

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



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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## Sixty Tons Of Candles:

The Wreck and Salvage  
Of the Port Hunter



## History on Board:

The Historical Paintings  
Of Charles Edward Banks

## Ben Franklin's Grandfather, Peter Folger

A Chronology



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### UNCONVENTIONAL HISTORY

The scholarly journal is among the most conservative of all literary forms. Still, even within the constraints of a scholarly journal's printed pages, there is room for the innovative and the unexpected. This issue of the *Intelligencer* is testament to that.

Liz Trotter's article "History on Board," for example, is rooted not in written texts, but in images: the twelve wood-burned, painted panels created by Dr. Charles E. Banks to illustrate key scenes from the early history of the Vineyard. Most of us, glancing at them in the Museum's carriage shed, can identify only two or three and guess at a few more; now, with the article and her astute commentary in hand, we can see them anew.

Stephen Grant's painstaking reconstruction of the life of Peter Folger—lieutenant of the missionary Mayhews, teacher of the Wampanoag, grandfather of Benjamin Franklin—is, likewise, no traditional journal article. It could not be: Our knowledge of Folger's life is too fragmented, and our sources for it too scattered. The article offers a framework of what we *think* we know about Folger, in the form of a chronology and a richly annotated bibliography: the skeleton of a life, rescued from the mists of the Colonial-era past, now ready to be fleshed out.

Finally, there is the lead article of this issue: A cross-generational collaboration more than 35 years in the making. It began in 1985, when—as part of a summer job at the Tisbury Museum—I set out to gather all the available information on the 1918 wreck of the *Port Hunter*. Distracted by graduate school, I handed off the results to my father, who added the results of his own research and drafted an article, intended for the *Intelligencer*, that remained unpublished at his death in 2001. Revised, and further amended, it appears in print here for the first time . . . dedicated to his memory.

A. Bowdoin Van Riper

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# Sixty Tons of Candles

## The Wreck and Salvage of the Port Hunter

by ANTHONY K. VAN RIPER  
& A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER

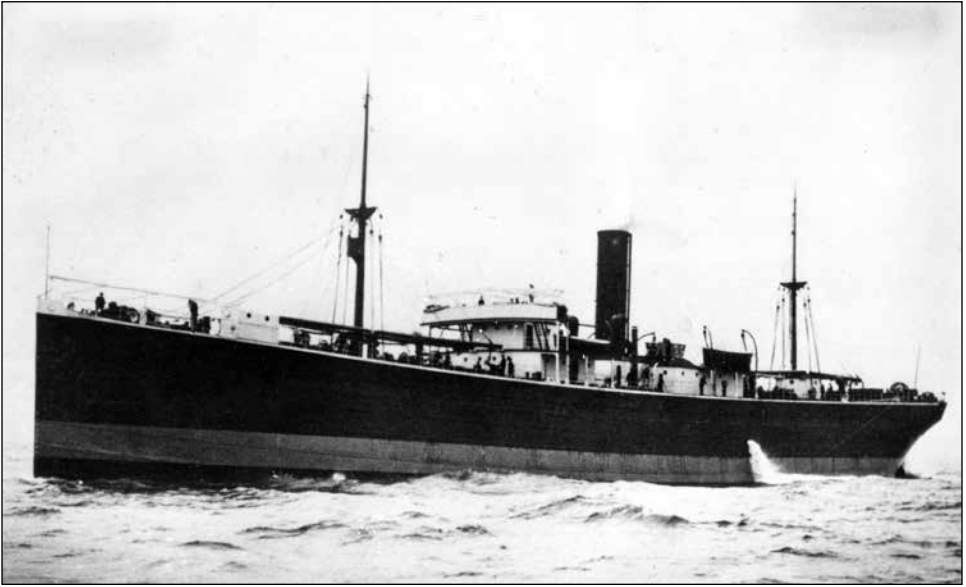
*The night of November 1, 1918, was cool, calm, and clear—a pleasant autumn night on Vineyard Sound—but for watch keepers at sea, it would have been, in the language of the day “as black as the inside of your hat.” The sun had set about 4:30 p.m., and the moon would not rise until 6:30 the following morning. In the deep, impenetrable darkness of that November night, two ships would collide off the mouth of Vineyard Haven Harbor, leading to the most lucrative shipwreck in the history of the Island. The swirl of activity that followed—legitimate salvage or brazen piracy, depending on who was telling the story—drew in divers from Cape Cod, merchants from New Bedford, and naval officers from Boston, along with a diverse cast of Vineyarders: fishermen and housewives, teenage boys and an enterprising Beach Road blacksmith. They were drawn by the lure of a \$6 million cargo, warm clothes and candles for the long winter to come, and maybe—just maybe—more exotic treasures spoken of only in whispers.*

### The Ship and the Wreck

The British cargo steamer *Port Hunter*, 4000 tons, sailed from Boston’s Commonwealth Pier on the afternoon of November 1, under the command of Captain William Stafford. Built in 1906 and owned by Commonwealth and Dominion Lines in England—a subsidiary of Cunard, which operated the giant liners *Mauretania* and *Aquitania*—the *Port Hunter* was 380 feet overall and, loaded to her marks as she was, drew just under 24 feet of water. Along with Captain Stafford, she carried a crew of seven officers, two apprentices, and forty-one able seamen, firemen, and specialty ratings, such as the wireless operator and a three-man gun crew.

She was loaded with a mixed cargo of supplies. Three thousand tons of steel billets and railroad car wheels for the French army were stowed low

Anthony K. Van Riper (1926–2001), who began his career as an English teacher at the Tisbury School, was a long-time board member and officer of the Dukes County Historical Society and the Martha’s Vineyard Historical Society. A. Bowdoin Van Riper (1963– ), his son, is Research Librarian at the Martha’s Vineyard Museum and editor of the *Intelligencer*.



Steam-powered, screw-driven, steel-hulled freighters like the *Port Hunter* had, by the 1910s, become the workhorses of the merchant marine, displacing sailing vessels from all but a few niche markets.

*Martha's Vineyard Museum, Basil Welch Collection, RU 465.*

in her holds to act as ballast, but her most important cargo was 2,000 tons of winter clothing: 191,000 cubic feet of it, divided into more than 40,000 packages. It was a rush order for the U. S. Army Quartermaster Corps, designed to help relieve the critical shortage of warm clothing among the troops of the American Expeditionary Force as they prepared for their second winter in France.<sup>1</sup> There were 207,000 sleeveless, fleece-lined leather vests; 133,000 flannel shirts; 237,000 pairs of winter drawers, and three times that many winter undershirts. Gear for wet weather was carried as well: 3,600 pairs of oilskin trousers; 3,300 pairs of hip-length rubber boots, and 60,000 tins of “dubbin” for waterproofing leather boots. A hodgepodge of smaller items, like the contents of a looted hardware store, filled the remaining space in the holds. There were nails and wire-mesh fencing, heavy leather gloves and cobbler’s shoe-repair kits, fire extinguishers and lock-stitch sewing machines. Total war consumes ammunition and fuel, but also shoelaces, soap, and toilet paper. They, too, were loaded aboard the *Port Hunter*, along with 60 tons of what the Army described as “candles, issue” and another 70 tons of “candles, lantern”— designed to light trenches and dugouts at the front.

*Port Hunter’s* course, as specified by the Routing Office of the 1<sup>st</sup> Naval

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1 John Bion Richards to Joseph Chase Allen, November 22, 1933. *Vineyard Gazette* archives; copy in “Wreck of the *Port Hunter* (1918)” vertical file, VREF 1060.1, Martha’s Vineyard Museum [hereafter “*Port Hunter* VF”].

District in Boston, brought her around Cape Cod, through Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds.<sup>2</sup> Once she had cleared Gay Head, she was to have shaped her course southwestward, bound—by way of the whistle buoy off Montauk and the Fire Island and Ambrose Channel lightships—to a point “about 60 miles off New York,” where the weekly convoy bound for France was to meet the destroyers that would escort it through the submarine zone.

The convoy would sail for France without her.

An hour or two after midnight, *Port Hunter* was passing East Chop Light with its green glow. Also to port were a few lights in Vineyard Haven; to starboard, one or two glimmers from Falmouth. The ship’s pilot—Charles B. Paine, who had come aboard in Boston, and who bore the responsibility of guiding Captain Stafford through the coastal waters between Boston and New York—could see the towing lights of the steam tug *Covington*, just clearing the eastern end of the Middleground Shoal off West Chop, bound for Boston with a tow of two loaded barges: the Consolidated Company’s No. 10 and No. 24.<sup>3</sup> *Covington* herself was owned by the Seaboard Transportation Company, a New Jersey corporation whose base of operations was Boston. Roland B. McCoy, the skipper, had been less than a month in command of the 19-year-old, 130-foot tug; the watch officer at the time of the collision was Orland L. McCallum, the second mate and pilot.

Afterwards, the word along the waterfront in Vineyard Haven was that *Port Hunter*’s pilot had celebrated the impending end of the war a little too heavily, and was drunk on duty.<sup>4</sup> Testimony taken at a hearing by the Board of Harbor Inspectors on June 30, 1919 seems to bear that out. Herman T. Parker, the local Inspector of Harbors in Boston, reported that: “L. W. Quinn, Master of the tug *Plymouth* which . . . was bound east and had passed the *Port Hunter* before the *Covington* [met] her, indicates that the *Port Hunter* had been steering wildly, and that the people in charge of the navigation of that vessel were not attentive to duty.”<sup>5</sup>

The rules of the road at sea are very clear: When possible, vessels on opposite courses should pass to the right of each other, that is, port side to port side. The second choice is starboard to starboard. As the old sailor’s rhyme says: “Green-to-green or red-to-red, perfect safety, go ahead.”

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2 First Naval District Routing Office to Capt. William Stafford, October 31, 1918. US National Archives; copy in *Port Hunter* VF.

3 Christopher C. Hugo, “Port Hunter,” Metro West Dive Club website. Accessed August 18, 2000. Copy in *Port Hunter* VF.

4 *New Bedford Standard*, October 1, 1919.

5 “Testimony of Herman T. Parker,” *War Expenditures: Hearings Before Subcommittee No. 4 (Quartermaster Corps) of the Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, House of Representatives, Sixty-Sixth Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 514-515. <https://books.google.com/books?id=IENDAAAYAAJ>

The two vessels were moving on opposite courses through the channel bounded by East Chop and West Chop to the south, and Hedge Fence shoal to the north. *Covington*, headed east toward Boston, was holding to the north side of the channel; *Port Hunter*, headed west toward New York, was closer to the south side, and thus the vessels should have passed green-to-green. For some unknown reason, however, as *Covington* drew closer, *Port Hunter*'s pilot ordered a turn to starboard so as to pass to the right of the tug, which meant she would cut across the tug's bow. Second mate McCallum, seeing collision was now inevitable, ordered *Covington*'s engines thrown into reverse and backed down hard.

It was too late. The tug's nose drove into the steel plating just aft of *Port Hunter*'s port bow. At 2:02 AM, an SOS was received by the ship *Ontario*, which stood by for 25 minutes to render assistance; none was requested.<sup>6</sup> *Covington*, having backed away from the stricken freighter, anchored her barges and returned to assist, towing her into shallower water to facilitate salvage. By dawn, *Port Hunter* was aground in 36 feet of water on the western end of Hedge Fence shoal, holds flooded and decks awash. *Port Hunter*'s voyage, begun in Avonmouth, England on September 30, 1918, ended 33 days later with a laconic notation in the ship's log: "Voyage terminated Vineyard Haven 2-11-1918 (sunk)."<sup>7</sup>

### The First Weeks—November 1918

Captain Stafford, the crew, and the Boston pilot—fifty-three men in all—came ashore safely in the ship's boats. They were safe, but cold and disoriented: The collision had taken place at 2:00 AM, and many had left the ship dressed only in shoes and trousers. News of the wreck had preceded them into town, however, and the people of Vineyard Haven were ready for them. Frank L. Eddy, manager of the telephone company, canvassed local stores and leading citizens, collecting donations of food, clothing, money, and tobacco. Women from the Vineyard Haven chapter of the Red Cross provided the sailors with a midday meal, and Rev. Austin Tower, chaplain of the Seamen's Bethel, gave them a place to stay and gather their wits. The bulk of the crew departed on the 2:20 PM steamer to Woods Hole, and were in Boston by nightfall; Captain Stafford and two of his officers remained behind, to assist with salvage operations.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Commandant, First Naval District to Director of Naval Intelligence, "Report from S/S Ontario," November 2, 1918. US National Archives; copy in *Port Hunter* VF.

