tilton (1861-1932), like his brother Zeb, is a Vineyarder of such legend that it's not even necessary to use his last name. Zeb may be better known now, but George Fred was much more famous in his day. He was a rough, drunk, racist old whaler who had spent years whaling in the Pacific arctic. Described as "a real man" and "quite a wag," a good impersonator who "could tell stories by the hour," Tilton once won a fistfight with heavyweight boxing champ Joe Choynski in a San Francisco

barroom.<sup>18</sup> By 1917, George Fred was already an eccentric New England celebrity. He had earned his fame twenty years earlier, in 1897, when he left on foot from the northern tip of Alaska on a two-thousand-mile adventure to find help for hundreds of whalers trapped in the ice and running out of food.<sup>19</sup>

In the spring of 1917, just as the US was finally joining the World War, Monjo hired Tilton to pick up Cleveland's furs from the past two seasons, deliver supplies, and investigate the disappearance of his schooner. The 55-year-old bos'un had recently joined the Naval Reserves, so Tilton had to obtain a four-month leave of absence in order to undertake Monjo's mission.

Captain Tilton tells the story in his 1928 autobiography, "Cap'n George Fred Himself:"

One day I got orders to report to the commandant, O'Brien, at the war college. As I went over there I kept thinking to myself, "What in the devil have I done now? And will I be court-martialed or just hung?" When I got there I had to pass through the hands of six or eight officers, each one striped like a barber's pole. They wanted to know who I was, what I was, where from, where bound, and why. My Lord, I got tired answering questions, but finally I reached the commandant's office and reported. ...

I was introduced to a fur dealer who was interested in the trading posts on Hudson Bay. He had owned the schooner *Gifford* and had sent her up eighteen months before with supplies for the post at Cape Fullerton and to bring back a two years' catch of furs. The schooner had never been heard from, so he came to New Bedford, looking for a man with Arctic experience to take another vessel and go looking for her. As it happened, there wasn't another man available at the time but me and he had gone about getting a hold of me as I have explained. It didn't take us long to reach an agreement, and I signed articles right away.

My first orders were to go to Gloucester, and buy such vessel as would be needed, and bring her to New Bedford to fit and load supplies for the trip. I came home for the first night, and then started. I had a suitcase that cost me fifteen dollars in Frisco with a new suit in it. All my toilet articles and several suits of underwear were present. When I boarded the train at Woods Hole I put the suitcase in the baggage rack overhead and sat there until we got to Boston. Well sir, when I got ready to leave the train the suitcase was gone. In its place was an old empty grip with a hole in the bottom. Believe me, if I could have caught the lad that took my suitcase they would have had to pick him up with blotting paper. But I never found him.

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18 Some sources attribute the barroom tale to his relative, Pacific arctic whaling captain James A. Tilton.

19 Tilton made it to California, only to learn that a rescue expedition had left months earlier.

I met the agent of the fur company, bought some new clothes and a suitcase — not as expensive as the one I lost — and started for Gloucester. There we picked out the ninety-ton auxiliary schooner *Pythian* and bought her the next day.

Tilton purchased the *Pythian* from Gorton-Pew Fisheries — a company known today mostly for their fish sticks. The “badly battered” ninety-foot fishing schooner had been a mackerel seiner, but was now fitted with a 36-horse gasoline engine.

Tilton continues:

I had her hauled out, cleaned, painted, and sheathed with oak, and rudder pennants and tackles put on. Then she was launched and the sails bent, and with four fishermen for a crew we took her around to New Bedford. We fitted at Kelley’s Wharf, Fairhaven, and we carried out almost everything you could think of. There was grub of all kinds for the post, gear, traps, clothing, blankets, trade goods, and a lot of rifles....

We finished loading the schooner a few days after I got back, and about the time we got through I got a letter from the authorities at Newport, asking me what my cargo was. I immediately wrote back giving them a copy of the manifest. Then right straight back came an order for me to again report to Newport at once. And when I got there and reported I was bawled out for carrying firearms.

“What would you do if you met a submarine?” they wanted to know.

“It all depends upon the circumstances,” says I. “I’ve got nothing whatsoever to defend myself with. The rifles are all in cases, and if a submarine was to shove a gun under my nose, I believe I would throw up both hands.”

“Well,” they asked, “you won’t be apt to run out there and give that cargo to ‘em, will you?”

“T’aint likely,” says I, and the incident was closed.

I went back to New Bedford and got my crew together and sailed. Two or three of the men were from the Vineyard, and one had already enlisted in the Naval Reserves, unbeknown to me.

Tilton’s crew included an African-American steward, Jim Drayton, and a seasoned mate, Arthur Cotnoir of New Bedford. As a cabin boy, Cotnoir claimed to have been knocked out of a whaleboat onto a harpooned whale’s back, enmeshed in the line, and pulled under ten or twenty feet before freeing himself.<sup>20</sup> Also aboard were four greenhands which presumably included the unnamed Vineyard boys and also included a sailor with knowledge of gasoline engines. The *Boston Globe* later mentioned the young Vineyarder aboard “who was to remain with Captain Cleveland to learn the business; he proved to be an enlisted man in the Naval Reserves.”

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20 He later was featured on radio shows such as Robert Ripley’s (of “Believe it or Not” fame) and billed as the “Whale Cowboy.”

They departed the first week of July, 1917. The crew spotted the steamer *SS Kristianiafjord* wrecked off Cape Race, Newfoundland with over 1100 passengers trapped aboard, but failed to recognize their predicament and didn't stop.<sup>21</sup> They next struck a gale off Cape Sable, twisted their rudderhead and were forced to put into St. John's, Newfoundland, for repairs. Tilton wrote: "When I went ashore I found a whole bale of telegrams from all ports along the coast, telling me that I had this man who was enlisted and to look out for him and be sure to bring him back." The identity of this delinquent Vineyarder has not been learned.

One of the Vineyard boys mailed a letter home on August 4th from a station in Labrador stating that all was well on board. But as they rounded Cape Chidley and entered Ungava, the *Pythian* passed beyond wireless reach.

Forty-eight days passed without word.

### "Trace"

In late September a cryptic telegram was received by the *New Bedford Standard*. Nobody knew exactly what it meant. Tilton had sent a message from Makkovik, a wireless station in Labrador. From there it went by wireless to Fogo, Newfoundland, then by cable to the mainland, and finally over the "land wires" to New Bedford.

"*Pythian* on way home from Hudson Bay. Trace of *A.T. Gifford*. All well."

The newspapers tried to parse the message. "All well" likely referred to the *Pythian*, but what did "Trace of *A.T. Gifford*" mean?

The *Boston Globe* interpreted the cablegram to mean that wreckage of the schooner had been found and the crew had been lost. Two days later they backpedaled, saying "it is quite possible from the wording that Cap-



Capt. George Fred Tilton, circa 1928.

<sup>21</sup> All passengers were rescued without a single fatality, although the steamer itself was a total loss.

tain Tilton wrote ‘no traces of the *A.T. Gifford*,’ and that the message was mangled in transmission. The phrase is hardly one that would be used if the fate of the schooner had been discovered.... [Tilton] is expected here in about 15 days and will have an interesting story to tell.” But fifteen days came and went.

Tilton wired Monjo in late October from St. John’s: the *Pythian* had collided with an outgoing barkentine and suffered major damage. They spent a month making repairs while families at home continued to wait for any news of the *Gifford*. The *Boston Globe* wrote, “It is expected there will be a fortune in the furs as a result of the high prices. It was thought Cleveland might be ready to return, but he appears to have decided to continue his dwelling in the north. He is the only white man at Monjo’s Station. He has a hut and a whaleboat and he has spent most of his life in the desolation of the frozen North.”

The *Pythian* finally anchored in Vineyard Haven harbor at 9:30 pm on Sunday November 25, some six weeks late. “Within an hour Capt. Tilton hired the best automobile in town to take him to his home in Chilmark... and he proceeded to make up some of his lost sleep,” reported the *Boston Globe*. The *Globe* continued:

George Fred Tilton, veteran of the north country, is just back from a summer jaunt up Hudson Bay way, glad to be back alive. As for real hazards, the captain says this voyage beats all hollow that 3000-mile walk he made out of the Arctic... When a veteran like Capt. Tilton says that he felt just like kneeling down and kissing mother earth when he landed at Vineyard Haven, it’s a fair guess that the captain experienced some peril during the voyage. ‘Never again for me in the north country in a 90-foot vessel,’ said Capt. Tilton. ‘Either I’ve lost my nerve or I’ve gained some common sense.’

### Tilton’s Story

Tilton had bad news. The *Lowell Sun* reported, “The schooner *A.T. Gifford* of [New Bedford] has been lost in the Hudson Bay country with 23 men.” The *New Bedford Times* added that the *Gifford* “was burned at sea ... every man on board was undoubtedly lost.” Tilton would later write in his autobiography: “I found proof that the schooner had caught fire and burned until her gas tanks blew up and sunk her ... this information was gathered from the natives.”

It had been a difficult trip. Tilton complained about the inaccurate charts upon reaching Hudson Bay — Cape Fullerton was off by 35 miles, he reported — and also about the magnetic conditions. “Whenever the ship reached shoal water the compass became practically of no value... Why, there were times when the ship worked from north around again to north and the compass wouldn’t change more than three points.” He had

arrived at Fullerton on August 23 in a thick fog; Cleveland was away, but returned to the station the next day. They stayed at Fullerton for a week unloading supplies, loading furs, investigating the missing schooner, and quite likely sharing some drinks.

His return home was particularly trying. It began with a terrifying close call in a blizzard off rocky cliffs before even leaving Hudson Bay, and continued with the collision at St. John's. While still in port his naval reservist had tried to escape on an outgoing train, but was captured and returned to Tilton. Cotnoir was offered a well-paying job and quit, leaving Tilton without a mate. Storms raged all the way to the Vineyard, the gasoline ran out, and Tilton spent the last eleven days without sleeping in his bunk or changing his clothes.

*And God Caught an Eel* adds a few more details about Tilton's report:

When [Tilton] returned many weeks later, he brought back some shreds of the story of the missing ship. Soon after reaching Hudson Bay he had heard the story from an Eskimo chief, whose dialect he spoke. The chief had visited the *A.T. Gifford* to share some of the crew's good rations while it was locked in the ice. The chief had noticed that the cabin stove had one leg broken off, and that bricks had been put under the stove to steady it. When the ice broke up in the spring, the chief brought presents and furs to the departing captain and bade him farewell. They watched the ship head toward the straits, but while she was still in sight she rolled in the heavy swell and blew up. Apparently the bricks under the stove had given way and the gasoline drums had caught fire and exploded.

Other witnesses later emerged. In his 1938 memoirs for the HBC company magazine *The Beaver*, Capt. G. Edmond Mack, master of the HBC ship *Nascopie*, wrote about his return to Hudson Bay in August 1916 after serving in the war:

On arrival at Wolstenholme, they reported a ship had been seen on fire from the cliffs on the Bay side, about three days before our arrival. I spent a day cruising with the *Nascopie* around Digges Island, and between Digges and the mainland, to see if any signs could be seen of survivors, but nothing was found.

Mack later assumed it was the *A.T. Gifford*, although, oddly, the date is a year off. The *Boston Globe* mentioned a similar account in a 1923 article: "One report was that Eskimos had seen a craft burning in Hudson Straits about the time the *Gifford* was due to pass out of the bay."