7 Log of the *Port Hunter*. HM Public Records Office, Richmond, Surrey, UK; copy in *Port Hunter* VF.

8 "Vineyard Haven Welcomes Crew," *New Bedford Evening Standard*, November 3, 1918 [transcript in *Port Hunter* VF]; Reed Howland, "Wreck is Reluctant in Yielding Valuable Cargo," *National Fisherman*, January 1966, 38-39.





For the first few weeks after the wreck, *Port Hunter* remained relatively level, her decks just awash, making salvage efforts relatively straightforward. *Martha's Vineyard Museum, Basil Welch Collection, RU 465*

On the mainland the first steps in those operations had already been taken. Even as Frank Eddy was soliciting donations for the stranded crew on the morning of November 2, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Naval District in Newport, R.I., cabled news of the sinking to Washington:

British steamship *PORT HUNTER* bound Boston to France via New York Government cargo collided with tug *COVINGTON* off Vineyard Haven 2AM this morning. Badly damaged towed by *COVINGTON* to Hedge Fence Shoal and successfully beached. Deck awash, forward hold filled with water, after hold half filled, now resting easy. Owners Commonwealth and Dominion Line 911 Fenchurch Avenue London England. Captain Stafford requests owners be notified by Operations. District vessel on the way to her assistance.<sup>9</sup>

Another cable, sent in the early hours of November 3, elaborated: "Four salvage tugs four lighters dispatched by Government trying salvage vessel. Request owner cable full instructions their representative here."<sup>10</sup> Tugs,

9 Commandant Second Naval District to Office of the Chief of Naval Operations [OpNav], November 2, 1918. US National Archives; copy in *Port Hunter* VF.

10 Office of the Chief of Naval Operations to unspecified recipient, November 3, 1918. US National Archives; copy in *Port Hunter* VF.

barges, and divers were on the scene by November 3, and the Boston papers reported, that Sunday morning, that “some of the steamer’s cargo was taken off, and if favorable weather continues the ship will be refloated.”<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately for the Navy and the *Port Hunter*’s owners, the chance to refloat the ship never arrived. Currents, peaking at 3.5 knots, scour Hedge Fence with every turn of the tide, and as soon as the *Port Hunter* was grounded on the shoal they had begun eating away at the sand beneath her keel. Two weeks after the collision, the sagging of her now-un-supported bow and stern pushed her battered hull past its limits, and she broke in half, just forward of her single stack, on November 15.<sup>12</sup> Officers from the Navy salvage crew and Bureau of Construction surveyed the ship, along with representatives of the Commonwealth and Dominion Line, on November 25. Doubtless influenced by the imminent arrival of winter, they “decided to abandon salvage operations, due to her condition,” after removing some 900 tons of cargo from the forward hold.<sup>13</sup>

The salvaged goods, primarily bales of clothing, were stored on the wharf at Woods Hole and eventually shipped to Port Newark, New Jersey. Boxes of buoyant cargo—mostly candles and soap that had floated out of the after hold—were pulled from the sound by Navy patrol boats, and boxes which had washed ashore were reclaimed from locals by other Navy men. Once rounded up, the floating cargo was stored at Menemsha and eventually sent to Boston. The smoothly functioning system broke down, however, on the landward side of the operation. No provisions were made for rinsing and drying the clothing sent to Woods Hole. It sat on the wharf for weeks, still in bales and saturated with seawater, while salt and sun rotted the cloth and corroded the leather. When the bales were opened in New York the clothing was condemned by government inspectors as unfit for use.<sup>14</sup>

The government’s mismanagement of what should have been a straightforward salvage operation drew strong criticism from Islanders. Captain Benjamin Cromwell of Vineyard Haven, testifying before a Congressional committee formed to investigate wartime expenditures, called it “the worst thing I ever saw or heard of from start to finish.”<sup>15</sup> It was frequently compared with the local salvage efforts which began after the government vessels departed, almost always unfavorably. An unnamed Edgartown mariner, commenting on the matter for a reporter from the mainland, commented:

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11 “British Ship in Collision,” *Boston Herald*, November 3, 1918, 2.

12 *New Bedford Standard*, October 2, 1925.

13 District Salvage Officer, Northern District to United States Attorney, Boston, January 8, 1919, paragraphs 5-7. US National Archives; copy in *Port Hunter* VF.

14 “Blunder and Waste in Port Hunter Wreck,” *New Bedford Sunday Standard*, February 2, 1919, p. 23. Copy in Martha’s Vineyard Museum, *City of Columbus* and Other Marine Disasters, RU 214, Box 1, Folder 7.

15 “Testimony of Benjamin Cromwell,” *War Expenditures*, 544.

“The funny part of it is, that after the government officials with their scientific apparatus and their wrecking crew and their power hoists gave it up as a bad job, the islanders and the Cape Codders went in there and cleaned up.”<sup>16</sup>

### Feeding Frenzy—November 1918 to January 1919

Vineyarders had been gathering in the *Port Hunter*’s cargo since the day after the wreck, and not all of what they gathered found its way back into the hands of the Navy’s work parties. Stan Lair, sixteen at the time, recalled the scene on West Chop in the first weekend of November 1918:

So a bunch of us boys headed down toward the Herring Creek [the entrance to Lake Tashmoo]. And sure enough, there were all sorts of things coming ashore in boxes. There was a man, an old gentleman right ahead of us, going along, pulling stuff up. His name was Shubael Vincent. He was putting his initials on every box that he came along . . . “S. V.” . . . “S. V.” . . . [and] throwing them up into the bushes, and the boys were coming along right behind [him] and picking them up and making off with them!<sup>17</sup>

Once the Navy tugs and lighters departed in late November, amateur salvage operations began in earnest. Fishermen from both sides of the sound—from Cuttyhunk, Cotuit, Falmouth, and Barnstable as well as Vineyard Haven, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown—flocked to the wreck. Cromwell, who watched from the West Chop shore with his spyglass, reported that the amateur salvors “were there in such large numbers that most of them hung on until another fellow got out, and then got in—some 30 or 40 boats at a time.”<sup>18</sup>

Once over the open holds of the wreck, they would fish for their prizes—some only a package or two, others dozens in a single trip—and haul them aboard. Initially, they used clam rakes and long-handled gaffs to remove the bales of clothing and boxes of candles from the hold. As they began to penetrate the lower depths of the hold, however, they turned to more elaborate devices: multiple grappling hooks; weighted, harpoon-like toggle irons; and barbed iron darts designed to pierce the sodden wood crates. Elmer Chadwick, who ran a blacksmith shop on Beach Road near where Tisbury Marketplace now stands, did a brisk business fabricating such tools for fishermen eager to get into the action. By early December, they were taking an estimated \$100-\$200 worth of goods per man per day from the holds.<sup>19</sup>

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16 *New Bedford Sunday Standard*, December 29, 1918.

17 Stan Lair, “The 1918 Wreck of the *Port Hunter*,” recorded May 25, 1979, transcribed by Chris Baer, 1995. <http://history.vineyard.net/porthunt>

18 “Testimony of Benjamin Cromwell,” *War Expenditures*, 543.

19 “Blunder and Waste,” 23. Elmer Chadwick (1868-1953) was also chief of the Tisbury Fire Department and an expert gardener, known for his dahlias (Stan Lair, “1914 Map of Vineyard Haven, Section 1A,” <http://history.vineyard.net/vh1914/vhn2a.htm>).



A wool-lined leather vest: the most coveted piece of *Port Hunter* salvage. Martha's Vineyard Museum collection.

Once the clothing had been brought ashore, the first order of business was to wash the salt out of it. This was undertaken mostly by Island women, either at laundries in town or at home, and for weeks after the wreck, olive-green army gear hung from the clotheslines of Vineyard Haven. Some of the salvaged goods went directly into the salvors' homes: candles burnt just as well, and woolen underwear kept its wearers just as warm, in New England winters as in French ones. Captain Cromwell, who piously declared to a Congressional committee that he himself "did not dare to buy" because he knew the goods were government property, nonetheless wore a salvaged wool shirt from the *Port Hunter* (a gift from a friend) to the

hearing.<sup>20</sup> Puttees — strips of wool cloth intended to be wrapped around soldiers' calves, and thus of little value to the average civilian— were sewn and braided into throw rugs. Issokson's tailor shop, at the corner of Main and Union Streets, offered "Haven Coats," made from two fleece-lined leather vests, for \$5 apiece.<sup>21</sup>

Salvaged goods in excess of the salvors' own needs were initially sold "on the sly" to local buyers, but soon were peddled openly in the windows of Island shops. Over time, the flood of goods from the wreck gradually drove prices down, and by the end of December, local salvors had essentially given up on saving crates of candles and soap, the prices for which had fallen too low to make them worth the work of hauling ashore. Clothing remained lucrative, however, with leather vests—impossible to duplicate for less than \$10—and rubber boots the real prizes.<sup>22</sup> "It wasn't safe to hang your vests out on the line to dry at your home along with your wash,"

20 "Testimony of Benjamin Cromwell," *War Expenditures*, 543.

21 Stan Lair, "Vineyard Haven's Main Street," recorded May 15, 1979; transcribed by Chris Baer, 1995. <http://history.vineyard.net/mainst.htm>

22 *New Bedford Standard*, December 29, 1918.

Stan Lair remembered, “‘cause you’d look out the next morning and the whole thing would be gone, including your family wash. So there were a bunch of pirates around here in those days!”<sup>23</sup>

Merchants from as far away as New York, sensing bargains, began arriving in Vineyard Haven in December. Some boarded local fishing boats in order to accompany amateur salvors to the wreck site, holding an impromptu auction among themselves as each bale of clothing was hauled aboard. Less adventurous merchants gathered on the wharf at Vineyard Haven, hailing the boats as they returned and shouting out their offers for the clothing which had been raised that day. In time, many resorted to buying the clothing sight-unseen, in order to be among the first bidders on a new shipment. “I never saw such a sight in my life,” Cromwell testified in 1919, “I recollect seeing two old Jews going along talking. ‘My God,’ [one] said, ‘it was worse than Wall Street!’” The out-of-town buyers, Cromwell continued—his testimony colored by the endemic anti-Semitic prejudice of the era—were relentless in their quest for bargains: “One or two of the Jews . . . came into the Barnacle Club [a social club for Vineyard Haven mariners] one night and came right to me and wanted some of the stuff.” Told that Cromwell had none to sell, the buyer demanded to know why not.<sup>24</sup>

Mainland merchants “came down all of a sudden. They simply swarmed the town,” said Harleigh Schultz, freight agent for the steamship company and editor of *The Vineyard News*. “The street was merely an open air Wall Street with the dickering that went on.” A New Bedford reporter—even before the wave of outsiders descended—compared the situation to a Texas oil boom, and concluded that: “Unless somebody determines the law of the thing or the government steps in and puts the kibosh on the whole proceedings, Vineyarders, Cape Codders and Cuttyhunkers are going to get rich pretty fast in the next few months, for out of the hold of the steamer *Port Hunter* are coming bale upon bale of merchandise.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Enter Barney Zeitz—February to August 1919**

“The law of the thing,” as the New Bedford reporter put it, was a matter of some dispute. The official position was that the *Port Hunter*’s cargo was “still the property of the Quartermasters Department, United States Army,” and that anyone “purchasing, selling or disposing of any of this cargo held themselves liable to prosecution.”<sup>26</sup> Vineyarders likely countered by citing the laws governing maritime salvage, which hold that (as

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23 Lair, “Wreck of the Port Hunter.”

24 “Testimony of Benjamin Cromwell,” *War Expenditures*, 543.

25 *New Bedford Standard*, December 29, 1918.