All on board were presumed dead.

Cleveland's post was bought about 1918 by the Hudson Bay Company. As it had been losing money, the HBC decided to follow a recommendation by Cleveland to move the buildings north to Repulse Bay. In the fall of 1919 Cleveland attempted to carry this out, but only got as far as a tem-

porary anchorage dubbed Bury Cove; in 1920 Cleveland's post was finally reopened at Repulse Bay. Cleveland came home to the Vineyard briefly in 1923 before returning to the north for the last time. There was little to hold him on Martha's Vineyard. His mother had died. His daughter, married at fifteen, had abandoned her own two children and disappeared mysteriously. His son had become a stranger. Cleveland's families were in the north now.

### Coats Island Discoveries

Coats Island is a windy, treeless, boulder-strewn island on the north side of Hudson Bay. It is more than twenty times larger than Martha's Vineyard. Mostly low-lying muskeg and sedge tundra crowned with dramatic cliffs on its north coast, Coats is home to walrus, caribou, polar bears and huge flocks of auks. It's uninhabited by humans — indeed, it's the largest uninhabited island in the northern hemisphere south of the Arctic Circle. The Sadlermiut people who once made their home here had died in the 1902 epidemic Cleveland witnessed.

Steven J. "Lofty" Stewart — known to the Aivilingmiut as "Angoo-teekootak" ("A Tall Person") — was hired by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1918 to establish a new trading post on Coats island with the HBC schooner *Nannuk*.<sup>22</sup> The post completed, Stewart decided to fully explore the island in 1919. In his memoirs, published by *The Beaver* in 1935, Stewart wrote:

Early in June I made arrangements to attempt the circumnavigation of the island by canoe....One outstanding incident I shall describe. On reaching the point of land known as Cary's Swan Nest — the southeasterly cape on Coats Island — we made a very tragic discovery. Here we found the body of a white man, or rather I should say, all that was left of it. He was probably the last survivor of the American schooner *N.T. Gifford* [sic], lost off Digges Island in the fall of 1916. No doubt other members of the crew of the vessel reached Coats and Mansel islands, as whale boats were later found on each of these islands, also a couple of dories and other ship's gear. To my knowledge, however, no other bodies were ever discovered.

At Cary's Swan Nest a navigation light had been erected in 1915 by a party from the government chartered vessel *Minto*, and close to this light the unfortunate man had built a small rock hut. From its appearance it seemed as if he had lived here for some time. Outside the hut was a cache of clothes which suggested, from its contents, that the owner was an engineer. Be that as it may, the sad fact remains, that his only hope of rescue was to stay by the light in the hope some ship would call and refuel it. I have often thought had we picked up Cary's Swan Nest the previous fall in the *Nannuk* instead of Cape Pembroke we might possibly have found the man alive. Judging from the state of the remains I should say he had died that same fall probably from starvation, and had been eaten soon afterwards by bear and foxes as

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22 The post was short-lived. The island remains uninhabited to this day.

only part of the body was found. We carefully searched the neighbourhood the following day for any further traces of the tragedy but found nothing.

In 1921 Cleveland made another discovery on Coats Island:<sup>23</sup>

Capt. Cleveland, while cruising about the bay, paid a visit to Coasters' Island [sic Coats]...there he found an overturned fisherman's dory. Beneath the dory were two skeletons, one of a small person and one of a medium-sized man. The dory was in such a position that it might have been used as a shelter for the two persons.

As Capt. Gibbons of the *Gifford* was the smallest man in her crew of 15, Capt. Cleveland was almost sure the smaller skeleton was his. When he found lying beside the skeleton of the small man a revolver, which he identified as that owned and carried by Capt. Gibbons, he was certain. There was no means of identifying the other skeleton, although it was probably one of the officers of the *Gifford*. The bones of hares and small birds told the story that the two men had proceeded as far as possible in the dory and then made a camp as best they could and lived as long as possible on these hares and birds. The two men evidently tried to reach the nearest Hudson Bay trading post, 70 miles from where the dory was found. Captain Cleveland's idea is that the men reached Coasters' Island [sic] when the Winter storms set in and were trapped there. The island is near the entrance to Hudson Bay and is rarely visited by Eskimos or hunters.

The RCMP corroborated his story in an internal report, although the details varied slightly:

A report, dated September 24, 1921,...that the crew of a Hudson's Bay Company schooner had met natives living on Coats island, in the north of the bay, who told them that they had found the skeletons of three white men, and a boat, on the shores of the island. One man had been buried under rocks, and the other were close together in the open; a revolver, the only weapon found, was near the remains. An American schooner, the *A.T. Gifford*, was lost in the bay with all hands on her way out in 1915, and from various indications it is believed that the three men whose remains were found had belonged to this vessel.

So there had been survivors. But the Sadlermiut, whose land this once was and who might have aided the *Gifford's* crew (as the Aivilingmiut had once rescued Cleveland), were all dead.

### **Cleveland's Legacy**

Cleveland returned to Repulse Bay in 1924 to command his first ship — the HBC supply schooner *M. S. Fort Chesterfield*<sup>24</sup> — but his liver gave out

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23 "Bones of Lost Sailors Found." *Boston Globe*, Sep. 21, 1923, p.7.

24 Dudley Copland, who met Cleveland in 1924, noted "Although Cleveland accepted the title of captain he was not a qualified master." His technical shortcomings reportedly included off-shore navigation.

within a year, and he died shortly after his return to the US. His elderly father buried him in Vineyard Haven's Oak Grove Cemetery next to his mother.

George Fred retired from the sea and became caretaker of the *Charles W. Morgan*, which the late Captain Gibbons had once commanded. A tablet is dedicated to George Fred at the bethel on New Bedford's Johnny Cake Hill.

The Fullerton police post was reopened briefly in 1918 but then closed permanently soon afterwards. The descendants of the Aivilingmiut slowly gave up their nomadic traditions and settled down in Repulse Bay, Coral Harbour, Chesterfield Inlet, and other arctic communities. Today, only the occasional hunter ever visits Fullerton, better known now by its Inuktitut name, Qatiktalik.

Cleveland's surviving children grew up in the Inuit traditions. When the fur market dried up (more-or-less permanently) during the Great Depression, they were left without means to obtain guns, ammunition, or other southern goods while at the same time having forgotten many of the traditional hunting and survival skills of their ancestors. This was a dark time in the North. The Inuit were assigned "disc numbers" (an ID number such as "E5-386" on a leather dog tag) in the early 1940s by the Canadian federal government in lieu of a surname. By mandate, their children were sent to government-run residential schools hundreds or thousands of miles away designed to expunge their language, customs, and culture.

All of Cleveland's children had large families, and some, like his son Kripanik, died only in the past few years. Cleveland has approximately one hundred Inuit grandchildren, most of whom are still living, and he has well over a thousand living descendants today — a significant fraction of the population of Nunavut. His modern offspring includes professors, heavy metal musicians, website designers, legislators, prisoners, ministers, journalists, government officials, fishermen, CBC radio hosts, mayors, polar bear carvers, homemakers, poets, interpreters, and social workers, spanning the north.

Cleveland is mostly forgotten on the Vineyard, but he is quite well remembered in the north. Some idolize him, others despise him. His larger-than-life tales can be found in numerous books about the eastern arctic and his character even appears in a 2006 movie, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*.<sup>25</sup> His character was played by veteran French-Canadian actor Pierre Lebeau and his trading post was recreated outside Igloolik. Writer Nancy Wachowich, blogging on the movie set, described Lebeau as he first showed up on the set dressed as Cleveland:

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<sup>25</sup> The film was a follow-up to the award-winning *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner*, the first all-Inuit directed, written and acted film.



George Cleveland's six oldest Inuit children, conceived before his adventures at Cape Fullerton, undoubtedly visited him there.

Lebeau arrived looking like someone who I would not want to speak with in a bar. His costume was a crumpled old musty wool military jacket, trousers tucked into 1880s military boots, a dirty loose blouse-type shirt, and an undershirt. His tooth had fallen out before his flight to Igloolik, so he had delayed replacing it in order to stay in character. It also looked as if he had not seen a shower in a while. ... I sat for a few and watched the action. Lebeau brought to his character particularly slimy gravitas that I had always imagined Cleveland possessing. He sounded positively creepy.

One of Cleveland's great-granddaughters writes:

Three years ago, I decided to take Inuit Studies in Arctic College and who should we study but Captain George Cleveland. I was so proud. I told everyone in my class I was his great-granddaughter. Another woman raised her hand and said 'So am I.' We just looked at each other and said, 'Hello, cousin.' We are now aware of our many countless cousins up here because of this great man. To us he's great, we love him....I work for Corrections with inmates from all over Nunavut and had met some inmates that are also George Cleveland's great grandsons. It's always a great meeting. Even in jail. One of them was an exact image of George, and each time we met, he said, just to be able to talk about how we are related and who we are brought healing for him.

This spring someone posted a recent photo of the old buildings at Fullerton on Facebook, triggering a lively conversation of old memories and old ghost stories. Cecilia from Iqaluit wrote, "As a kid in Rankin, every time someone asked 'where are you going, or have been?' the answer was always, "Qatiktalikmit" or Qatiktalikmuun." Michael, a native of Repulse Bay, commented, "Somewhere along the beach, my mom said, there was a qarmaq, which is probably just a pile of sod now. I was born in that hut." Eulalie, a firefighter in Rankin Inlet, wrote, "Just imagine, there were so many people living there, and now there are none."

### **The Other Vineyarders of Hudson Bay**

George Cleveland may be the last and most well-remembered Vineyard

whaler to winter on Hudson Bay with the Inuit, but he was no means the only one. Below is a list of fourteen additional Vineyard men who served on whaling expeditions which wintered on Hudson Bay. These voyages came at the end of the era in which whaling was considered a profitable profession. As pay fell and working conditions worsened, arctic-bound crews drew increasingly disproportionately Native American, African American, and immigrant crewmen. As George Cleveland discovered, even during the lean years of 1873-1896 (now known as the “Long Depression” when unemployment topped 22% in Massachusetts), whaling firms relied on thuggish crimps to “shanghai” able young men on the waterfront to fill out their crew. The list below is undoubtedly incomplete.

Vineyarders who wintered on Hudson Bay, 1860-1915:

| <b>NAME<br/>(BIRTH — DEATH)<br/>RESIDENCE</b>                | <b>SHIP<br/>(DEPARTURE<br/>YEAR)</b> | <b>NOTES</b>                                    |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>George Bolton</b><br>(c. 1838 — ?) of Chilmark            | <i>Andrews</i> (1863)                | Wampanoag                                       |
| <b>Alden or Abner S. Parsons</b> (c. 1846 — ?) of Tisbury    | <i>Northern Light</i> (1863)         |   |
| <b>William Johnson</b><br>(c. 1837 — ?) of Gay Head          | <i>Morning Star</i> (1866)           | African-American or Wampanoag                   |
| <b>Allison B. Lewis</b><br>(1844 — 1921) of Tisbury          | <i>Ansel Gibbs</i> (1866)            | (to Cumberland Inlet)                           |
| <b>John C. Randall</b><br>(c. 1852 — 1874) of Vineyard Haven | <i>Abbie Bradford</i> (1874)         | Lost in the ice with a boat’s crew, Sept 1874   |
| <b>Hiram W. Hammett</b><br>(1850 — 1938) of Chilmark         | <i>A. Houghton</i> (1876)            | Rumored to have had “a child with the Eskimos.” |
| <b>Joseph Reny Jr.</b><br>(c. 1862 — ?)                      | <i>George and Mary</i> (1879)        |   |
| <b>Thomas M. Foster</b><br>(1863 — 1889) of Vineyard Haven   | <i>Abbie Bradford</i> (1884)         |   |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>William H. Morton</b><br>(c. 1846 — ?) of Gay Head         | <i>Abbie Bradford</i><br>(1886)                                     | Wampanoag   |
| <b>Judson A. James</b><br>(c. 1863 — ?) of Tisbury            | <i>Wave</i> (1887)  | Probably Wampanoag  |
| <b>Chester H. Robinson</b><br>(1874 — 1943) of Vineyard Haven | <i>A. R. Tucker</i> (1895)  |   |
| <b>Jesse Smith</b><br>(1877 — 1952) of Vineyard Haven         | <i>A. R. Tucker</i> (1895)  |   |
| <b>Benjamin B. Worth</b><br>(1845 — 1904) of Edgartown        | <i>A. R. Tucker</i> (1895)  |   |
| <b>G. S. Johnson</b><br>(c. 1848 — ?) of Edgartown            | <i>Platina</i> (1896)   | African-American?   |
| <b>George Cleveland</b><br>(1871 — 1925) of Vineyard Haven    | <i>A. R. Tucker</i> (1895),<br><i>Francis Allyn</i><br>(1897, 1899) | Also with Monjo company, Scottish whalers, HBC, etc., 1902-1925 |

### Arvagasugiaqpalaqtut Kinguvaanginnik Qaujinasungniq (The Whalers DNA Project)

Inexpensive DNA tests can now genetically identify historical and genealogical information about an individual, including ethnicity and ancestry, with a high degree of accuracy. They can also identify relatives as distant as fifth cousins. Known as “autosomal” tests, they read from nearly one million DNA locations on all 23 pairs of your chromosomes and from both sides of your family tree. These tests have become increasingly used in anthropology, ancient history, and now modern history. Arvagasugiaqpalaqtut Kinguvaanginnik Qaujinasungniq (The Whalers DNA Project) is a new initiative to identify Martha’s Vineyard and New England whalers who have surviving Inuit descendants in Nunavut and the Hudson Bay area, and to reunite distant cousins from North and South.

George Cleveland undoubtedly wasn’t the only Vineyarder to conceive children in the north; Hiram Hammett of Chilmark is another whaler rumored to have had at least one Inuit child. Others — most notably Capt. Hartson Bodfish of Vineyard Haven — had second families in the western



Ruins at Cape Fullerton, Nunavut, Canada, as they appear today.

Arctic. It wasn't just the whalers, either: Capt. George Comer reported that the police detachment at Cape Fullerton alone fathered six children between 1903 and 1910.

Are you descended from any of the fifteen Vineyard men listed above, their parents, or their grandparents? Or are you descended from another New England whaler who wintered in Hudson Bay after 1860? Please join our project! Saliva-based, mail-order DNA tests are currently available for \$99. If you would like to help or learn more about the Whalers DNA Project, please email [cbaer@vineyard.net](mailto:cbaer@vineyard.net).

## Bibliography

This article drew from hundreds of newspaper articles (in the *New Bedford Standard*, *New Bedford Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The [New London CT] Day*, and many others), dozens of books and crew lists, together with thousands of emails — and more recently, Facebook messages and posts — from George Cleveland's countless Inuit descendants in Nunavut.

Of special mention is Capt. J.A. Wing's logbook of the schooner *A.T. Gifford*, 1913 — 1914, the original of which may be found in the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College. Also of special mention is the series of six newspaper articles George Cleveland wrote with Minna Littman in 1924 for the *New Bedford Sunday Standard*, although Cleveland oddly omitted his five years at Fullerton in these serialized memoirs. Some of the most important other sources I list below:

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For additional information about George Cleveland, especially his early adventures, see the author's website at: <http://www.oldtimeislands.org/Cleveland>

## Reminiscences from Early Years Of a Beloved Summer Colony

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ON A WARM SUMMER DAY in 2005, a group of neighbors gathered on the beach in the Lagoon Heights area of Oak Bluffs to enjoy the water, the sunshine, and the company of their friends. They had been doing this for many years; in fact, some had known each other from childhood. On this particular day, as they reminisced about past summers, they began to talk about the need to preserve the history of their small community, or “the colony,” which had been settled more than a century ago. There were only a few people left who still remembered the story of those early years, and they felt it was important to record the history while there was still time.

A group of people agreed to write their memories, and what follows is a collection of their stories about their beloved island.



First, though, a bit of history on how the colony began. The following appeared in Arthur Railton’s article, “The Summer of 1874,” published in the February, 1986, issue of the *Dukes County Intelligencer*, a publication of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum:

It was a watershed summer. There would be no turning back. The nation, in 1874, discovered our Island.

For two years, real-estate speculation had gone beyond the wildest imaginings of Vineyard residents. Spreading out from Cottage City were subdivisions of all sizes: Lagoon Heights, with 400 lots, sold in a few weeks; Oklahoma; West Point Grove and Cedar Bluff on West Chop; Ocean heights; Hines Point, all had their start at this time. Developers had grabbed over 2000 acres, dividing them neatly into tiny rectangles, eight lots per acre.

Buyers rushed to the Island, eager to get a spot before it was too late....

Although not in the original plans, it was decided to build a hotel in the Lagoon Heights area. The following excerpts are from an article titled, “The Prospect House Offered a Clear View to Tisbury, Easy Access to the Trolley,” written by Douglas Ulwick, which appeared in *The Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 2009:

The land development created by the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company that became the heart of the future town of Oak Bluffs was so successful that it spawned many imitators--but none as successful. One of the also-rans was Lagoon Heights. Created with north and south sections in 1873, based on a survey by Richard Pease, it was bounded by Lagoon Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, County Road, and Winne Avenue. Most of Winne exists only on paper today, running parallel to and between Lagoon Avenue and Worcester Avenue. The other streets are still well known.

The original layout of streets and parks made no provision for a hotel, but at some point it was likely decided that a hotel would bring potential buyers to the neighborhood. A location in the south section was chosen at the corner of "New York Avenue" (later renamed Hudson Avenue) and Beacon Avenue, the site taking up a modest area of approximately 100 feet by 100 feet. . .

In addition to the view, another major selling point was accessibility. The electric trolley line had opened up to Lagoon Heights, traveling up Wing Road, turning onto Alpine, then turning onto Hudson, passing the Prospect House on its way to the Lagoon, ending up at the present day boat launch at the foot of Hudson Avenue. An 1894 advertising brochure touts its new management (it was sold in 1888), its accessibility, its view, its size--accommodations for 200 guests--and its rates at \$2.50 per day.

The Prospect House suffered a fate similar to the other notable Oak Bluffs hotels, the Sea View House (burned 1892) and the Highland House (burned 1893), as it burned in 1898 in the off-season and there was no reason to rebuild. The rest of Lagoon Heights lay dormant for decades. It had been the victim of poor timing. The "boom" years in Oak Bluffs had passed just as it was getting off the ground. It would be for another generation to settle in and develop the homesites....

Thus, our little colony began.

## Remembrances of Summers Past

by FLORENCE OBERMAN CROSS

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THE FIRST in this collection of memories are those of the Obermann family, Anton, Florence and Beryl, who are third generation residents. Our mother, uncle, and grandparents had spent their summers in Lagoon Heights since approximately 1904, starting as renters, and then as owners.

### **Members of the Family:**

Albert H. Buck, 1868-1956

His wife, Florence E. Harrison Buck, 1868-1937

Harold A. Buck, 1899-1968

His wife, Myrtle McLean Buck

Marion E. Buck Obermann, 1900-1997

Her husband, Anton Obermann, Sr. 1893-1971.

Their children: Anton, Jr., 1930-2008; Florence, b. 1933,  
and Beryl, b. 1935

The Obermann children's happiest early memories are of the colony, a group of small cottages located near the lagoon. The cottage our family visited each summer belonged to our grandparents, Albert and Florence Buck, who were among the earliest settlers of that area. The Bucks had bought the cottage, located on Springfield Avenue, in 1906, when it was just two small rooms and a porch. This small cottage was typical of the ones built at that time. At the time of purchase, Marion Buck (later Obermann) was five years old and her brother Harold was a year and a half older. Their cottage was a pre-fab, which had originally been located in Worcester. It was disassembled, shipped by rail and boat to the Vineyard, and rebuilt in the late 1800s in its present location. The Bucks had purchased it from an art teacher, Fred Daniels, who taught in the Springfield, Mass., school system. Fred Daniels bought the property from Olive Holt, who bought it from Daniel Wing, October 12, 1871. The Buck family would spend from early July to the end of August at their cottage. The elder Buck would commute on weekends. During those early years, he was known as "the mayor" of the colony.

Albert Buck worked for the City of Springfield, in the school system. The following quote from an article in the *Springfield Union*, dated Sept.

19, 1936, at the time of his retirement, tells about his employment:

...Mr. Buck was assigned to install the electrical equipment at Classical High School when the building was under construction in 1897. He was then employed by Plumber & Ham Company, a Worcester electrical concern. Together with another man, he put in the electrical equipment and the job was the first modern electrical job in Springfield, the armored conduit rather than the open wiring system being used. Mr. Buck remained at the school in the employ of the Worcester firm for several months after the building opened to operate the electrical system and in October, 1898, entered the employ of the city as engineer of the building....

One other item of interest about my grandfather is that he and Fred Belcher, who were both mechanically creative, invented the camshaft for motorcycles. They never patented the part and, some time later, they received a letter from the Indian Motorcycle Co. of Springfield telling them they could no longer make the part because Indian Motorcycle had patented it.

### **Neighbors and Cottages**

Fred Belcher and his wife Grace were neighbors of the Bucks in Springfield, who owned the cottage now owned by the Zahns, on the corner of Newton and Springfield avenues. The Allens — Emeline, and her son and daughter-in-law, Harry and Nellie, of Worcester Avenue — were also friends from Springfield. Grace Belcher was Emeline (Grandma) Allen's daughter. The Allens, whose cottage was later owned by the Flodstroms, also acquired the cottage next to theirs, which had been built by A.G. Weston of Worcester, circa 1920, and later purchased by the Duffs.

During those early years of the colony, there was a communal hand pump located between the Buck and Allen cottages, which provided water for the immediate neighbors.

The cottages in the colony in the 1930s that we Obermanns recall were the Gay and Brown cottages which were on either side of us on Springfield Avenue; the Allen and Duff cottages, which were on Worcester Avenue; the Reid, Amy Day, Fletcher, and Lida Oliver cottages, which overlooked the lagoon; and the Father Duffy, Belcher and Davey cottages, which were on Newton Avenue. There was the "red roof cottage" off Fitchburg Avenue, which was owned by the Cox family, and "Doc" Watkins', which was on the lagoon just off Lagoon Road.

The Fletcher family cottage was built in the 1920s by Gardner and Madeline Fletcher of Springfield, and remained in the family until it was sold in the summer of 2009.

We could see across the fields to Hudson Avenue and the cottage of Miss Lillian Chignall, or Chiggie, our mother's friend, who would stop by

for a visit now and then. She had been a governess to a family in New York City and retired to the Island. Her cottage was near the site of the former Prospect House.