26 District Salvage Officer to United States Attorney, January 8, 1919, paragraph 10.

Benjamin Cromwell expressed it) “after a vessel is left [derelict] you go there and get what you can.” The withdrawal of the Navy salvage crews in late November, Vineyarders argued, marked the formal abandonment of vessel and cargo by their respective owners, leaving both to be claimed by anyone willing to do the necessary work.

The government, determined to reclaim its wartime property, began the first year of peace by soliciting bids from private firms for the salvage of the *Port Hunter*’s remaining cargo. They were met with a resounding lack of interest: By February 1919, not a single offer had materialized. Later in the month, however, federal officials signed a contract with the Mercantile Wrecking Company of New Bedford to remove the remaining American cargo—worth nearly four million dollars—from the wreck. Mercantile Wrecking was a family operation, headed by Barney Zeitz—a self-made Russian immigrant businessman who had come to America as a child—and his three brothers: Fisher, Morton and Harry. Other partners in the venture included William H. Grimshaw and Michael J. Leahy of New Bedford and the wholesaler Jacob Dreyfus and Sons, of Boston.

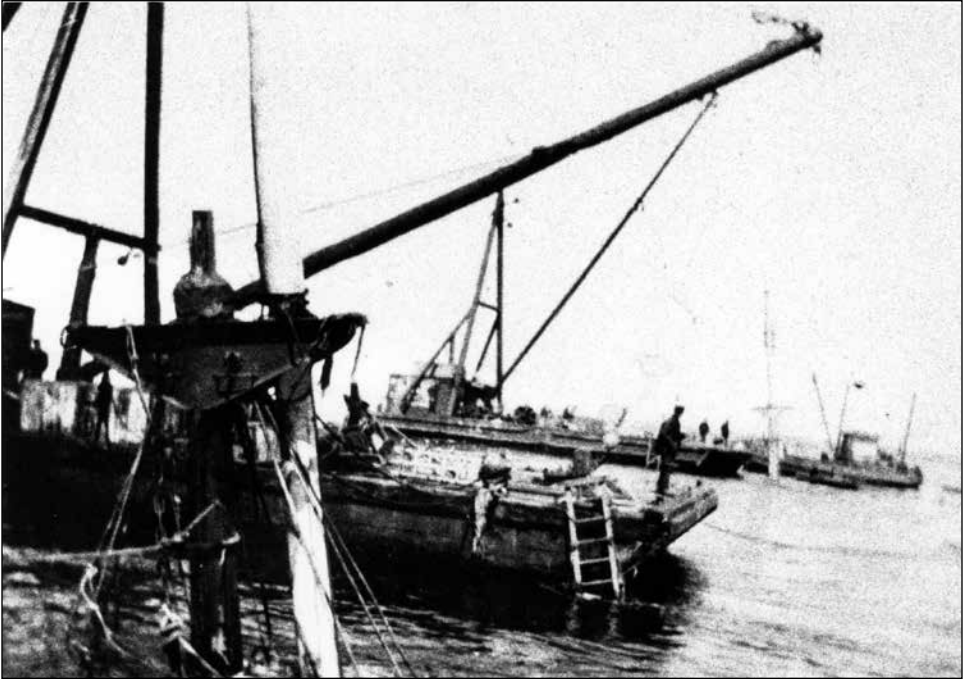
“It was mid-winter and bitter cold,” Zeitz recalled in a 1933 interview. “The wind whipped through your clothes and into your bones. Waves rolled high and the current raced along with a driving power nothing could stand against. It snapped six-inch hawsers as though they were darning cotton. But down there, 60 feet below the surface of Vineyard Sound, was \$5,000,000 and we were after it.”<sup>27</sup> Work on the first day of operations—February 10, 1919—lasted all of five minutes: The wind quickly rose to gale force, and continued to blow for nine straight days. “There was better than \$50,000 gone at the very start,” said Zeitz, who paid his divers \$100 a day whether they worked or not. He persevered, however, knowing that his contract with the government awarded Mercantile Wrecking half the appraised value of all the cargo it recovered. Eventually, the weather moderated, and the first day’s haul covered all the expenses incurred during the storm, with a little left over.<sup>28</sup>

Zeitz’s operation, which employed seven vessels and 200 men, including eleven divers, took five months to empty the *Port Hunter* of its American cargo, one crane-load at a time. Initially, the waterlogged crates and bales were raised in small boxes, but the process sped up immeasurably when Zeitz designed a three-ton metal basket that allowed his crews to “haul the stuff up in great style.” The operation now hit its stride, bringing up 500 to 900 boxes and bales a day. Raising the cargo, however, was only the beginning. Stung by its failures the previous November, the government added a clause to the Mercantile Wrecking contract making them responsible

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27 Quoted in Howland, “Wreck is Reluctant,” 38.

28 Ibid.



Salvage operations on the *Port Hunter*, 1919 or 1920. Author's collection; courtesy of Bill Luce.

for laundering the salvaged clothing.<sup>29</sup> Zeitz met the requirement by subcontracting with E. A. Nickel's sanitary laundry in Oak Bluffs, where—at the height of the salvage operations in the spring of 1919—fifty employees washed, dried, and folded 100,000 garments a day. A dozen government inspectors attended the salvage operations, inventorying every cobbler's kit and pair of woolen drawers to ensure that nothing went “astray” between Hedge Fence and Boston.<sup>30</sup>

Other government representatives, meanwhile, set out to reclaim the cargo that had been lost to private enterprise in December and January. A notice circulated throughout the Cape and Islands, and published in local papers, in February 1919 declared that it was the duty of all those who possessed cargo from the wreck to return it to Commonwealth Pier, in Boston, by March 15.<sup>31</sup> This appeal to civic duty produced—perhaps not surprisingly—a tepid response, and led to more proactive measures. Agents of the U. S. Intelligence Service spent three months, from June to

29 Howland, “Wreck is Reluctant,” 38; *New Bedford Standard*, February 19, 1919.

30 Lair, “Wreck of the *Port Hunter*” (laundry); *New Bedford Standard*, September 30, 1919 (inspectors). Nickel would later sue Zeitz, in the Edgartown District Court, for failing to deliver all of the garments whose washing he had contracted for (*New Bedford Standard*, October 2, 1925).

31 *New Bedford Standard*, February 18, 1919.

August 1919, chasing contraband candles and purloined woolen goods. The investigation, under the direction of Captain Charles R. Stark, Jr., led to “raids” on four New Bedford clothing stores and a number of private homes on the Cape and the Vineyard—some of the latter belonging to the Island’s “most prominent citizens.” It yielded a total of \$20,500 in illegally salvaged goods—roughly a tenth of what Vineyard salvors were estimated to have removed from the wreck between late November and January. Local newspaper accounts noted that the “pirates” were cooperative, but arrests of the four store owners were expected.<sup>32</sup>

The goods which Zeitz raised, along with those turned in voluntarily in response to the February circular, were sent north to Boston for processing. Some, including the cobbler’s kits, puttees, and olive drab shirts were bought back directly by the government. The remainder were sent to Commonwealth Pier—ironically, the same place where they had been loaded aboard the *Port Hunter* months before—to be sold at auction to private bidders. Among the items listed for sale were 97,000 rolls of toilet paper; whether they sold, and what use the buyer intended for them if they did, remains a mystery. Held on June 18, 1919, the auction attracted buyers from as far away as Minneapolis. The items sold were packaged in relatively small lots, in order to allow individuals, as well as businesses, a chance to buy some of them, and it took approximately 6 hours to distribute the goods among the 300 bidders present. Fifteen-dollar fire extinguishers sold at the auction for around \$4.70; ten-dollar leather vests went for around \$2; boots were \$2.50 a pair and candles 9 cents a pound. At these prices, it is hardly surprising that the government realized less than \$1,000,000 from the sale of their \$5,700,000 cargo.<sup>33</sup>

“We did the job and made some money on it,” Barney Zeitz recalled in 1933, “but it wasn’t really worth the worry and the trouble.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Scrap Steel and Tall Tales—1920 to 1945**

Barney Zeitz and the government were finished with the wreck by the end of 1919. Left behind were the French-owned steel billets and railroad car wheels in the depths of the hold, and the hull and machinery of the ship itself. Three different salvage companies—Ship Construction and Trading Company of Stonington, Conn., along with Merritt-Chapman and Atalanta of New York—attempted to raise the steel at various times in the summer and fall of 1920, all without success. A syndicate of Boston businessmen led by James C. Doherty, head of the Commercial Brewing Company, eventually acquired the salvage rights to the steel cargo in 1931 for \$10,000, having paid Lloyds of London \$6,500 for the salvage rights to the wreck itself a

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32 *New Bedford Standard*, August 8, 1919.

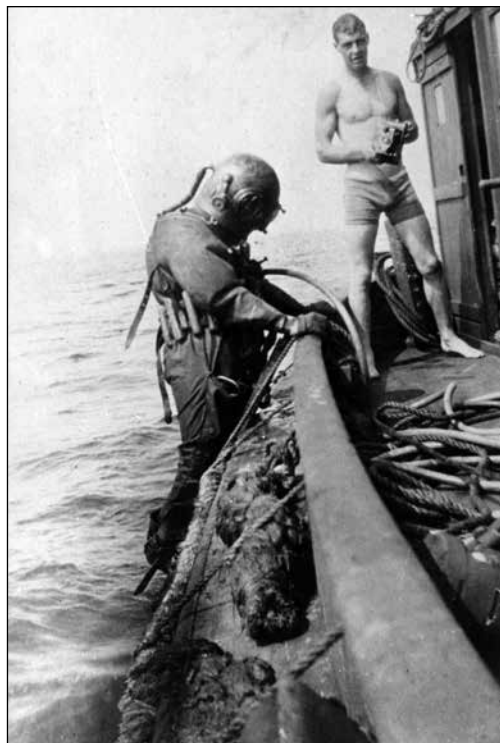
33 *New Bedford Standard*, June 19, 1919.

34 Quoted in Howland, “Wreck is Reluctant,” 32.



decade earlier.<sup>35</sup> Doherty was a shrewd businessman, but he was no salvage expert, and he knew it. He entrusted day-to-day operations to two more experienced men: Captain Joseph Whelan in Boston, and David J. Curney, an experienced commercial diver, in Vineyard Haven.

Leather and cloth rot, paper disintegrates, and iron rusts away, but the billets in the *Port Hunter's* hold were said to be a high quality chromium steel that would fetch a healthy price at auction even after three years immersion in salt water . . . if they could be raised. None of the three 1920 expeditions succeeded in bringing them to the surface, however, and although Curney retrieved samples when he and other divers surveyed the wreck in 1933, Doherty chose not to act on the knowledge. Every few years, through the 1930s and into the 1940s, plans for new salvage attempts surfaced. Rumors of one in 1937 led



A salvage diver, probably David J. Curney of Vineyard Haven, at work on the *Port Hunter* in the 1930s or 1940s. Martha's Vineyard Museum, Basil Welch Collection, RU 465.

Thomas J. Wilson of Edgartown to put in a bid for the 4-inch gun mounted on the *Port Hunter's* stern, which he hoped to add to the nineteenth-century naval cannons and cannonballs decorating Memorial Park.<sup>36</sup> Reporting on yet another round of rumors in 1940, the *Vineyard Gazette* speculated that the billets, once intended for France in 1918 might soon be raised “to finish a journey they started in the year 1918,” and be used “to defend that long-suffering country and her allies.”<sup>37</sup>

Steel billets, despite their evident appeal to a hard-headed businessman like Doherty, are a distinctly unromantic form of sunken treasure. It is hardly surprising, then, that rumors of more exotic cargo aboard the *Port Hunter* began to circulate in the 1920s and 1930s. Morris De Haven Tracy, in a 1937 *Boston Traveler* article that owed more to fertile imagination than to fact, wrote that among the freighter's cargo of comfort kits and

35 *New Bedford Standard*, July 30, 1920 and May 10, 1934. *Vineyard Gazette*, September 2 and November 25, 1920.

36 *Vineyard Gazette*, February 26, 1937.