There was a ramshackle cottage, abandoned for many years, which sat across Springfield Avenue from the Buck and Gay cottages. The story was that the owners lived in California and no longer visited. It was such an eyesore that one day several men tied a rope to an old Ford, attached it to the cottage, and pulled it down. The only sign that the cottage had ever been there was a pipe that for many years stuck several feet above the ground.

In the 1930s, Dorothy Gay Fullerton, her daughter Gay, and mother, Mrs. Mary Belle Gay, were regular summer residents. Their cottage, which was next to the Buck cottage, had been built by Dr. Henry W. Watkins, a local dentist and father of Dr. Eugene "Doc" Watkins, and had been owned by the Gay family since around 1916. I remember Mrs. Gay as a dignified, matronly, Southern lady. The wife of a clergyman from Cambridge, Mass., she ran a boarding house for college students during the winter. She would take her children to their cottage for the summer during the children's growing-up years.

Anne Madeiros purchased the Brown cottage, located on the other side of the Buck cottage, in the 1930s. She was an Islander who grew up in Edgartown and taught at a school for special education children in Worcester. She entertained many interesting friends there over the years. After her retirement, she married her longtime friend, Albert Kent. When Anne died in 1981, Beryl and Matt Stephens, who at that time owned the Buck cottage, became the new owners of her cottage and named it the "Anne-X."

One night in the summer of 1937, the Reid House, a guesthouse run by Mrs. Alexander Reid, located at Worcester and Newton avenues at the top of the path to the beach, burned to the ground. Our mother, having heard the fire trucks during the night, got us up early the following morning to view the ruins, which were still smoldering. According to David Fletcher, the fire was caused by a burning cigarette. A guest at the time was Walter Damrosch, musician and conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, who escaped safely. The foundation is still there if one knows where to look for it.

### **Flora and Fauna**

There were few tall trees in the area in those early years. The growth was mostly scrub oaks, new-growth pines, huckleberry and beach plum bushes. Along the beach could be seen pink and white *Rosa rugosa*. Side roads consisted of two sandy tracks that criss-crossed the fields. There were lots of cottontail rabbits, and in abundance were chewinks, or towhees, with their calls of "chewink" or "drink your tea." They would kick up leaves as

they hopped through the underbrush looking for food. Quails nested in the underbrush and their call of “bobwhite” was heard in the evenings. The incessant call of the whippoorwill could also be heard in the late evening. The wind sighing through the pines was a comforting sound as we were dropping off to sleep.

On a warm summer day, the smell of sweet fern permeated the air, and fields were dotted with orange butterfly weed swaying in the breeze. The fields and roadsides were sprinkled with Queen Anne’s lace and chicory. There was a large patch of pink lady slippers growing in a nearby field along with pipsissewa scattered here and there. With the exception of the songs of birds, the chirps of crickets, and the humming of bees, all was quiet--no sounds of traffic on the roads or commercial jets flying overhead. Life was more peaceful, less hurried, less complicated in those years.

### **Entertainment**

For entertainment in the early 1900s, neighbors and friends would visit in the evenings. The young people would play board games, such as Parcheesi, chess, and checkers; play tennis, walk to the standpipe (water tower), or into town; ride the merry-go-round, known as the Flying Horses, hoping to catch the brass ring; and attend dances at the Tivoli. They also would hold swimming races from Reid’s Point to Hines Point; walk around the lagoon at least once a year, carrying a picnic lunch; and families would get together for beach parties.

### **Life in the 1930s**

In the 1930s, our family made the trip to Martha’s Vineyard in the family car, our parents and we three children, driving from Westerly, RI, through Providence, Fall River and New Bedford. We would dress in our best summer clothes, full of anticipation and excitement. The trip was an all-day affair because there were no interstate highways then. We had to drive through towns and cities, and probably our top speed was 45 miles per hour on the open road. In New Bedford, we took the steamer through Woods Hole to Oak Bluffs, where we were met by our grandfather. I could hardly wait to get to the cottage so I could get out my toys, my “old friends” from previous summers, and play with them.

We children and our mother would stay for an extended visit, but our father, who was a linotype operator for the local newspaper, *The Westerly Sun*, could only stay for short visits.

Back in those days, there was no running water or electricity. We had a hand pump in the kitchen and used kerosene for cooking and lighting. If we wanted hot water, we heated it on the stove. Our grandfather had built a small, indoor bathroom off the kitchen and rigged up a flush toilet with a tank several feet above the toilet. When someone flushed the toilet, he or she was responsible for refilling the tank. This involved screwing a cap

on the kitchen pump, which redirected the water into the toilet tank, and then pumping until our arms felt like they were going to drop off!

Anton's morning tasks were to fill the kerosene lamps and stove and to help fill the toilet tank. At mealtimes, he liked to get the butter and milk from the well, which was located under the back of the house. It was a deep, dry hole, lined with stone and always cool, covered by a wooden door. The food was stored in crocks, which were raised and lowered on ropes.

Electricity came in 1938, but we did not have it installed until about 1950. We used a kerosene stove until 1957, when we put in gas. Town water was not available until the mid-1960s. There were no modern conveniences in our cottage. Much of the charm of being there came from the simplicity of life and lack of amenities.

Mornings were spent on the beach. Anton enjoyed playing with his homemade boats. We all had fun playing in the sand and learning to swim. We watched, and sometimes caught, the marine life: hermit crabs, horseshoe crabs and several other varieties of crabs, scallops, quahogs, soft shelled clams, periwinkles, starfish, mussels, and minnows that would nibble at our toes. A large patch of eel grass, which we didn't like walking through, grew in front of the Fletcher cottage, so the favorite gathering spot on the beach was at the foot of the Worcester Avenue path, where *Rosa rugosa* bloomed and beach plum bushes lined the path.

The Vineyard Haven 12 o'clock fire horn was our signal to head home for our noon meal. We would rinse off the salt water and sand in pails of water that had been set out in the sun earlier in the day to warm (no outside shower in those days). In those early years, we were actually small enough to fit in the pails.

Sometimes, before the noon meal, we were sent cross-lots with a few coins in our hands to Grandma Sylvia's farm on County Road for fresh vegetables. Her farm was visible from our cottage and we could see her, dressed in a long, dark skirt and bonnet to protect her from the sun, bent over, working in her garden. She kept a horse, which was housed in the barn. It wasn't a riding horse, but one used for plowing and chores. On our arrival, Grandma Sylvia would pat us on the head in greeting and say, "God bless, sweet child." She always sent us home with a bouquet of fresh flowers from her garden.

We would return to the beach after the noon meal and an hour's rest (so we wouldn't get cramps from swimming too soon after a meal); we would stay all afternoon. Our mother loved to swim and would dive into the water at Reid's Point, where there was a steep drop-off.

Occasionally in the afternoon, particularly if it were not a beach day, we would go for a ride in our grandfather's car, a '38 Oldsmobile. Anton

recalls that our rides up-island usually included a stop on Middle Road at a big tree with a large horizontal limb, which had a dip in it. We would take turns sitting in the dip and pretending we were riding a horse. We often stopped for ice cream in North Tisbury at a little general store with gas pumps out in front. The ice cream, which was homemade, was so rich that it coated our tongues and the roofs of our mouths.

When our mother went into town to shop, we would stop at Ocean Park to paddle in the wading pool. When we got older, we would occasionally swim at the town beach pier on Sea View Avenue. In the evenings, the adults sat on the porch while the children played outside. I can remember Doc Watkins driving through for evening visits on one of the sandy roads in the triangle in front of our cottage with Mrs. Watkins, a tiny lady, whose head barely reached above the car window.

Across the street from Grandma Sylvia lived her son and his family, Mr. and Mrs. John Sylvia, and sons, Johnny, Philip, and Bobby. Occasionally, we would walk there in the evening with our mother for a visit. They had a sail-go-round (a whirligig with sails) that Mr. Sylvia had made. Beryl was small enough to be the perfect size for it, though we all looked forward to riding on it.

In the quiet of the evening, sounds would come floating across the water — singing from the sailing camp, a motorboat on the lagoon, a band concert in Vineyard Haven, and the mournful sound of the foghorns from the West Chop and Nobska lights, as well as passing ships.

Anton (whose field as an adult was marine electronics) offered an explanation of how the foghorns operated to warn the sailors. He recalled many foggy nights lying in bed, listening to the foghorns as they broke the silence with their different sounds, the blasts about ten to twelve seconds apart. Blasts consisted of one or two tones. The dual-tone blasts were different sequences of high and low pitches, the first part of the blast being higher in pitch and the latter, lower, and another lighthouse using an alternate pitch of a two-toned signal horn. The different pitch levels were unique to each lighthouse and familiar to ships' pilots traversing Vineyard Sound.

We don't recall when we started attending the Wednesday night Community Sings at the Tabernacle, which began in 1904, but Beryl remembers that it became a ritual to walk into town to attend the Sings. We were each given a nickel to buy popcorn at Darling's — the best popcorn we've ever eaten. (They also made good saltwater taffy and fudge.) We could make that popcorn last all the way home.

We all recall picking huckleberries for a real treat — huckleberry pudding, huckleberry pie, and huckleberry pancakes, and in the fall there were beach plums for jelly. The field across from our cottage was full of huckleberry bushes, so we never had to wander far to fill our pails.

## **World War II**

When World War II began, travel by car became difficult because gas was rationed. Our visits then were shortened to a week or two, because our mother had taken a job as bookkeeper at Bradford Dyeing Association, a fabric dyeing and finishing company in Westerly. We traveled by train and bus to Woods Hole, where we would catch the ferry to the Island. The war affected the lives of many of our neighbors, as well. Many of the cottages remained closed, year after year (in particular, the Gay-Fullerton cottage and Father Duffy's). Warner Fletcher joined the Coast Guard and was stationed in Menemsha for a time. Johnny and Phil Sylvia joined the Army and both were sent overseas, Johnny to the Pacific and Phil to Europe. Martha's Vineyard was a very quiet place during the war years.

For entertainment we would walk into town. The scent of the privet hedges in bloom on Wing Road is a memory that stays with us to this day. Besides the many hours spent at the beach, we also had great fun jumping off the bluffs at the lagoon. Anton built a 16-foot kayak in woodshop at school when he was in his early teens. He took it to the Vineyard and had many happy hours paddling in the lagoon before it was stolen one winter.

During the war years, Anton recalls going to the Gay Head cliffs with his friends, where they could see the dive bombers practice-bombing Normans Land. The planes swooped so low that the boys could actually look down on the tops of the planes at the low point of the dive.

### **After the War: Weetauqua Corinthian Yacht Club**

Warner Fletcher organized the Weetauqua Corinthian Yacht Club after the war in 1946. Weetauqua was the Wampanoag name for "land at the head of the lagoon." Membership consisted of all the young people who lived on the lagoon who were old enough to sail. John Duff was the first Commodore. The boats owned by some of the members were a hodge-podge of classes and sizes. It didn't matter. The purpose of the club was to get the lagoon kids together to learn to sail and have fun. There were several small boats--the Moth class was one. Two other classes represented were Lightnings and Herreshoffs. Anton was a good sailor and won many races. The kids without boats would serve as crew during the races. Warner organized the raising of a flagpole at the beach so that we could fly our club flag on race days. The base of that flagpole is still standing, rusted, but a reminder of many happy days of competition.

The history of the flag pole dates back to July 18, 1911, when a gathering of neighbors helped to raise the pole. It was located in front of the Dr. Henry Watkins cottage next door to the Buck cottage on Springfield Avenue. On August 26, 1924, my grandmother Florence Buck wrote the following entry in her diary: "We had a terrible tropical storm. It uprooted

trees and moved homes from their foundations. It blew the end of our porch off. Also, flagpole was blown down . . .” The flagpole was stored in the basement of the Fullerton cottage (formerly the Watkins, then Gay cottage) all those years.

The Fletchers had several sailboats over the years, two of which were the “Surprise” and the “Pegasus.” Years before, Gardner Fletcher, father of Warner, David, and Harriet, had made a motorboat of copper, which was called the “Tea Kettle.” The Fletchers used a winch to pull their boats onto a cradle above the beach in the grass when not in use. The winch, a rusted relic, is still there. The Island was hit by a northeaster one summer that blew the “Pegasus,” keel first, into Reids Point. I remember the Fletchers trying to free it with the help of neighbors. The effort drew a large crowd.

**Following is a list of the early yacht club members:**

|                   |                    |                  |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Warner Fletcher   | Clarence Davey     | Mrs. F. A. Child |
| David Fletcher    | Alan Davey         | Pam Foster       |
| Harriet Fletcher  | Charles Newbury    | Hans Solmssen    |
| John Duff         | Libba Newbury      | Dave Boak        |
| Tom Duff          | Shirley Walker     | David Sisson     |
| Anton Obermann    | Jean Walker        | Jay Boyle        |
| Florence Obermann | Gay Fullerton      | Nancy West       |
| Beryl Obermann    | Pam Faulkner       | Jay Baldwin      |
| Jane Hillyer      | Shirley Faulkner   | Arthur Lee       |
| Jim Heeremans     | Sally Williams     | Peggy Korth      |
| Carol Heeremans   | Carol Fleckles     | Joan Korth       |
| Dave Gamble       | David Fleckles     | Jim Norton       |
| Paul Chapman      | Bob Klein          | John Carnie      |
| Sally Taylor      | Marvin Klein       | Mr. Griffith     |
| Dick Hall         | Bruce Macintosh    | Mr. Sutton       |
| Bayes Norton      | Karl Hider         | James Baldwin    |
| Pete Rolland      | Ruth Harlow Berman | Jerry Sullivan   |
| Don Kahn          | Hal Berman         | Weir Goodman     |
| Ruth Childs       | Bob Beaven         | Ed Luthrop       |

There was a raft beyond Reids Point that gave the lagoon children hours of fun swimming and diving. It was the perfect meeting place and is where we made many friends. One day Anton dove under the raft and came up too soon, raking his back on the barnacles that were on the underside. He had the scars all his life as a reminder.

Anton worked one summer as a dishwasher at the Eastville Inn, one summer as a clerk in the produce section of the Reliable Market, and one summer as a mechanic at Bergeron’s Garage. During one of those sum-

mers, along with his regular job, he and an Island friend, Eddie Perry, stayed in the East Chop Highlands home of Mr. Gookin, an invalid, and helped prepare his meals and take care of him. I worked as a waitress at the Ahoma Inn on East Chop the summer I was sixteen. With the exception of the Reliable Market, which opened in 1947, none of those businesses exist any longer.

During the summer that Anton worked at Bergeron's Garage, his Island friends, Eddie Perry, Bobby Sylvia, and George Packish, acquired an old Model T Ford four-door sedan. They cut the top off, making it an open car, and drove it up Circuit Avenue, tooting the horn, which sounded like "fish, fish," to attract the attention of the girls. When the car needed repairs, Anton would take it to the garage and work on it in his spare time.

Teenage girls would spend hours in the sun in those years, slathered with baby oil containing a few drops of iodine, to get a beautiful tan. All those summers in the sun during childhood and the teen years without benefit of sunscreen have contributed to lots of sun damage to the skin!

A highlight of the week would be the "sings," a sort of vesper service, which were held Sunday nights for the neighbors at the home of Ralph and Marion Harlow. Dr. Harlow would lead the sings with a brief talk and suggestions for hymns to sing. Marion Harlow would play the piano, their son-in-law, Dr. Harold Berman, would play the accordion, and the attendees would join in the singing. Dr. Paul Williams had a wonderful bass voice, and a favorite of everyone was his singing of "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho," accompanied by Hal Berman. When Mrs. Harlow gave up playing the piano, her daughter, Ruth Harlow Berman, took over.

An event that is still taking place at the time of this writing is the reading of the Declaration of Independence each Fourth of July at the beach, followed by a picnic.

Beryl recalls Sunday evening band concerts at Ocean Park in Oak Bluffs and, with other children, skipping around the bandstand as the music played. John Sylvia, Johnny and Phil, all played in the band years ago. Those concerts continue to be held.

### **The Next Generation**

In 1952 I married John Cross, who, after college and seminary, became a Congregational minister. We would take our four children each summer to the Vineyard for a few weeks. John loved to fish, and quahogs and fish were abundant during those years. With a permit and a lobster pot, one could catch lobsters, too. A real Island dinner for the family would be quahog chowder with huckleberry pie for dessert. In 1960 we bought a piece of property across from the Buck property on Worcester Avenue, and a few years later, in 1963, built our A-frame cottage. Once our children were all in school, I worked as administrative assistant for many years.

Anton married Phyllis Ahern in 1957. He was starting a marine electronics business, which kept him very busy during the summers. He and Phyllis had four children, which kept Phyllis busy with both the children and helping with the business, so they had few visits to the Island in those years. In the 1970s they did buy a piece of property on the corner of Barnes Road and Linden Avenue with a small cottage on it. They repaired and updated the cottage and furnished it with new things, but had little time to spend there, so they rented it for several years to college students. Unfortunately, the renters had parties and other activities that damaged the property and furnishings, and items that could be carried away were stolen, so they decided to sell. Sadly Anton died in 2008, leaving a large, empty spot in our hearts.

In 1959, Beryl married Matthew Stephens, who was teaching at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and also studying for his Ph.D. at Wharton. Matt became a professor and later, Vice Dean of Wharton and Director of the Undergraduate Division. Beryl was an organist and choir director. She would spend her summers at the lagoon with their two children and Matt would visit whenever possible. They purchased the Buck cottage in 1969 from our mother, who had inherited it from her parents at the time of our grandfather's death in 1956. Our grandmother died in 1936.

A noticeable change after World War II was the introduction of skunks to the Island by some short-sighted individual(s). These animals, which are not native to the Island, don't have a single redeeming feature, in my opinion! They have wreaked havoc on the ground-nesting bird population, and the smell of their spray reeks from one end of the Island to the other. They have even invaded the towns. They have multiplied to great numbers and have few natural enemies, the great horned owl being one of the few. It has been years since we've heard the call of a bobwhite or a whippoorwill.

Another change is frequent sightings of deer in our neighborhoods in the spring and fall. With the addition of many homes being built, their natural habitat has been shrinking and they now venture into our neighborhoods, something that once was a rare sight.

During those post-war years, people spent many hours at the beach, both mornings and afternoons. Since a lot of the people who had been friends growing up were still spending summers at the lagoon with their young families, days at the beach were also a time for social gathering among the parents as they swam, sailed, and kept an eye on their children while they played.

The Weetauqua Corinthian Club was no longer in existence. New families have moved into the original cottages and bigger cottages and winter



View of the Lagoon Heights neighborhood in the early 1900s, possibly from Winne Avenue, looking south toward Springfield Avenue. From left are the Brown, Buck and Watkins cottages. In the background is the Allen cottage on Worcester Avenue. *(All Lagoon Heights images provided by Beryl Obermann Stephens.)*

houses have been built, making what was “the colony” now a larger and much different community.

With the increase in both the summer and winter populations and the construction of more and larger houses, more cars and trucks on the narrow roads, and more planes flying overhead, the changes as we look back are many, varied, and irreversible. This makes our memories of a simpler time and our summers on the lagoon all the more precious.

## Lagoon Neighbors Remembered

by SALLY WILLIAMS

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### **A Cottage on the Lagoon**

The Williams family members:

J. Paul Williams, 1900-1973 and wife,

Helen Hobart Williams, 1898-1998

Katherine (Kay) Williams Brown, b. 1930-

Sarah (Sally) Elizabeth Williams, b. 1934-

My parents were looking for a summer cottage at the end of World War II, when I was eleven. Since my father was a college professor, the family could take nearly three months to spend away from our winter home. When a Mrs. Glover, in California, decided to sell a cottage she owned on Lagoon Pond, my mother decided to buy it. After squashing several sensible financial objections from my father, we bought a shack and a wonderful view for twenty-eight hundred or three thousand dollars. (Mother, years later, could not remember which.)

Our new shack-with-a-view had a two-room main house, with a watertight roof and several smaller buildings, including an outhouse and a garage. All of these were eventually incorporated into the main cottage building.

The main cabin was located about twenty-five feet from the edge of a thirty-eight-foot cliff. It was a "house built upon the sands," with no rocks worthy of notice. Later, I was told it was part of the sandy washout from the secondary moraine of the Wisconsin Glacier.

Everyone in the family had his or her appointed tasks that first summer. Mother did what mothers usually did in the nineteen forties. She must have been the cook, but I cannot remember what the source of heat was; maybe a two-burner camping stove. Most of the heavy jobs were done by my father. Much of his time that year was spent under the house, fitting cement blocks to strengthen the foundation. I wanted screens; he refused to do screens before setting a decent foundation. Mother solved the screen problem by tacking cheesecloth over the windows. Much of the rest of my father's work time was spent writing his book about the religions of America. It was a formidable task and one well done. He was working on

a third edition when he died thirty years later.

My biggest task was a daily sweeping of the cottage floor. Each sweeping garnered at least two full dustpans of sand, and I never actually got rid of the sand. Another of my tasks was to pull up the food that had been lowered in a pail eight feet or so down a well. The well kept the food cool and the task helped keep me busy. Since we had no electricity, the well was the coolest spot on our property. Pulling ticks off our dog, Patty, was a job we all had, but I did not know enough to be squeamish, and Patty, surprisingly, let me pull the ticks. I played with her a lot and she was used to my being hands on with her and teaching her tricks. She probably saw pulling ticks as just another game we played. I cannot remember what Kay's particular tasks were, but they were certainly more onerous than mine.

We had neither electricity nor water that first summer. We were used to camping without electricity, but water posed a more serious problem. We probably got it by hoses from our only near neighbors a couple of hundred feet away. None of us liked the chemical toilet, but it, in addition to mosquitoes, was my only real discomfort during that first summer. We had electricity by our second summer because we needed it to get power to the pump, which brought water up from the well. Water meant a water-flushed toilet, which made me especially happy.

### **The Harlow Legacy**

The families who lived in our small community on Lagoon Pond were far from diverse. They tended to have two things in common: they were related by blood or friendship to Marion and Ralph Harlow and/or they were families of clergymen.

The senior Harlows, Ralph and Marion, were both Harlow and clergy. Ralph had the gift of making friends and most members of our community liked to have a summer cottage in Lagoon Heights in proximity to the Harlows. Their family consisted of the Rev. Dr. Ralph, who taught religion at Smith College and was a Congregational minister, his wife, Marion, and their two daughters, Ruth and Betty.