37 *Vineyard Gazette* July 5 [editorial] and June 28, 1940.

warm wool undergarments were “such uncomfortable items as 70 motor trucks; 250 motorcycles with Lewis machine guns mounted; 3,000,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition . . . six Baldwin locomotives ... [and] 30 3-inch field pieces.” Despite their patent absurdity—no government manifest ever listed such cargo, no diver ever saw it, and no salvage crew ever raised it—these claims have periodically surfaced in otherwise serious articles on the wreck.<sup>38</sup>

Rumors that the *Port Hunter*’s cargo included liquor have circulated since the 1920s. They likely began as waterfront scuttlebutt in the spring of 1919, as Barney Zeitz expended his seemingly limitless resources of time and money to empty the ship and the Eighteenth Amendment—prohibiting the manufacture, transport, and sale of alcoholic beverages—completed its march toward near-unanimous ratification by the states. The fact that the rumors persisted after Zeitz completed his work in June 1919 and the passage of the Volstead Act enacted Prohibition in January 1920 suggests their appeal. No longer a barren hulk filled with unrecoverable (and uninteresting) steel ballast, the *Port Hunter* became—in the rumors—an alcoholic El Dorado, its bottled treasures tantalizingly close and yet utterly out of reach. The legend of the *Port Hunter* and her secret stash of liquor was appealing enough to local imaginations that it outlasted Prohibition itself. Newspaper reports of planned salvage attempts in 1932, 1934, 1937, and 1941 all mention the possible existence of fine brandy aboard, quoting ever-increasing values for it.

A *Vineyard Gazette* article from 1933, for example, reports that divers surveying the wreck—Curney and his shipmates, working on behalf of Doherty’s syndicate—discovered a compartment below the after gun room. The compartment was sealed with a heavy iron door, impossible to open since it had been distorted and blocked by shifting cargo. This compartment, they concluded, was the ship’s strong room and might contain liquor worth anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000, along with gold bullion.<sup>39</sup> A *New Bedford Standard* article from the same era reported that a cargo of brandy worth \$150,000 would be salvaged by divers on behalf of Doherty and his fellow businessmen. Describing earlier, abortive salvage attempts, the article suggested that they had been held back by fluctuating steel prices and the danger of a hijack once the cargo of brandy reached shore.<sup>40</sup> The rumor of brandy aboard the *Port Hunter* was still in circulation as late as 1941, but the

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38 A copy of the Tracy article is in “Maritime Disasters,” RU 214, Box 1, Folder 8; examples of its afterlife include *Vineyard Gazette*, October 26, 1962; and Dorothy R. Scoville, *Shipwrecks on Martha’s Vineyard* (Edgartown, MA: Dukes County Historical Society, 1972), 30.

39 *Vineyard Gazette*, November 17, 1933.

40 *New Bedford Standard*, June 18, 1936.

price of liquor had risen considerably. The writer quoted a value of \$200,000 for the brandy . . . doubtless because it had improved with age.<sup>41</sup> Not all who heard the rumors, however, found them credible. “There is no more liquor in the *Port Hunter* than there is in a temperance meeting,” wrote the author of the *New Bedford Standard* column “The Gam,” and the officer who had overseen the loading of the ship in 1919 drily observed, in a 1933 letter, that: “At that time there would have been no reason for anyone carrying liquor to France.”<sup>42</sup> Coals to Newcastle, indeed.

In a world where the holds of passing ships were filled with vital-but-mundane cargoes—fish and lumber, coal and bricks—the possibility that there just *might* be something more exotic aboard one of them would have held a nearly irresistible appeal. Legends of liquor or gold aboard the *Port Hunter* are, doubtless, just that: sea stories, popular because they were entertaining. Who *wouldn’t* want to have sunken treasure just off their shores?

And yet . . .

A September 1934 article in the *Vineyard Gazette*—a paper not known for sensationalist reporting—states that, while a tug and launch belonging to James E. Doherty lay idle in Woods Hole, a second launch was seen over the site of the wreck. The launch

. . . traveled only after dark and . . . lay in the vicinity of the wreck through the long dark hours. Men landed from this launch, here and elsewhere, and one night the launch sped swiftly to the mainland, but not to Woods Hole, where it docked at a lonely, deserted pier. There, kegs were unloaded and placed in a big car that was waiting. The car vanished, and shortly after that the big tug started operations.<sup>43</sup>

If true, this curious tale raises an inevitable question: Who were the men aboard the launch? The *Gazette* reporter suggests that they were local opportunists trying to turn a quick profit before the wreck was stripped clean. The fact that Doherty’s men did not start work until the morning *after* the launch departed suggest that the midnight work on the wreck was carried out with his knowledge, perhaps in an attempt to dodge heavy taxes. Whatever their identities or possible motives, however, they died without revealing what they knew, and the legends of gold and brandy on Hedge Fence are destined to remain just that: legends.

### **“A Decent Oblivion”—1945 to 2016**

*Port Hunter* had been pressed into service to supply a war that, it was said, would “end all wars.” Neither the ship nor the war fulfilled its mission, and as the century’s second global conflict drew to a close in 1945 the

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41 *Vineyard Gazette*, July 24, 1941.

42 “The Gam,” *New Bedford Standard*, May 12, 1934; Richards to Allen, November 20, 1933.

43 *Vineyard Gazette*, September 14, 1934.

cast of characters around the ship was changing. David Curney, by then “perhaps the oldest Atlantic diver in active service,” received authorization, from James Doherty, to remove the *Port Hunter*’s propeller—hundreds of pounds of salable bronze, and more easily retrieved than the steel in the hold.<sup>44</sup> The following year, Barney Zeitz died in New Bedford at the age of 63, better remembered as the founder of the Zeiterion Theater than as a salvage operator. Curney made his last dive on the *Port Hunter* in 1948, evidently convincing Doherty, after a quarter-century, to give up on his dreams of salvaging the steel.<sup>45</sup>

The wreck’s masts and superstructure were now ten feet below mean low water in Vineyard Sound, and according to a Coast Guard “Notice To Mariners” dated January 25, 1950, *Port Hunter* was “not considered a menace to navigation.” On January 27, 1950, the lighted buoy which had marked her position was removed. Commenting on this action in an editorial the following week, the *Gazette* speculated that interest in the wreck would wane, that the “ill-fated ship will at last be allowed to sink into a decent oblivion and that the fantastic tales surrounding her will be forgotten.”<sup>46</sup>

The *Gazette*’s hopes were not fulfilled. James Green, who bought the salvage rights from James Doherty sometime after 1948, hired Captain George Perry and the lighter *Irene Mae* in an attempt to salvage the steel in the hold.<sup>47</sup> The effort came to nothing, as did a second attempt launched from Falmouth two years later, involving the tug *Anton Doorn*, a scow, a launch, and twenty men.<sup>48</sup> Green financed another attempt on the steel in 1960, in partnership with Richard L. Dyer, president and chief diver of the Coastal Marine Survey and Salvage Company of Quincy.<sup>49</sup> Green and Dyer’s ambitious plans, which involved an electromagnet mounted on a barge, produced results, but they were too little and too late to satisfy creditors. When their salvage contract expired in the fall of 1961, their tug *Argonaut* was seized and sold at auction to cover Green’s debts. The buyer, John L. Bottomley, soon announced his own plans to raise the steel, which he did—relying, like Green and Dyer, on a barge-mounted crane and electromagnet—in the summer and fall of 1962. Discovering that the railroad-car wheels were of a gauge that had long since gone out of use and would fit only a single active railway, located in Algeria, Bottomley sold them to a scrap dealer along with the steel billets.<sup>50</sup>

Bottomley’s divers, like Doherty’s and Zeitz’s before them, used “stan-

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44 *Vineyard Gazette*, July 20, 1945

45 *Vineyard Gazette*, April 9, 1948

46 *Vineyard Gazette*, Feb 3, 1950

47 *Vineyard Gazette*, July 3, 1951

48 *Vineyard Gazette*, July 14, 1953

49 *Vineyard Gazette*, December 2, 1960

50 *Vineyard Gazette*, October 20, 1961; May 20 and October 26, 1962

dard diving dress”—a suit made of heavy rubberized canvas, a domed metal helmet, and boots weighted with lead to counteract buoyancy—and were supplied with air through a hose fed by a compressor on the surface. By the mid-1950s, however, the growing availability of SCUBA gear opened the wrecks like the *Port Hunter* to recreational divers who carried their air supplies on their backs. Two recreational divers from what was then Otis Air Force Base visited the ship in the summer of 1957, removing small souvenirs like portholes and reporting that the bolts holding them crumbled at the touch of a hammer. Four teen-aged residents of Oak Bluffs—Sam Low, Willy Jones, Dick Jones, and Arnold Carr—located the wreck in August 1960 and made a total of fifteen dives on it in the summer and early fall.<sup>51</sup>

“I cannot describe the true impact of what I saw,” wrote Low, describing his first sight of the wreck. “I have never seen anything so mysteriously beautiful and exciting as the dark form that confronted me sixty feet beneath the surface of the ocean.” Dozens of others have followed over the year, seeking the same thrill of discovery, and the wreck remains listed on websites catering to SCUBA enthusiasts. A report of a 2006 dive, posted on one such site, describes the ravages of the sea:

The deck has almost entirely caved in, as has much of the port side of the vessel. A huge sand dune is riding over the wreck amidships. The sheer amount of sand involved is pretty incredible. The wreck rises about 40-50ft from the bottom at the bow and the stern, and yet this pile of sand is so large that it has risen from there all the way to the top of the wreck! That’s a 40-50ft high sand dune! There was no longer any sign of the anti-aircraft gun . . . [which] appears to have been buried or lost in the collapse. The starboard side remains largely



A small part of the 70 tons of Army-issue “Candles, Lantern” aboard the ship. *Martha’s Vineyard Museum collection.*

<sup>51</sup> Low’s first-person account of the initial dive appeared in the *Vineyard Gazette*, August 19, 1960; the small artifacts retrieved by the quartet are now part of the Museum’s collection.

intact and is an impressive shear wall, except for where it was buried amidships. The rudder and propeller shaft also remain.<sup>52</sup>

The rapid deterioration of the wreck—in 1991, the same diver notes, the structure of the ship had been largely intact and the deck gun had been present—suggests that, in the not-too-distant future, the *Port Hunter* will cease to be recognizable as a ship. Like countless other ships lost in the waters around the Island, she will complete the transition from wreck to wreckage, reduced to a pile of wood-and-steel bones covered by shifting sands sixty feet below the surface of Vineyard Sound.

Even after her last rivets give way and her last plates disappear from view, however, the *Port Hunter* will live on in local memory. Pieces of her—port-holes and signboards, medicine bottles and leather jerkins—reside in the collections of the Museum, ready to illustrate her story for future generations. The story of the *Port Hunter* will also live on, however, because it is not *just* the tale of an unlucky ship. The stubby trench candles and puttee rugs that came from her holds are reminders of time when—in the waning days and the uneasy aftermath of what was still called “The Great War”—the interests of Vineyard fishermen, New Bedford salvage operators, Fall River clothing merchants, and the United States government converged, and sometimes collided, in the waters off Vineyard Haven Harbor.



The *Port Hunter*, recreated in miniature by Vineyard Haven shipyard owner, model maker, and maritime historian Tom Hale (1923-2012). *Martha's Vineyard Museum* collection.

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52 RIOceanographer, “Dive Report: Port Hunter (9-6-06),” *ScubaBoard*, September 6, 2006. <http://www.scubaboard.com/community/threads/dive-report-port-hunter-9-6-06.157526/>

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# History on Board

## The Historical Paintings of Charles Banks

by ELIZABETH TROTTER

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**D**R. CHARLES EDWARD BANKS' *History of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts* (1911) is the cornerstone of the Island's written history. Anyone interested in the history of the Island comes, sooner or later, to the three imposing green volumes known, in the halls of the Martha's Vineyard Museum, simply as "Banks." Born in Portland, Me., in 1854, he received his MD from Dartmouth Medical School in 1877 and served for forty years in the United States Marine Hospital Service, including three as chief surgeon of the Marine Hospital in Vineyard Haven. Historical and genealogical research was Banks' hobby, and decades of meticulously collecting, archiving, collating and synthesizing public records, county archives and military records led to the publication, under his name, of more than twenty books and pamphlets on the early history of Maine and Massachusetts. His *History of Martha's Vineyard* is just one part of a substantial body of historical work.