Ralph could make you feel you were the most valued person in the world when he was talking to you. Ralph charmed and helped to manage the world while Marion managed Ralph, the Harlow household, and anyone else lower than she in the pecking order. A friend of the family called her "Managing Marion."

When I was little, Ralph told me Johnny-in-the-Penny stories. Johnny, who lived in a penny that was always in Ralph's pocket, had wonderful and unlikely adventures that I pestered Ralph to tell me. Unfortunately, I have forgotten them.

When I was thirteen, and like most thirteen-year-olds rather unsure of myself, Ralph told me I would become a beautiful woman. Since I knew I

had rather irregular features, I suffered from a sense of being unattractive. Ralph's comment did wonders for my self-esteem.

The Harlows had two daughters, Ruth and Betty. The elder, Ruth, graduated from Smith College and briefly taught at Northfield School for Girls before she married Hal Berman, who was off to World War II after having helped to start what became a large family.

Betty went to Mt. Holyoke College and married another soldier, named, to the confusion of many, Hal like her brother-in-law and Harlow like her father. I was seven and went to their wedding. Ralph had a moving picture camera, not an everyday thing in those days. One reel showed a picture of the wedding party with me on the sidelines wearing a pink party dress. In an earlier sequence on the same reel was a picture of a turkey, his fan-shaped tail in full nuptial regalia, which we had stopped to admire.

### **The Harber Melange**

Betty, Ruth and their husbands, the two Hals, together bought the property just behind us. They named the place "Harber," combining the first three letters of each of their last names. This multi-building establishment had adequate space for their combined families of four adults and seven children. One structure held a living room and kitchen; beyond that, connected by an outdoor walkway, was a building with two large bedrooms, a closet-sized room, and one small bath without tub or shower, that served the whole family. Next was a barn with unstructured space that held several of the children and another bedroom. Lastly was a tiny extra building, which was made into a bedroom. The entire place resembled the Minotaur's maze at Knossos.

The combined families produced together a numerous tribe: Steve, Linda, Jean, Dick, Susanna, Bonnie, and Johnny. Steve would bring to our house eels that he caught in the lagoon. Mother cooked them for our family. They were very fat and I hated their taste; so did my father, but we ate them anyway (my parents had lived through the Great Depression and went to considerable lengths to save money). Linda, I recently learned, would take her dates and go necking beyond the scrub oaks at the top of our cliff. Jean, when just older than a toddler, repeatedly bounced happily down the low front steps of their cottage the year it was purchased. Susanna painted pictures, some of which ended up on the cottage's walls. Johnny earned my wrath when I stupidly called down to him from a makeshift scaffold from which I was painting an inside wall of our house, not to step on the floor because the paint was wet. I've never let him forget that.

### **Chiggie**

The first person to welcome our family to the new shack on the lagoon was Miss Lillian Chignall, who was recently retired as a governess to a New York family. She must have been about seventy years old when we

first met her. I had encountered a governess only in my reading and was somewhat surprised to discover they existed in real life. Apparently they did in 20th century New York, and Chiggie was proof of the existence of the occupation.

Her transportation was by foot. She was the first visitor to our new cottage and sought us out to introduce herself. Invariably, she wore a hat; she had several, but all were light-colored. Fairly short in stature, she had good posture and (as would be expected of a governess) was always straight and proper. She was wonderfully good with children (I was ten or eleven). We were all delighted to see her when she came for drop-in visits.

Chiggie lived in a haphazardly-built cottage called Huckleberry Lodge, because it lodged in the huckleberries. The house had a small living room with a fireplace, which, I think, supplied the heat for the whole building. That tiny living room was surrounded on three sides by a big, screened porch where she entertained in warm weather. The fourth side was a kitchen, which was on two levels; half the kitchen was four or five steps above the rest of the kitchen below. I never knew why the kitchen was two levels, and I am not sure anyone else did, either.

Chiggie was English and an established tea party giver. These were delightful occasions somewhat spoiled by mosquitoes that got through the screens. I learned the protocols of tea from her while I gobbled as many biscuits as I dared.

Miss Chignall was well versed in the flora and fauna of the Island and gave my parents gardening advice. We lived less than twenty feet from the highest cliff on Lagoon Pond, thirty-nine feet high according to the surveyor, and we needed to put plantings on and at the top of the bank to hold it in place. She strongly approved of huckleberries that grew at the top of the cliff. She suggested black locust trees, which grew fast and would hold the bank. She was right. The locusts are now towering above all the vegetation in the yard, including an enormous oak. They have spread their runners and upward growing sprouts too enthusiastically all over a large and somewhat wild yard. Chiggie misjudged badly how extremely happy the locusts would be at the top of our bank. "Invasive" is the word used these days to label fast-growing and spreading plants.

She lived in that house in the woods midst the huckleberries until she was nearly one hundred. Then, one of her friends persuaded and helped her to move into a house in Vineyard Haven. She did not like it there, but her friends insisted she should not live alone. Chiggie died in a nursing home after she reached the century mark and started to lose her memory.

I visited her once in Vineyard Haven. She was delighted to see me, just as she wanted to see all the children she had visited when she was younger.

## **The Fleckles Family**

The family that lived nearest to us was the Fleckles family. They were much the closest because they had placed their house at the most southern edge of their property and ours was already at the northern edge of our property. Their house was a temporary building left behind by the military when they moved out of the airport after the war (World War II, of course).

My father obtained the trees from the State Extension Service. While he placed foundation cement blocks in the sand under the floor, the mothers put spruce seedlings in the sand along the boundary line. Luckily the small spruces survived, thrived, and now there is a solid row of evergreens and satellite oaks and wild cherries so thick we can hardly see one house from the other.

Cherry Fleckles was a full-time homemaker and Elliot a military chaplain at the veterans' hospital near Northampton, Massachusetts. The family had five children — four sons and a daughter. The boys all left the Island as adults, but one daughter, Carol, bought out her brothers and owned the summer house after her parents died.

The Fleckles family bought an old Quonset Hut that had been built by the military at the airport for wartime use. They divided the main space in this structure into a living/dining room, with small bedrooms along its sides. In my opinion, the kitchen was the best room in their house; the family had a real icebox instead of a refrigerator. After the first summer when my family put food down the well to keep it cool, we got an electric refrigerator. (We needed electricity to get water that was not hand pumped.) An icebox was a splendid “new” creation for me. The ice arrived in huge blocks and went out in buckets of water. I sometimes helped with the latter. At our house I always did the run to the well when Mother needed the butter.

Carol, her older brother, my older sister, and I jointly owned a small boat in which I more or less learned to sail. The older siblings tended to ignore the boat, but Carol and I sailed it. None of us loved it very much; it side-slipped badly, and the winds on the lagoon were usually fluky. As a result, I ended up a less than enthusiastic sailor.

## **The Mead Family**

Not all our neighbors at the top of the bank were drawn to Martha's Vineyard by the Harlows. The next family north along the bank after the Fleckleses was the Mead family, who had been established in Oak Bluffs before either the Harlows or Williamses moved to Lagoon Heights.

The Meads came to the Vineyard every summer, as did we. The original pair of small cottages that they owned was passed from the senior Varnum Mead to his son Varnum Junior. Each time a house adjoining theirs went

on sale, they acquired it. First the Clark cottage went to sister Priscilla, then the Kirkpatrick cottage fell under the gavel to Jan, wife of Varnum Junior and mother of Dottie and Susan, the next generation. Susan built a year-round house a short distance away on land her family owned. Dottie and family now come for summers. The Meads were, and still are, good neighbors.

Mother was a little suspicious of the senior Meads in her generation; if they voted Republican, they could not be truly acceptable as friends. When I was little, I did not know them well. They had no children my age for me to play with. I was suspicious because they owned a large, and I believed, ferocious German shepherd. Rex, fortunately, did not wander over into our yard. Whenever I came close to their house, he came to meet me and I went in the other direction.

Until I moved from Barnes Road in 2007, the Meads were my best and closest year-round neighbors. I also owned and loved dearly a large and enormously noisy German Shepherd who likes to go and meet people. My minister at the time, who has cats and is wary of dogs, called my ferocious beast a “cream puff.” The Mead dog may have been one, too.

### **The Boak Family**

The Boaks were near neighbors who lived outside of and predated, by a generation, the Harlow/clergy circle. We became, and still are, good friends, in spite of the fact that they were Republicans. My father was a Democrat and my mother a rather intolerant Socialist. The Boaks and the adult Williamses frequently enjoyed themselves of an evening playing bridge. Mother came away from one bridge session making the comment that she never realized that Republicans could be such nice people. (She had the same problem with the Meads.) Peter Boak, grandson of the most senior Boaks and now the director of the Island Community Chorus, used to help Mother maintain the yard. Clearly, politics and gardens were separate from each other in my mother’s mind.

Peter’s aunt and uncle, Mary and David Boak, were active bird watchers, as were my mother and I. They kept a list of all the birds they saw from their property, which gave me the idea of doing the same thing. I have an advantage and therefore a longer list; at my house on the lagoon, one could list a number of shore and water birds that the inland Boaks lacked.

### **The Mabee Family**

Still headed north along the bank toward the bridge, the next neighborhood family was the Mabees. They had been a missionary couple, and also taught at a college in Maine. They, too, were friends of Ralph Harlow. Since their children were older than my childhood generation, I did not know them well, even though they had no dogs. The senior Mabees were close friends of my parents.

I do not remember Mr. Mabee at all well, but do recall that he was a Baptist clergyman. After he died, I came to know and love his wife. Miriam Mabee was a grandmotherly lady with white hair, a slight limp, and a kind smile. She wore printed gingham housedresses and baked good cookies of which I consumed a goodly number. She had a strong religious faith, which was expressed in kind acts.

The community children had a path that went along the top of the bank, close to its edge, for about a quarter of a mile. We used it regularly, including at night, and I could find my way on it, even at the time of a new moon, with no difficulty at all. The path came closest to the waterfront cottages in front of the Mabee home, essentially trespassing on their front lawn.

Miriam and I became very close in her later years. I often stayed with her in the “off” season when I came to Martha’s Vineyard while my parents stayed “in America.” Miriam became my honorary grandmother. She had chosen to live on the Island alone in the woods, as did I for many years after I retired. I went to her to be mothered with cookies and an understanding, listening ear.

I also felt safe in her home. At the time of these visits, I was developing into a very troubled alcoholic. No alcohol was present in her home and I could not betray her trust by bringing some in. We never discussed my addiction, although I think she must have been aware of it. I always knew she would love me and support me if I came to her for help. Her home was a safe haven where I could stay sober.

Some of my best experiences with nature on Martha’s Vineyard were at Miriam’s home. My only sighting of an island scarlet tanager was in the woods behind her house; it was probably migrating through to breed in the north. The most dramatic and exciting sunset I can ever remember seeing was from a window in the living room looking toward the west over the lagoon. It was a ribbed display of exciting colors blending into each other: purple, coral and gold.

The only time I saw Miriam getting angry was one morning when she went outside and discovered that a rabbit had eaten ALL the petunias she had planted the day before. No four-letter words for this lady--but she would gladly have done in the rabbit.

### **The Faulkner Family**

Another family in our community, close friends of the Harlows although not with any religious connection, were the Faulkners, headed by Harold and Ethel. Harold was a history professor at Smith College who preferred to stay at home in Northampton and do research while the rest of the family spent the summer at the beach. Their two daughters, Pam and Shirley, were the same ages as my sister Kay and I. Ethel had given up work on a Ph.D. and a career in order to get married, a not uncommon practice in the 1920s

and '30s. Almost all the mothers in our lagoon circle, including my own, had abandoned careers in favor of marriage. Harold Faulkner had been an unusually successful textbook writer, and the house he and Ethel (mostly Ethel) built on the lagoon was very large for a "cottage."

Ethel was a frustrated professional and ran her household the way she would have organized a job. This story is probably apocryphal, but she carefully saved pieces of string that she labeled "string too short to use." As a result of being a frustrated scholar, she became an overzealous housekeeper, along with being a wife and mother. She probably was also a valuable research assistant for her husband.

My special friend was Shirley Faulkner who was my age. We sailed my boat in races put on by our neighborhood children's yacht club. The boat was so inferior — it side-slipped dreadfully — that no one else wanted to handle it. So, by default, it was my boat. Shirley and I sailed in many of the club's races. We always came in last. We earned the Davy Jones's Locker Prize as our reward; we did not receive the Plugger's Cup because we "didn't try hard enough." (I never learned to enjoy sailing after that.) Shirley and I had private conversations during our races and became fast friends.

Pam, the older daughter, was four or five years older than I was. That age spread is negligible when you are retired and writing your memoirs, but the ages seem worlds apart when you are twelve or thirteen. As a result, Pam and I never knew each other, although we summered in neighboring cottages and our families usually celebrated Thanksgiving together. From the records of our local teenagers' yacht club, I recently discovered that she raced a boat named the "Dodo," the same boat I also owned and raced. She, too, appears to have been a mediocre sailor.

### **The Klein Family**

Another family of our Lagoon Heights circle of friends — and close friends of the Harlows — was the Klein family. Mrs. Klein, Sylvia, had been a student and close friend of Ralph Harlow at Smith College, but she married a dentist, not a professional clergyman. She might have considered becoming a rabbi herself, but I am not at all sure Jews ordained women in the 1950s. A somewhat obscure religious connection might be made through Sylvia's uncle, Morris Cohen, who was one of America's better-known theological thinkers.

There were four Kleins: father Al, who was a dentist; mother Sylvia, who followed domestic and intellectual pursuits; and two school-age sons, Bob and Marvin. My first clear memory of Bob and Marvin, who were a little younger than I, comes from a time I babysat for them. My parents had bought our cottage within the last two or three years, and the Kleins had rented a house nearby on a lot with a beautiful view of the lagoon. Bob

was too old to need a babysitter and resented my presence deeply. He had, however, recently broken his jaw in a bicycle accident. His jaw was wired shut, and he had to drink from a straw. The adult Kleins hesitated to leave the boys home alone with Bob incapacitated, and I was hired to look after them. Bob was incensed and refused to accept my authority in any way. I did not know what to do, and I don't remember Marvin's reaction.

Al was one of my favorite people. He was kind and loving and knew how to talk to young people as equals. He was a member of, or advisor to, the yacht club formed by some of the young people who lived on the lagoon. Once he and a teenage club officer paid a formal visit to invite me to be club treasurer. I was terribly flattered and I'm sure I accepted. In retrospect, I cannot think of anyone less appropriate for the job. I still have trouble adding 9 plus 8, to say nothing of dividing 24 by 4.

Sylvia had a quick wit combined with a swift tongue, which was something I enjoyed even as a child. She was a good cook and often invited my family to supper. We usually had my favorite dessert — a blueberry pie from Humphrey's. She also had a dishwasher, something I lusted after; I was the dishwasher in my family.

Since Bob and Marvin were boys and enough younger than I to make a difference, we were not playfellows. I've always been fond of them and grew more so as we got older, when age and gender made less of a difference.

The Kleins owned my favorite toy. It was a closed box with a marble-sized steel ball, a top one could tilt, and a hazard course with holes and barriers. The goal was to get the ball on a path from the top left to the lower right without letting it fall through a hole. I cannot recall ever succeeding, but I do remember hours spent trying.

### **Our Friends, the Taylors**

The Taylors were close friends of the Williamses, but were neither clergy nor particularly close friends of the Harlows. In another sense, however, they were quite close as residents of the Central Massachusetts Connecticut River Valley, albeit the Amherst rather than the Northampton side of the river. Both fathers were professors who taught at the colleges located in the valley. George Taylor was a professor of American economic history.

The other members of the Taylor family were daughters Debbie and Sally, the same ages as were my sister Kay and I, and their mother, Mary. George was one of my favorite people, warm and loving, with a good sense of humor, while at the same time being relentlessly rational. That is not to say he was not emotional and irrational — that's part of the human condition. But he believed the source of truth was objective reality, a characteristic (I'm tempted to say "failing") he shared with many professors of his generation, including my father. He left child rearing largely to his children's mother. The Taylors bought an old farmhouse in the hills above



July 1931: Beach party on the lagoon, at the foot of the Worcester Avenue path. The Reid house is in the background. Several in this picture are unknown. Those who are identifiable include (from left) Gardner Fletcher, standing, and seated next to him, Madeline Fletcher; Albert Buck, kneeling at the grill; Florence Buck, and immediately behind her, Warner Fletcher; David Fletcher, in front of the Reid house; Anton Obermann; Fred Belcher; Fred's daughter Madeline Belcher; and kneeling in the foreground, wearing a beret, Marion Buck Obermann.

the Connecticut River before World War II.

Both parents had grown up in an era when every rural family raised chickens and possibly a pig for food. One of my earliest memories is of a chicken running headless around the yard because George had just cut off its head with an ax.

Mary was like many professors' wives in those days and was expected to choose between a profession of her own or follow the expected path of marriage and motherhood. As a result, she was constantly researching the history of our town of Pelham, Massachusetts, while never writing the history. She enjoyed her research greatly, and Sally and I sometimes played in the cellar where Mary collected artifacts, such as candle snuffers, candle molds, or canning jars, or wove endless lengths of linen bureau scarves. She was always late as a result of her ongoing researches, crafts, and projects. But she always found time to feed her family and friends well with plentiful meals accompanied by tasty leftovers from many meals gone by.

A final member of the Taylor menage was Bijou, a bright russet Maine coon cat who could as well have been named Amber.

The Taylors purchased a Methodist Camp Meeting cottage in 1951, six years after we bought our cottage on the bluff.

## Cottage History

by LAURISA OWEN RICH

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### **Members of the Cox family:**

The Honorable Alfred E. Cox and wife?

Phillip W.L. Cox, Sr., d.1976? and wife Ruth Dillaway Cox, d. 1969?

Phillip W. L. Cox, Jr., d. 1991?

Edward Cox, d. 1997?

Nancy R. Cox Hollister, d. 2001

Phillip W.L. Cox, Jr.'s grandchildren: Peter Cox, Emma Cox Owen, Fred Cox

Emma Cox Owen's children:

Jayson Owen, Laura Owen Rich, Sarah Owen, Sunday Jacobs Owen

The Red Roof Cottage was built in 1919 from a Sears and Roebuck kit called an Aladdin Home. Originally built out on sheep pasture in the "wilds" of Oak Bluffs, the cottage enjoyed an expansive view of the Lagoon Pond. It had a hand pump in the kitchen, an ice box, an outdoor bathroom and, yes, a red roof. Over the years it has been added onto (by a variety of uncles and locals with rudimentary carpentry skills), electrified and plumbed. A nice year-round neighborhood has grown up around it, but the lot is large with tremendous privacy offered by Winne Park (off the deck) and Beacon Park (fronting Fitchburg Avenue).

In the late 1800s my great, great grandfather Alfred E. Cox brought his family from Malden, Massachusetts, to spend summers in their seaside home on the corner of Canonicus and Sea View avenues in Oak Bluffs. Weary of the Victorian lifestyle there, his son Philip rented this cottage the summer it was built and bought it the next year. An educator by profession, he brought his family down just after Memorial Day every year and closed it up for their departure just before Labor Day. The rustic nature of the lifestyle here appealed to them all: clamming in the lagoon, getting milk and vegetables from Tia Anna's farm nearby, bird-watching, berry picking, canoeing and sailing.

The cellar was hand-dug when the cottage was plumbed (sometime in the 30s) and the interior kitchen was moved to the expanded back porch shortly after that. A platform was added, accessed by a raise-able ladder, for access out onto the kitchen rooftop for nude sunbathing and stargaz-



At the Buck cottage: from left, Willard Watkins, Marion Buck, Adelbert Watkins, and Harold Buck.

ing. It is said you could see the village of Edgartown from up there in those days before reforestation after the Island's long history as pastureland.

My great-grandmother Ruth and great-aunt Nan were both artists. The cottage has become a gallery for their paintings, sculpture, pottery and weavings. Nan acquired the floor loom here on the Island in the 1940s when she apprenticed with a master weaver from Hungary who immigrated to Martha's Vineyard after World War II. It has recently returned to the cottage after residing with Nan throughout her life in New York City, Pennsylvania, Florida and California. Many yards of artisan textiles and numerous rugs and tapestries were created on it. The "Flowers-in-Vase" painting was painted by a sister of the maverick political family from Texas. The Gay Head Cliffs painting is by James Gilbert of Martha's Vineyard.

Much of the cottage furniture was cast-offs from mainland homes of various family members. The white tables on the sun porch are from the Sea View summer home. The original ice box is in the cellar.

The small cabin below was built as a garage for the family's Model T Ford. In the 1940s it was converted into an art studio, then later a guest cottage when the studio was moved to the cellar — a cool spot on hot summer days.

## Summers on the Raft

by SALLY TAYLOR HOHENTHAL

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We knew that summer had begun when we arrived on the Vineyard complete with bikes, suitcases, crab nets and tennis rackets. But, summer really began with the launching of the raft. It had been pulled up on the shore for the winter, and now its four oil barrel and splinter filled planks, complete with a narrow diving board, must be launched.

Families from around the lagoon gathered to push, drag, and scrape the cumbersome float out to the heavy cement blocks that would anchor it. The placement of these blocks was calculated carefully so that even the most exuberant individual could dive into the water at low, as well as high, tide without scraping bottom.

Once the raft was secure, the real fun began. First, there had to be the “swim out to the raft” challenge. Who would be allowed to swim out this year without a parent or older sibling swimming alongside? Would you be able to make it this year and be one of the “big kids?” If you failed, you would be left out of all the activity, including pushing, jumping, and generally messing around with the other children of the lagoon. The raft created a feeling of community among the lagoon families. It was a meeting place where “summer kids” could get to know each other and enjoy new experiences. Friends met and picnics could be planned. Fishing poles appeared, but I don’t recall any fish being caught. However, quahogging was organized and the art of digging with feet, compared to a rake, was debated furiously.

As long as the raft was out in the lagoon, the older kids could escape from the parents’ demands and younger brothers’ and sisters’ pestering. Only if you could swim to the floating club could you become a member.

It was always sad when the barrel and wood structure was headed for the shore; you knew then that summer had come to a close. Who would be able to join the select group on the raft next year? You hoped it would be you.

## The Zahn Family

by CARL ZAHN

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Our Vineyard contact began with my first wife, BJ's family, Edwin and Frida Woodrow. They lived in Somerville, New Jersey, and visited the Vineyard every September from the time BJ was eight or so, usually taking the Nobska from New York. They stayed with Bill Luce's family in Vineyard Haven.