Banks' talents, however, were not limited to medicine and historical research. He was also a talented artist, and his pen-and-ink drawings of buildings and landscapes give *History of Martha's Vineyard* a distinctive look and feel. Far less familiar are his set of twelve wooden panels that depict—with burnt-in lines and a color palette of reds, browns, and grays—some of the highlights from his famous book. Displayed for many years in the Museum's carriage barn, they are a remarkable attempt to convey history through art. The range and variety of their historical references is enough to whet the viewer's appetite for knowledge of the vast, rich saga of Vineyard history. At times our Island can seem small indeed, but the events that have shaped it loom large in their historical scope. Retelling twelve of them, the Banks panels give us pause to wonder at the men and women who came before.

*Editor's Note: Living and writing a century after Banks, we know things he did not know, and see the world (past and present) differently than he saw them. The discussions that follow explore how Banks, from his vantage point in the 1920s, saw Vineyard history.*

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



## Welcome to the Island

pp. 80-88

Seventeenth-century immigrants to the Vineyard were greeted by Thomas Mayhew, Sr., who held proprietary rights to Martha's Vineyard. Mayhew styled himself as the Island's first governor, with the papers to prove it, and was quick to assert his authority in dealings with European settlers.

In this first panel a group of those settlers—their varied backgrounds illustrated by their assortment of hats and dress—are interrupted in mid-unpacking by the sound of a bugle, and called upon to listen as Mayhew spells out his authority.

Local Wampanoag join the audience to hear of his commands regarding the settlers' limits in land sales. Land is plentiful, Mayhew declares, but there will be order in the purchasing process and he, their governor, will be the font from which all approved sales pour.

A further cadre of Wampanoag stand, fingers pointed, looking out into what is now Edgartown Harbor, wondering what the tide is washing ashore (and, perhaps, whether their world will be changed).





## The Mayhew Ministry pp. 157-213

From the 1640s through the early 1700s, missionary work flourished on the Island under the oversight of the London-based Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The men of the Mayhew family were key to the enterprise, with Thomas, Sr., his son Thomas, Jr., grandson John, great-grandson Experience and great-great-grandsons Zachariah and Jonathan, all Mayhew preachers. They reached out to the Wampanoag communities, spreading the English language and the benefits of European medicines along with Christianity. The communities of “praying Indians” ministered to by the Mayhews and by Wampanoag preachers who followed them became well-known throughout the Massachusetts Bay Colony, particularly through Experience Mayhew’s book *Indian Converts*, which recounted—for European audiences—their lives and deathbed confessions. Increase Mather, Samuel Danforth and Cotton Mather, all esteemed Puritan clergymen, all lauded his efforts over the years. Banks shows the natives in various listening poses as they are fed the morsels of the white mans religion. One of the Mayhews stands with his Bible in his outstretched hand, explaining the goals of his mission while offering himself as teacher and spiritual guide.



## Who Was Here First?

pp. 89-103

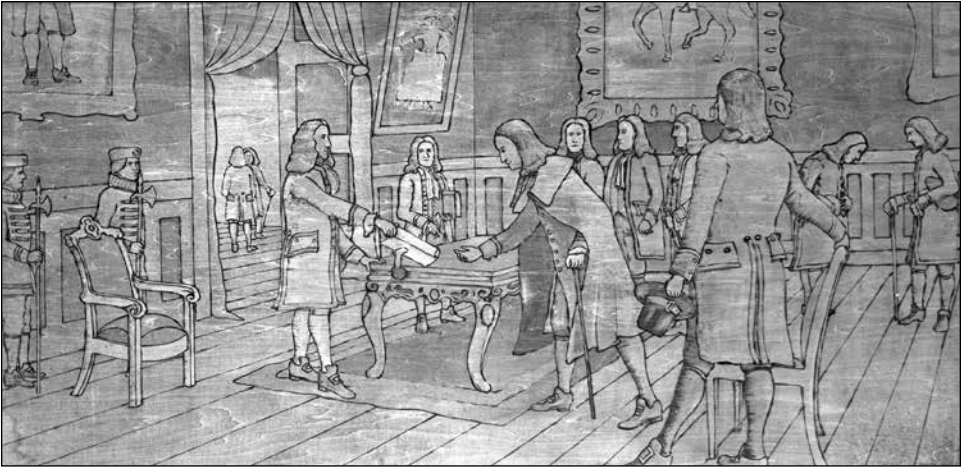
A centuries-old oral tradition, handed down through the Pease family and recounted by Banks, holds that John Pease's settlement of the Vineyard predates Thomas Mayhew's arrival by a decade. On a 1632 voyage to Connecticut, the story goes, Pease was overcome by the beauty of our Island and came ashore with a desire to settle. He peacefully offered the Wampanoag sachem his red coat (a hard-earned legacy of his military service), in exchange for a plot of land. Banks adds a stack of coins in Pease's outstretched hand, perhaps to reassure the viewer of Pease's desire to deal fairly with the Wampanoag. The woman pointing to the ground appears skeptical: unhappy with the terms of the deal, or perhaps with the entire idea of individuals buying and selling a shared resource like land.



## A Beloved Missionary Departs

p. 217

Thomas Mayhew, Jr., through his tenacity and strength of character, won the hearts and minds of many Wampanoag, and the admiration of European settlers. He used his skill in medicine to heal, and his mastery of theology to gather a strong and loyal congregation. Called back to England to settle a family matter and to consult with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which had funded his work, he bid his followers an emotional farewell at a service in 1657. Afterward, many of them formed a spontaneous procession, following him across the Island to his home. In the panel a mix of settlers and natives, some apparently weeping, listen as he gives them a final blessing—already dressed in his traveling cloak. Tragically, on its way to London, Mayhew's ship was lost at sea. The site of his final sermon, known as the "Place by the Wayside," became a spot hallowed to his memory. It is recognized today with a commemorative boulder along the Edgartown-West Tisbury Road.



## Lifetime Achievement Award

pp. 145-153

The Crown had left Thomas Mayhew, Sr., to run Martha's Vineyard as he pleased for nearly thirty years. Then, in May 1670, an ominous letter arrived summoning him to Fort James, New York, to present himself before the new Royal Governor, Francis Lovelace. Mayhew, not used to having a boss, delayed for nearly a year—sending letters instead of himself—but eventually he gave in and traveled to New York with his grandson Matthew, arriving in July 1671. He need not have worried.

At what became known as the “Conference of Fort James,” Lovelace validated all of the authority that Mayhew claimed over the Vineyard, and placated him with a title to match it: “Governor for Life” (of the Island). The panel shows Lovelace handing the signed “Tisbury Charter” to Mayhew, who leans in to accept it.

Paintings on the wall depict the King and Queen, and two uniformed royal guards—further symbols that Lovelace's authority comes from King Charles II himself—stand at attention near the door behind him.

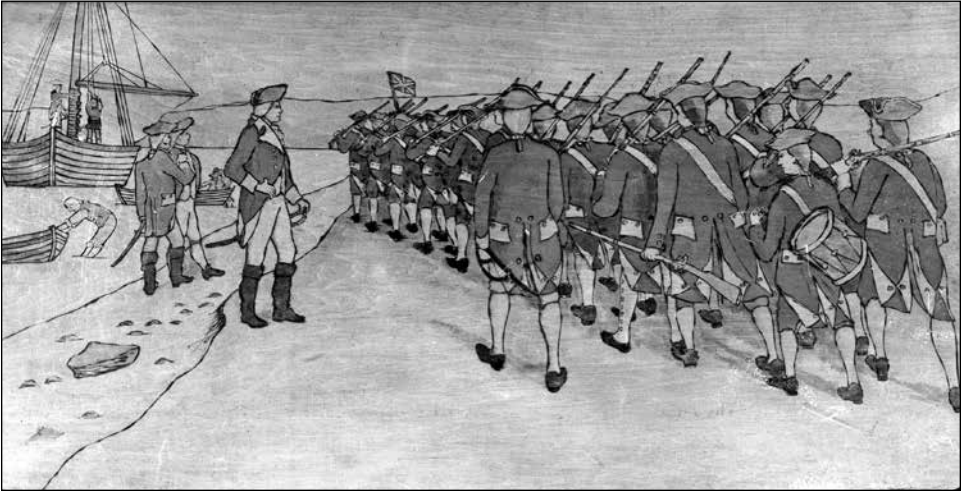


## An Early Rebellion

pp. 154-162

Restless with Mayhew and his newly confirmed “lordship,” Islanders saw their chance when New York unexpectedly fell to the Dutch in 1673, leaving the Island at a political crossroads. Twenty settlers petitioned Mayhew to place the Island under the authority, and the more democratic rules and regulations, of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: a change that would have limited his authority and thwarted his desire to make his Governorship-for-life hereditary.

The panel shows Mayhew’s response to what he deemed a mutiny. The settlers—representatives of forty families, or half the Island’s population—have come before him with their petition for independence, and he greets them like an enemy with his hand raised, refusing to even read their words. The Islanders’ declaration is a foreshadowing of what will, in a century’s time, become a national cause. George III will raise his hand in 1776 as Mayhew does here in 1673, trying to squelch the rebellious surge, but by then it will be too late.

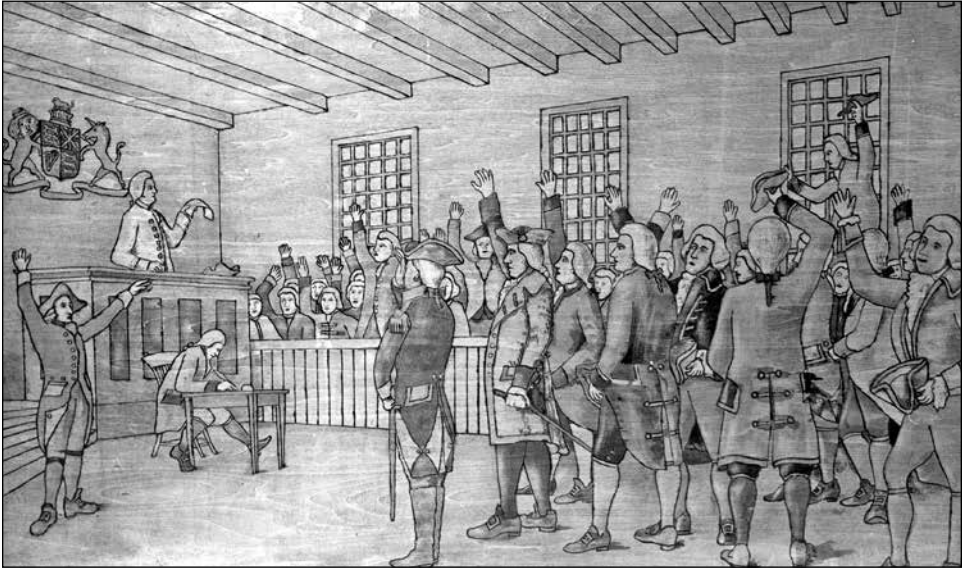


## Island Militia

pp. 294-296

The Vineyard's "Puritan Militia" was formed as early as 1645, and a special "Training Day Holiday" was devoted to military exercises and a call to muster. Townspeople would gather to look on as the troops went through drills and marched with their newly polished muskets and halberds, and the women of the Island provided picnic food for all. The training day holiday became a highlight of the year, affectionately regarded as a celebratory rite.

More than a century later—better equipped, and dressed in the King's uniform—Island militia companies marched off to fight in the French and Indian Wars. Banks depicts the departure of one such company: perhaps that commanded by Zaccheus Mayhew from 1755-1760, on its way to the siege of Quebec. Though only provincial troops, Banks imagines them moving with the discipline of regulars, with muskets carried over their left shoulders and a lone drummer (not yet accompanied by a fife) marking out a cadence.



## Revolution in the Air

pp. 325-329

The spirit of rebellion simmered in Massachusetts in the year 1774, the Vineyard was no exception. To read the County Congress Resolutions adopted by the residents of the Island on November 9, 1774, is to understand the frustration of those who—though loyal to their sovereign—felt that he had never understood their situation, and had repeatedly abused their rights. Echoing the sentiments of the Continental Congress and foreshadowing those of the Declaration of Independence, the resolutions were unanimously adopted by the three Island towns, declaring the Vineyard ready to stand in solidarity with those who sought the freedom to govern themselves.