BJ and I were married in 1950, and she persuaded me to make our first trip together to the Vineyard in 1951, in the spring, I believe. We also stayed at the Luce's (kind of an early bed and breakfast), but it rained every day (five) that we were there, and I swore off the Island.

We ended up vacationing primarily on the Cape, usually in Wellfleet. But BJ kept voicing nostalgia for the Vineyard, so in 1960 we rented a cottage from Varnum Mead's sister, Priscilla, just up Barnes Road. The weather was better, and we came back the next four years, the last (1964) in the Williamses' cottage, a couple of doors down from Priscilla's. It was a cool August and we amused ourselves looking at real estate.

We settled on the house on Newton, which was owned by Lida Oliver (Earl Peters' aunt) who had also owned the one across the street, which she had sold to John and Harriet Wayne (who later divorced, and she ended up with Danielson). They sold to Bill Fender.

N.B.: The Zahn house is on the corner of Newton and Springfield avenues, originally built by Fred Belcher.

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## STORM OF THE CENTURY

# Remembering the Hurricane Of 1938: Still the Big One

by BONNIE STACY

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Hurricane damage at Menemsha. *Photo from the Museum collections.*

**N**OWADAYS WE HEAR of potential great storms and hurricanes for days in advance. Radar and 24-hour news and weather channels offer imprecise predictions that seem designed to whip the maximum number of people into a frenzy of preparation. When a storm does not meet expectations, there is disdain for all the hype. Try to imagine, then, a hurricane arriving on the shores of Martha's Vineyard with almost no warning. A hurricane that found no one prepared. Seventy-five years ago on the afternoon of September 21, that is exactly what happened.

The hurricane of 1938 has attained legendary status, and deservedly so. It was the storm of the century. It devastated the coast from Long Island to Cape Cod, destroying property and killing 564 people in southern New

Bonnie Stacy is Chief Curator of the Martha's Vineyard Museum. This story is reprinted by permission from the Martha's Vineyard Times, in which it first appeared.



After the storm hit Menemsha, people salvaged what they could. *Photo from the Museum collections.*

England. Here on Martha's Vineyard, Josephine Clark, Jamaican cook for the Thielens, a summer family in Chilmark, was swept away when she fled with the couple as their house was surrounded by water. She was the Island's sole fatality.

Others were thankful to survive, but their property loss was enormous. Menemsha was gone in two hours, fishing shacks lifted up and smashed by the power of the storm, boats ripped from their moorings and stranded on shore.

In his 1976 book, *A Wind to Shake the World*, Everett S. Allen recounts the story of the 1938 hurricane's course of destruction from New Jersey to Massachusetts. Allen had lived on Martha's Vineyard from the age of eight, except for the time he was at college. He had begun his first day as a reporter for the *New Bedford Standard-Times* just the day before the storm.

Describing the Vineyard he wrote, "Water rose halfway to the eaves of the Edgartown Yacht Club; within, the piano was afloat,"... "In Vineyard Haven, water was knee-deep over the steamboat wharf. The lower streets of the town were flooded to depths of two or three feet and the harbor-front lawns were strewn with boats and wreckage." At Menemsha, Carl Reed "saw three huge waves sweep across the creek, carrying everything before them."

The Martha's Vineyard Museum has collections that preserve the memory of this catastrophe. Photographers, both known and unknown, recorded the devastation, especially at Menemsha, but also in Edgartown and elsewhere on the Island. Interviews collected decades after the storm



Storm surge at the Edgartown Yacht Club. *Photo from the Museum collections.*

by the museum's Oral History curator, Linsey Lee, prove that the events of that day in 1938 remained with Vineyarders for the rest of their lives.

One of these oral histories was given by Jimmy Morgan in 2000. He was 14 in 1938 and describes riding the school bus home to Menemsha from high school in Vineyard Haven. Though the storm had not reached its height yet, there were already trees in the road. When he arrived in Menemsha, he decided to have a look. "I walked around the shore and down along the harbor, and then everything started floating away and I went home." His father had been in a dory with Everett and Donald Poole, trying to save some of the things that were floating out of the buildings.

When Morgan looked back on the storm, he reflected on the damage, "I guess they'd had hurricanes there before. They never called them hurricanes, always an 'August gale.' But they never had anything like that. They didn't know how bad it was going to be... After the hurricane, everything was all washed out, the docks and fish shacks were gone."

Another oral history, this one from 2001 with Betty Honey of Vineyard Haven, has her reading a letter that her mother wrote just after the storm. "Wednesday it blew from two p.m. to late at night. I was in the woodhouse by the back door, ready to run out if the big elm trees crashed down." She describes 17-year-old Betty getting home from school and going to work, and then tells about fruit being blown from trees, Adirondack chairs being tossed about, "and all the time those great trees were swaying and the tops shrieking with the wind." The letter continues, "Elaine Merrill and Edith Marshall and dog were returning in Elaine's car from Oak Bluffs. The wa-



Shoreline wreckage at Menemsha. *Photo from the Museum collections.*

ter rose and covered their running board and they had to proceed and when they got to the electric light plant the water was in her car, which was rocking like a boat. They got out into the water above their waists, Miss Marshall's coat floating and the dog swimming behind her on the leash."

The letter, which was to Betty's mother's sister in Vermont, also alludes to the isolation the Vineyard experienced in the days following the storm. It starts with the information that "the boats are coming and going, but I hear the train service and so on are poor. So I've sent this air mail," and concludes, "Two big airplanes came yesterday to get reports on conditions here. All communications between here and Boston was lost. Write soon."

There have been hurricanes that hit the Vineyard since 1938. Big storms in 1944, 1954, and 1991 did major damage and live on in the memories of Islanders who were here to experience them. But the storm of 1938 remains the one that they are all compared to. After 75 years, it's still the big one.

## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# A Season to Celebrate Island Relationships and Communities

This issue of the *Intelligencer* is full of stories of both relatives and relationships. Chris Baer's article about his great-great-grandmother's nephew (not sure what relation that is!) is amazing: it is indeed, using the author's words, a "larger-than-life tale." The story ends with a nod to contemporary science and a current project relating to DNA testing, connecting the brave old world of a century ago with the future.

Also in this issue, the Lagoon Heights Memories article tells the common story of families and neighborhoods that have a unique history of their own. These relationships are the glue that keeps the Vineyard together and creates our special community. The Museum is fortunate to have forums — this publication as well as exhibitions and events — to remember and celebrate these relationships and communities.

Many Islanders had a special relationship with Sheldon Hackney, who passed away in September. In closing, I think Sheldon's words upon receipt of the Museum Medal in August, and delivered by his son Fain, are worth repeating as we think about history, relationships and community.

"I also think that my commitment to the Vineyard grows out of its character of being very diverse, yet there is a strong commitment to the health and happiness of each different community. As I am a historian, you will not be surprised by my belief that an understanding of the history of one's community increases one's commitment to it. It is up to each of us, of course, to use our understanding of who we are and what our community is to build a society of which we can all be proud. That is one of the reasons the Museum is so important in the community. We don't need to behave like our predecessors, but we need to understand who we are so that we can become who we want to be. History is about the future. Onward."

Best wishes for a happy holiday season and a healthy new year. Thanks for your support and come see us more often in 2014.

David Nathans  
Executive Director

## WE GET MAIL: A CORRECTION

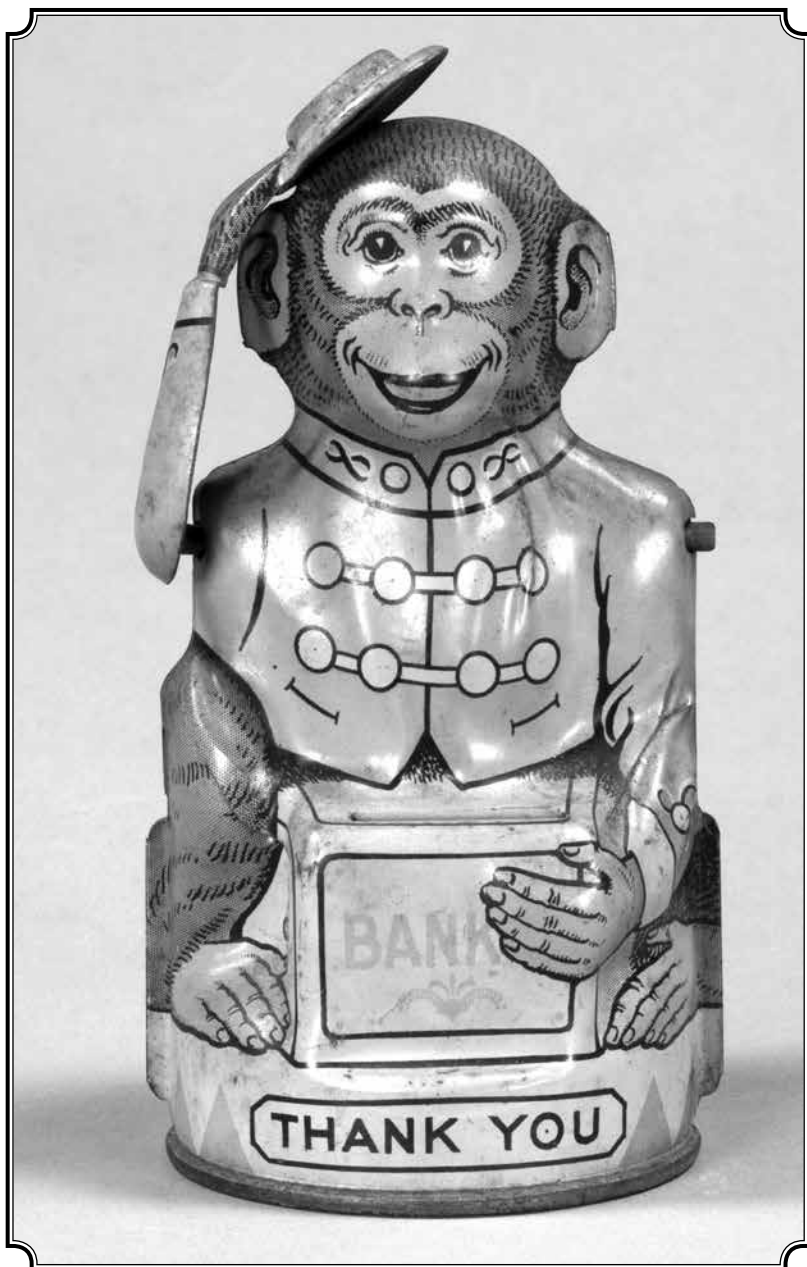
Dear Editor,

I'm sorry to report that I made an error in my article which appeared in Vol. 54, No. 2 of the *Intelligencer*. On page 11 I stated that Mr. I.W. P. Lewis attended and graduated from West Point. He did not. He did study optics in France.

Sincerely,

Wayne C. Wheeler

SUPPORT for the *Dukes County Intelligencer* is always welcome. Please make your tax deductible contribution to the Martha's Vineyard Museum. If you enjoy receiving the *Intelligencer*, consider making a gift of membership to a family member or friend so that they too can enjoy the journal of the Martha's Vineyard Museum, as well as all the other benefits of membership. See our website, [www.mvmuseum.org](http://www.mvmuseum.org), for more information about how you can support our work.



Mechanical painted tin bank, circa 1950, from the current Martha's Vineyard Museum exhibit, "Toys," on display in the Northeast Gallery through Jan. 25, 2014. *MVM collection*