The panel captures that moment of unity and resolve: hands are raised, the “ayes” have it, and the recorder takes down the count that Banks will scrutinize a century-and-a-quarter later. The seal of George III—with a lion representing England and a unicorn symbolizing Scotland—looks down on the action. Within a few short years, however, the symbols above that podium would change dramatically.



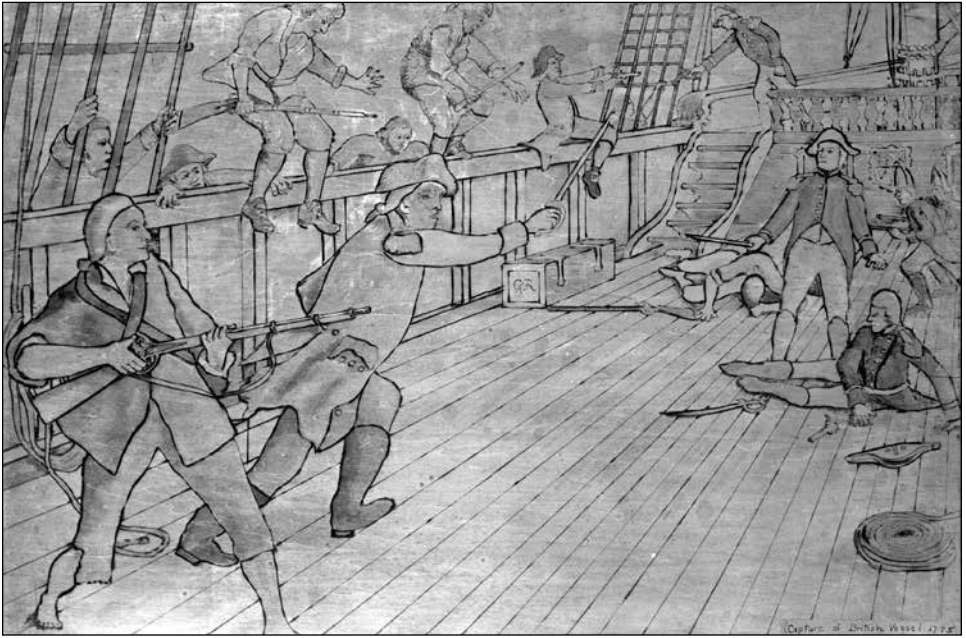
## Ready to Fight

pp. 336-342

The muster of troops for the Island's militia, known during the Revolutionary War years as "The Seacoast Defence Troops," took place under the capable guidance of Captain Nathan Smith. With British ships continually active in Vineyard Sound by the year 1775, such a force was seen as necessary to defend the interests of the Island's vulnerable population, which then numbered just under 3,000.

In all three Island towns, men signed up for a cause they felt in their bones was worthy to represent. The lists of those who served, reprinted by Banks, are filled with familiar Island names: Looks and Luces, Nortons and Manters. The drummer boy is now accompanied by a fife player, and from Banks' list we know their names, too: Nathan Bassett and Lothrop Chase. The British troops carry their muskets over their left shoulders, while the new American troops—perhaps in an early symbol of separation?—carry theirs on the right.





## Heroes of the Sea

pp. 404-405

The Revolution gave early signs of America's emerging naval prowess, and Vineyard sailors played a small but vital role. Captain Nathan Smith—drawing on his militiamen's experience as whalers, pilots, and fishermen—led Vineyarders into one such engagement in April 1776, arming a whaleboat and using it to board and capture the armed schooner *Volante*, a tender to the British sloop-of-war *Scarborough*. After a brief skirmish the enemy struck their colors and Captain Smith took the prize into Holmes Hole Harbor.

This panel highlights the Vineyarders' first brush with naval honors, and celebrates their audacity in boarding and taking a larger ship. Smith leads the charge with his sword raised, and British sailors—caught unaware, and suffering from wounds inflicted by the boarding party—fall back in confusion. The reckless bravery of the Islanders is illustrated here by a man leaping fearlessly onto the *Volante*'s deck with only a pike in his hand to ward off British musket fire.



## A Sign of Liberty

pp. 412-414

Among the wonderfully heroic deeds accomplished by Islanders over the years one particular story of patriotism and defiance stands out. In April 1778, the British warship *Unicorn* sailed into Holmes Hole harbor and her captain demanded the town's Liberty Pole—erected 1775 as a symbol of solidarity with the Continental Congress—to repair his fore-topmast. On the night before the crew of the *Unicorn* were to take it, three young women—Parnell Manter, Polly Daggett and Maria Allen—sabotaged the pole under cover of darkness, drilling holes into it with an auger, filling them with gunpowder, and touching it off with a light. The pole, splintered and cracked, was rendered useless for the British ship's needs; *Unicorn* set sail without its new spar, and the Island rejoiced. The panel shows the women in action atop a fancifully high and rugged hill: the drilling process complete and, with two posted as lookouts, the third raising the powder horn in order to complete the process of destruction. The illustration is a reminder that heroines, as well as heroes helped us gain our independence.



## Grey's Raid

pp. 367-383

The lowest point of the Island's fortunes during the Revolution came in September 1778, when two dozen ships and 4,000 troops under the command of General Sir Charles Grey arrived at Holmes Hole to scour the Island for much-needed provisions. The ranks of the local militia were at an all-time low and its officers, including Nathan Smith, were arrested and held under guard while the redcoats encamped on Manter's Hill. They spent the days searching Island homes for powder and arms, seizing tax monies, and gathering hundreds of cattle and thousands of sheep. Islanders had no choice but to stand by and watch as their livelihood was paraded—none too briskly or gracefully, this panel suggests—by the British to their waiting ships.

A notable survivor of the raid was "Josey's Pig," saved by a housewife who brandished her broomstick at the redcoats who came to her door and sent them away laden with guilt rather than pork. Similar tales of defiance, lost to history, were doubtless told and retold during the long winter that followed.

**BEYOND BANKS:  
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- "Part III: Thomas Mayhew, Sr." August 1991, 27-63.
- "Part IV: Matthew, John and Experience." February 1992, 135-163.
- "Part V: Gay Head Neck and Farm, The Missionaries, Experience Mayhew, Zachariah Mayhew, Frederick Baylies." February 1993, 109-164.
- . "Just How Revolting Were the Vineyarders?" February 1996, 128-160.
- . "Teaching and Preaching: Two Hundred Years of Indian Schools." February 2000, 47-65.
- Trotter, Elizabeth. "The Liberty Pole: New Light on a Vineyard Legend." Winter 2015, 3-18.
- Yetwin, Neil B. "Who Was General Charles Grey, the Man the Vineyard Hated?" 35.3 February 1994: 146-152.

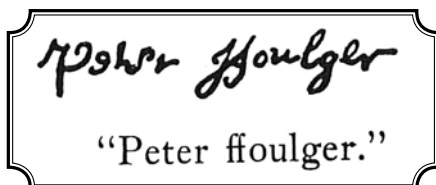
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# Benjamin Franklin's Grandfather, Peter Folger

## A Chronology

by STEPHEN H. GRANT

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From Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*,  
*Annals of Edgartown*, 67.  
*Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.*

PETER FOLGER (1617–1690)—a leading figure among the first generation of English settlers on Martha's Vineyard—first came to my attention while researching the life of one of his descendants from the Gilded Age, Henry Clay Folger (1857–1930), for a dual biography titled *Collecting Shakespeare: The Story of Henry and Emily Folger* (2014). The Henry Folgers assembled the largest collection of Shakespeare in the world and gave it to the American people conserved in a white marble memorial only two blocks from the U.S. Capitol. Henry Folger had a pronounced but not obsessive interest in his roots and collected articles and correspondence that can be found in the vault at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Interestingly, the name Folger—originating in the Flemish town of Fougères—became known in England at the same time as that of William Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup>

In *Collecting Shakespeare*, I wrote that Henry's ancestor Peter was the “first and most colorful of the [Nantucket] island's Folger clan.” I later found out he wasn't the first, but the son of the first, John Folger. After

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1 English spelling was not yet standardized during the reign of Elizabeth I, and Folger (like Shakespeare) was spelled in many ways. In conducting research for this article, I came across the following variants: Foilger, Ffoulger, ffoulger, Foulgier, Fougieri, Foulger & Folger.

Stephen H. Grant worked in Asia, Africa, and Central America as an educator for the U. S. Agency for International Development, before becoming a full-time writer. He is the author of *Collecting Shakespeare* (2014), a joint biography of Henry and Emily Folger, founders of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

further archival digging and personal interviews, I stand by *colorful* as a description of Peter Folger, and would add that he also must have been the most *versatile* Folger. Many, in fact, consider him the most *valuable* to the community of early settlers of Massachusetts' offshore islands.

As the annotated bibliography included in this article shows, researchers and authors overwhelmingly conclude that, as engaging as Peter Folger's life appears, there is a conspicuous absence of evidence to back up many assertions about it. Such is the nature of twenty-first-century explorations into seventeenth-century people's lives and accomplishments. The following timeline, therefore, will convey some bare bones of not so much what we know as what we *think* we know. The article sticks closely to the early history of the Folger family on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, leaving to others the task of filling out the picture by describing the fairly complicated religious, political, and social trends of the early modern period.

Why a timeline? Many biographers recommend starting a book-length study by developing a timeline. A timeline covers the who, what, where, and when, setting the stage for background, context, and details to be fleshed out. The eve of 2017, which will mark the 400<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Peter Folger and the 350<sup>th</sup> of Abiah Folger Franklin, is an auspicious moment at which to begin that process.



## PETER FOLGER: A CHRONOLOGY

**1593** – John Folger born in the village of Diss, 20 miles southwest of Norwich in the county of Norfolk, East Anglia, England.

**1617 (April)** – John Folger's son Peter Folger born near the city of Norwich, East Anglia.

**1635 (July-September)** – Peter Folger leaves school to accompany his father John to London to take part in the Puritan migration to America. John may have brought with him his wife, Merible. Peter's younger sister Ruth may have come along. The passengers pay the five-pound fare and, in Plymouth, board their vessel—that may have been the *Abigail*—containing 220 passengers and a cargo of cattle. They sail the North Atlantic, headed for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Also on board is Puritan preacher Rev. Hugh Peters, secretly fleeing the King's Searchers, and his indentured maidservant Mary Morrell, who will become Mrs. Peter Folger.

**1635 (October)** – The *Abigail* sails into Boston Harbor.

**1639** – After a stay in Dedham, Massachusetts, John, Merible, and Peter Folger settle in Watertown, where the men work in the gristmill of English merchant Thomas Mayhew.

**1640** – John Folger acquires 6 acres of land in Watertown near the

meeting house common and builds a homestall.

**1641** – Thomas Mayhew buys Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, and the Elizabeth Islands from Alexander, Lord Stirling and others for £40.

**1642 (Spring)** – The Folgers move to Martha's Vineyard where Peter becomes right-hand man to Governor Thomas Mayhew. Mayhew asks Peter Folger to bargain with the local Wampanoag leaders (sachems) for rights to the lands.

**1642** – Peter Folger pays Rev. Hugh Peters for the remaining years of Mary Morrell's indenture and marries her.

**1648** – John and Peter Folger acquire land in the main town on Martha's Vineyard, originally dubbed Great Harbour in 1652 and renamed Edgartown in 1671.

**1650** – John and Peter Folger have acquired 10 acres each near each other, according to Early Settler map drawn up by Ardis Mayhew and reproduced at right.

**1652** – Peter Folger is named Great Harbour's first schoolmaster.

**1652 (June 26)** – Great Harbour grants Peter Folger two acres of land near the schoolhouse.

**1652 (September)** – John Folger is chosen to serve the community as hog-reeve: constable charged with appraising the damages by stray swine.

**1653** – Peter Folger and five others are appointed to govern the Martha's Vineyard community.

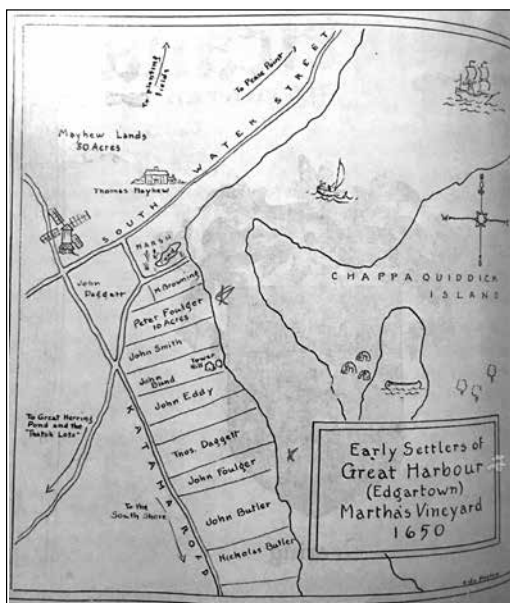
**1655** – Peter Folger and four others are appointed to resolve controversies in the community.

**1656** – Peter Folger, who has learned the Wampanoag language, is employed by Thomas Mayhew Jr. to teach English to native youths.

**1657 (late fall)** – Thomas Mayhew, Jr., departs Martha's Vineyard for England, leaving Peter Folger to continue with the education and catechism of young Indians, but his ship is lost at sea.

**1659** – Peter Folger's salary as English schoolmaster is £20.

**1659** – Peter Folger makes first trip to Nantucket as interpreter for Martha's Vineyard patrons and some off-Island men (mainly Tristram Coffin of Salisbury, Mass.) looking for land acquisition. Peter Folger is asked to negotiate with local Wampanoag for the land. Tristram Coffin and his



*Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association.*

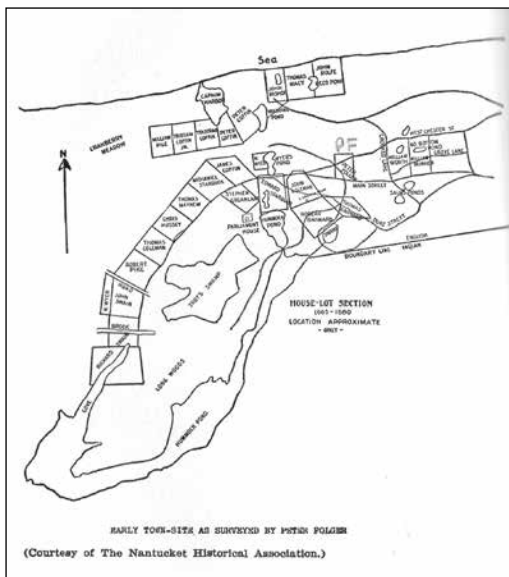
partners—often called the Proprietors or the First Purchasers—buy all of Nantucket, except for one lot that is reserved for Thomas Mayhew, Sr. The price: £30 plus two beaver hats. For another £5 they obtain adjacent Tuckernuck Island.

**1660** – Peter Folger visits Nantucket soon after its purchase to stake out lots, initially on the western end.

**1660 (fall)** – John Folger dies on Martha's Vineyard.

**1661 (May)** – Peter Folger returns to Nantucket to finish surveying the land.

**1662 (February 27)** – Widowed, Merible Folger signs a deed selling her Martha's Vineyard property.



**1662** – Peter Folger visits Nantucket to act as a witness for land transfers. It may be then when the results of his surveying take the form of the map at left, where Peter Folger's property is on Main Street, not far from a boundary line between English land and Indian land.

**1662 (fall)** – Uncomfortable with religious trends in Massachusetts, Peter Folger becomes attracted to Roger Williams—who welcomes Baptists and other religious minorities in his Rhode Island colony—and takes his family to Newport.

**1662 (December 3)** – Peter Folger sells his home on Martha's Vineyard and leases a house and land from Wil-

liam Corry in Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

**1663** – Dissatisfied with life in Rhode Island, Peter Folger decides to move his family to Nantucket.

**1663 (July 4)** – Tristram Coffin, Thomas Mayhew, Sr., and the other First Purchasers offer Peter Folger a half share in their venture with a lot on Nantucket called Rogers Field.

**1664** – Peter Folger is described as surveyor, joiner, blacksmith, and weaver. His eldest son Eleazar is a shoemaker.

**1665** – Sachem Metacomet, known to the English as King Philip, lands unannounced on Nantucket with a flotilla of war canoes in response to an alleged offense against the Wampanoag tribe. Official interpreter Peter Folger successfully calms the sachem, who leaves the island.

**1666** – Nantucket's first gristmill is built at Wesco Pond, and Peter Folger is appointed miller.



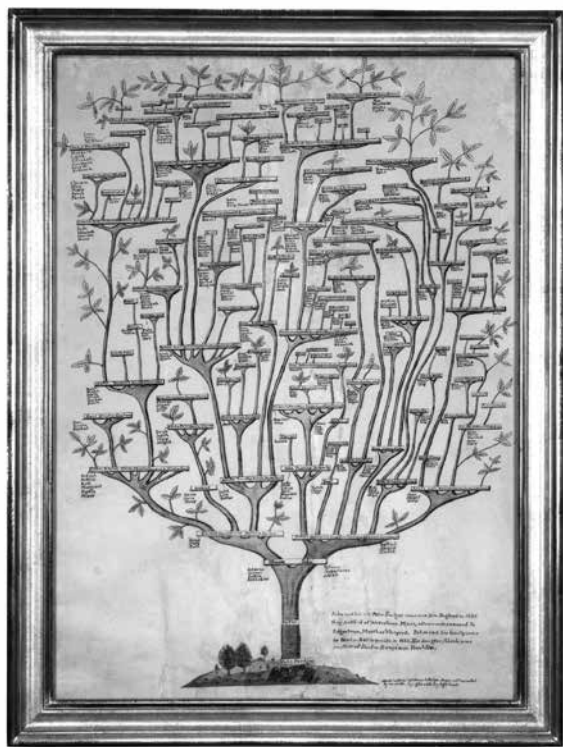
**1675** – A political schism evolves between two groups of Nantucket leaders, with half-share man Peter Folger siding with Captain John Gardner, who arrived on the island in 1672 to organize the cod-fishing industry. This faction is called the Defenders of the Duke's Charter. The other camp, called the Defenders of the Old Company and consisting of the First Purchasers, is led by Tristram Coffin.

**1676** – Magistrate Thomas Macy requests that Peter Folger, as Clerk of Courts, turn over the town record book, along with other items such as minutes, the record book holds the original deeds of land purchased from the Indians. Fearing some shenanigans by the adverse party, Folger refuses to give up the important book, and is imprisoned in the Nantucket jail, the first Englishman to be incarcerated there. While the political prisoner is reproached for his silence and civil disobedience, Peter is the object of support from family, friends, and Indians. The island government comes to a standstill.

**1676 (April 23)** – From prison, Peter Folger is the author of a poem of 428 lines, "A Looking Glasse For the Times," published in Cambridge, Mass. It is a plea for religious tolerance.

**1677 (March 27)** – From prison, Peter Folger writes a petition to the British governor in New York asking for clemency for a poor old man sixty years old not able to care for his family.

**1678** – The governor, responsible for administration of the island of Nantucket, rules that Peter Folger's imprisonment is illegal. Released after 14 months in jail, Folger returns to active life. He does not turn over the town record book, the whereabouts of which remain unknown to this day.



*Courtesy of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society.*

**1690 (June 29)** – Peter Folger dies on Nantucket.

**1704** – Mary Morrell Folger dies on Nantucket.

## The Nine Children of Peter Folger and Mary Morrell

### **Joanna Folger**

Born on Martha's Vineyard in  
1645

Married John Coleman of  
Newbury, Mass. on Nantucket  
in 1666

Died on Nantucket on May 18,  
1719

8 children

### **Bethia Folger**

Born on Martha's Vineyard in  
1646

Married John Barnard of  
Salisbury, Mass. on Nantucket  
on Feb. 26, 1668

Both drowned June 6, 1669, on  
a passage between Martha's  
Vineyard and Nantucket

No children

### **Dorcas Folger**

Born on Martha's Vineyard in  
1647

Married Joseph Pratt of  
Charlestown, Mass. on  
Nantucket on Feb. 12, 1675

Died in Charlestown, Mass. on  
Dec. 24, 1712

9 children

### **Eleazar Folger**

Born on Martha's Vineyard in  
1648

Married Sarah Gardner of Salem,  
Mass. on Nantucket in 1671

Died in Boston in 1716

7 children

### **Bethshua Folger**

Born on Martha's Vineyard in  
1655

Married Joseph Pope of Salem,  
Mass. in 1679

Died on Nantucket in 1720  
8 children

### **Patience Folger**

Born on Martha's Vineyard in  
1657

Married (1) Ebenezer Harker of  
North Carolina, then (2) James  
Gardner

Died on Nantucket on March 17,  
1716

2 children

### **John Folger**

Born on Martha's Vineyard in  
1659

Married Mary Barnard in 1688

Died on Nantucket on August 23,  
1732

9 children

### **Experience Folger**

Born on Martha's Vineyard in  
1661

Married John Swain, Jr. in 1687

Died on Nantucket on June 4,  
1739

9 children

### **Abiah Folger**

Born on Nantucket on August 15,  
1667

Married Josiah Franklin of  
Boston on Nantucket on Nov.  
25, 1689

Died in Boston on May 18, 1752  
10 children (plus reared 5  
stepchildren)

*62 children were born of the 10  
Folger unions above.*

## CONCLUSION

Not having any idea what would await him, at age 18 Peter Folger accompanied his father from England to the New World, never to return. He had to have been aware of the contentious religious atmosphere in East Anglia that was prompting hundreds of families to seek greater independence in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He must also have realized to some degree that as the only son of a barely literate man, and as someone who had benefited from schooling and some technical training, he would likely be thrust into situations that would push him to act, define his character, and test his mettle.

Assessing Peter Folger's talents and accomplishments over a half-century of Massachusetts life along with those of his more famous grandson leads one to conclude they both displayed substance and strength of character as well as an impressive versatility.

<b>Peter Folger</b>	<b>Benjamin Franklin</b>
Surveyor	Printer
Miller	Postmaster
Weaver	Publisher
Blacksmith	Currency cutter
Teacher	Scientist
Clerk	Inventor
Joiner	Civic activist
Poet	Author
Philosopher	Statesman
Negotiator	Diplomat
Interpreter	Politician
Polymath	Polymath

Even less is known about Abiah Folger Franklin than about her father. Nevertheless, some Vineyarders and Nantucketers strongly believe that the talents which distinguished Benjamin Franklin were "Folger traits" inherited from Peter. The late Nantucket author Bob Mooney was one of those believers who stretched the comparison to cover physical appearance as in the image here.



Concept by author Bob Mooney and illustrator Diane Swartz of what Peter Folger may have looked like, reproduced in Mooney, *Tales of Nantucket*.

—Courtesy Nantucket Historical Association and Robert C. Mooney

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Florence Bennett, *A Grandfather for Benjamin Franklin: The true story of a Nantucket pioneer and his mates*. Boston: Meador, 1940.

This 75-year-old book is the longest volume on Peter Folger I've found, 462 pages containing 27 chapters and 19 illustrations. I looked for information on how Peter Folger learned the tongue of the Wampanoag Indi-

ans. I learned that Roger Williams published in 1643 *Key into the Languages of America*. The “Indian-speak” term for Folger was “the White Chief’s Old-Young Man,” implying that although young in years he was old in experience and wisdom. Anderson is fun to read because she uses her imagination: “What else can Peter have had in his chimney cupboard? Certainly *The Bay-Psalms Book*,” she writes. Author Clarence King (see below) believes that Captain John Gardner brought Peter Folger a volume of Shakespeare’s plays he had purchased in Boston. April 23, 1676 (Shakespeare’s 112th birthday and only his 60th deathday) is the date of Peter Folger’s poem published in Boston, *A Looking Glasse for the Times*. It lies in the Nantucket Historical Association’s archives, marked “Original document, written by Peter Folger himself.” A second document, dated March 27, 1677, contains the “four-square” signature Folger used. In this plea for clemency after his imprisonment, Folger describes himself as “a poore old Man . . . hauing liued 30 yeares upon this Island.” The bibliography includes 35 documents. Grr, no index.

Anderson, Robert C., George F. Sanborn Jr., Melinda L. Sanborn, *The Great Migration: Immigrants to New England 1634–1635*, Vol. II C–F. Boston: New England Historical and Genealogical Society, 2001.

I delved into this 738-page tome with great expectation that I’d find confirmation of the ship—many say the *Abigail*—that carried Peter Folger and Mary Morrell from London to Massachusetts in September 1635, but came up with only one line about Peter regarding his daughter Joanna, followed by “but the evidence for this has not been found.” No ship log exists confirming for sure when the couple arrived in Boston and on which vessel.

Baldwin, Ada Harriet. *His Mother’s Kindred*. Serialized in four issues of *Americana Illustrated*, vol. 35, no. 1-4. New York: American Historical Company, 1941.

Ada Harriet Baldwin was a Folger from Baltimore, Maryland. In her 185-page study, which I was delighted to find in the Nantucket Historical Association library, she admits to “sorting out contradictory tales” about the Folgers’ origins. She believes the first Folgers were Flemish weavers who sought refuge in the industrial towns of East Anglia, England, when they went about learning to become skilled craftsmen. The early Folgers were not adventurers; they were deeply religious, quiet, and hard-working. Nevertheless, they set out for adventure when father John and son Peter Folger cross the Atlantic and arrived in Boston on October 6, 1635. A few years later, “Peter Foulger married Mary Morrill of Salem, having bought her of Hugh Peters for the sum of twenty pounds.” Peter set about learning the dialect of the Algonquin tongue spoken by the Wampanoag. In her last serial contribution, Baldwin lingers on Peter Folger’s opus, “A Looking

Glasse For the Times,” quoting Benjamin Franklin’s evaluation: “the valiant doggerel of Peter Folger, although totally lacking in charm and poetic inspiration, is not without a gleam of humor, and is a good example of the versifying of his day.” The last issue also shows two Folger land plots on an early Martha’s Vineyard map.

Banks, Charles Edward, *The History of Martha’s Vineyard, Dukes County Massachusetts in Three Volumes*. Boston: George H. Dean, 1911.

Banks was a surgeon and Vineyard historian. I consulted this first edition at the Library of Congress, but it exists also in a 1966 edition. Only volumes I and II contain information on Peter Folger, and some on his father, John. The thick volumes are particularly rich in tracing land lots (3 acres, 8 acres) on Martha’s Vineyard (including Chappaquiddick) that John and Peter purchased or sold. We read about Peter as a school master and teacher of religion to the Indians. “Peter Folger was the first school-master, and the building where he taught was on the Old Mill path near the Sarson lot on Slough hill.” As for where Peter Folger lived, “His home lot was on Tower Hill, north of the cemetery, about the site occupied by the house of the late Sol Smith Russell.” Banks is good about divulging actual dates (month, day, year) when he has evidence, and for admitting on the many occasions when the early settlers’ movements were shrouded in uncertainty.

Douglas-Lithgow, R. A. *Nantucket: A History*. New York: Putnam, 1914.

Robert Alexander Douglas-Lithgow (1846–1917) calls his twenty chapters from “Geology of the Island” to “Quaint Nantucketers” the first systematic historical record of Nantucket since 1835. “There was little in the way of handicrafts to which he could not turn his skill,” wrote Douglas-Lithgow of Peter Folger. We learn here that between 1666 and 1676 Peter Folger was put in charge of the grist-mills at Lily Pond, an assertion missing in many other accounts. The name of the town Sherburne (Shearburn) was changed to Nantucket in 1795, more than a century after Peter Folger’s time.

Downs-Watson, Kim. “Peter Foulger: What We Have Discovered About a Most Remarkable Man,” *Historic Nantucket*, vol. 30, no. 4 (Apr 1983), 22–31.

Interestingly, the research for this two-part article was commissioned by the husband of a Foulger descendant in memory of his wife. We learn that Zaccheus Macy was one of many who held Peter Foulger in high esteem, calling him “the most indispensable settler among the first Nantucketers.” Addressing the availability of hard facts regarding Peter Foulger’s life, the author warns us that “much of the data had very little, if any, documented evidence behind it.” This charge pertains to the arrival in the New World in that “no ships’ logs, yet available, list Peter and/or Foulger family among their passengers.” The article is especially rich in its footnotes, references, manuscripts, and bibliography.

Downs-Watson, Kim. "Peter Foulger: What We Have Discovered About a Most Remarkable Man," *Historic Nantucket*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Jan 1984), 14–21.

Kim Downs-Watson noted in this second article that after 19 months (more than I spent) of research on the life of Peter Folger she was still unable to find many key answers to turn statements of "traditional conjecture" into "substantiated facts." What delighted her, however, was the outpouring of interest in Peter Foulger that Part 1 had prompted: letters, phone calls, and a visit from Mrs. John A. Foulger who made the voyage from Wymondham, England!

Fischer, David Hackett. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*. London: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Fischer's lengthy study does not mention Peter Folger, but offers a fascinating description of the Puritan immigrants from Eastern England during the 17th century. Archbishop William Laud complained that "East Anglia was the throbbing heart of heresy in England." Dissent was a tradition there. Immigrants to the New World were not only deeply pious in unconventional ways. They were extremely literate, highly skilled, and heavily urban. They were people of substance and character, with a trace of obstinacy. They traveled in family groups. All of these traits fit Peter Folger.

Gardner, Grace Brown. *Fifty Famous Nantucketers and Other Sketches*. Manuscript in the archives of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society.

It was very exciting to leaf slowly through this manuscript from the archives of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society in Boston. The handwritten volume was compiled by Helen R. Kluegal of Kaneoha, Hawaii. Gardner wrote columns on the same subject for *The Inquirer and Mirror* (Nantucket, Mass.), published 1949–1950. Four of the fifty are Folgers: #3 Peter Folger, #6 Abiah Folger, #14 Walter Folger, and #25 James A. Folger.

Hinchman, Lydia (Mitchell) Swain. *Early Settlers of Nantucket 1650–1850: Their Associates and Descendants*. Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1901.

The 432-page book with 36 chapters and 3 appendices is a gold mine of genealogical information about the early settlers on Nantucket. Most of the chapters are family specific. Since I was tracing the Folger family, I looked mainly in one location (chapter 9). But since the early settlers intermarried a lot, I skimmed all the other chapters. There seemed to be a drawing of Peter Folger, but the image was not at all clear in the Kindle format. In the appendix I found a veritable index of 49 Folger families; this was very useful for me. Early chapters gave specific information about both settler and Indian deeds, with month, day, and year of signature. Ms. Hinchman cites where the old documents may be found. She gives her best guess about the origin of each family. She believes that Peter was a Baptist who may have become a Quaker in old age.

In reading this book I came across the names of several families that I knew from my youth growing up in Massachusetts. I emailed one person whose name I recognized. She responded: "Yes, you have found my roots!"

I end with this rare incident of humor in a dry book. At Vassar College, a visitor greeted [astronomy professor] Maria Mitchell, originally of Nantucket: "Miss Mitchell, I met a cousin of yours the other day." Her reply, "Oh, very likely. I have five thousand cousins on Nantucket." At the time, that was the entire population of Nantucket.

King, Clarence. *The Half-Share Man: Peter Folger of Nantucket: Grandfather of Benjamin Franklin*. Nantucket: Poets Corner Press, 1972.

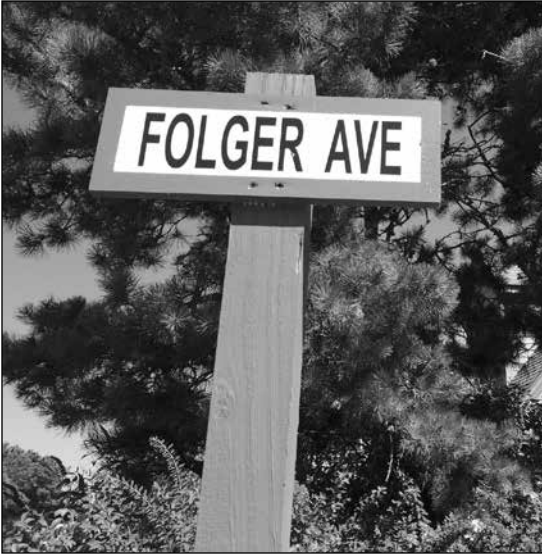
From chapter two: "He dashed toward her and she came staggering to meet him. He wrapped his arms about her and kissed her. She threw her arms about his neck and her eager lips responded to his kisses. . ." The "he" is Peter Folger and the "she" is Mary Morrell. The time is September 1635. The place of their tryst is the deck of the *Abigail* during a hurricane. Although Clarence King (1883–1974) in his slim volume about Peter Folger uses engaging historical fiction, he follows very closely all the important historical moments in Folger's life. Who will be able to confirm King's assertion that Peter Folger's horse was named Aristotle?

Labaree, Leonard W., et al., eds., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.

Franklin started to write his *Autobiography* in 1771 at the age of 65. Peter Folger had died in 1690 and his daughter Abiah in 1752 when Franklin was 46. In early pages of his *Autobiography*, Franklin writes only a few (but favorable) words about his maternal grandfather: "My Mother the 2d Wife was Abiah Folger, a Daughter of Peter Folger, one of the first Settlers of New England, of whom honourable mention is made by Cotton Mather, in his church History of that Country as a *godly learned Englishman*." The genealogical research that Franklin conducted in England was focused on his paternal side. In 1758 Franklin visited his paternal grandfather's grave in Oxfordshire, but does not appear to have visited the Folger ancestral land in East Anglia. In any case, Franklin gives genealogical information about both sides of his family in his *Papers*.

Mooney, Robert F. *Tales of Nantucket*. Nantucket: Wesco, 1990.

I had the pleasure of a work session with Bob Mooney in his Nantucket home on August 1, 2015. One of my questions to him was, "We have a copy of Peter Folger's signature in the Banks book, but do we know what he looked like"? His face broke into a mischievous smile. "No, we don't, but I have an idea about it. Diane Swartz translated it from my imagination to a drawing in *Tales of Nantucket* introducing my chapter, 'The Missing Record.' I think he might have looked a lot like his grandson, Benjamin Franklin."



Folger Avenue, Miacoment. As Peter Folger labored to produce the first survey maps of Nantucket in 1660, he would not have imagined that three-and-a-half centuries later the island would be smattered with street signs bearing his name: Folger Avenue in Miacoment, Folgers Lane off Cliff Road, Folger Road in Cliffside near Sherburne Turnpike, Folgers Court in Siasconset, Folger Hill off Polpis Road, Folgers Marsh in Polpis near the Shipwreck Museum, and Folger's Creek in Pocomo East. *Author's photograph*

Mooney, Robert F. *More Tales of Nantucket*. Nantucket: Wesco, 2005.

*More Tales of Nantucket* contains the portrait of James A. Folger, founder of Folger Coffee. Ruth Waldo Newhall published the portrait in her slim book, *The Folger Way: Coffee Pioneering Since 1850*. Mooney cites an astounding figure, "Some forty percent of Nantucket's young men traveled thousands of miles from home" in the Gold Rush, where "whaleships were hastily converted into passenger ships." Bob Mooney died on April 6, 2016 while this article was in its final stages of preparation. He was aware of its being published, and gave me permission to reproduce in it his original pictorial notion of what Peter Folger looked like.

Newhall, Ruth Waldo. *The Folger Way: Coffee Pioneering Since 1850*, San Francisco: J. A. Folger & Co., c. 1960.

I tracked down this coffee company publicity volume at the California Historical Society Library. Only the first of 72 pages in this booklet mentions Peter Folger, and in very general terms. The booklet contains no footnotes or bibliography. I was unable to ascertain where the author's papers reside. Part of my interest in James A. Folger, founder of Folger Coffee, was the fact that his nephew was Henry Clay Folger, the subject of my biography, *Collecting Shakespeare*. "Jim" Folger was born on Nantucket in 1835 and died in Oakland, California in 1889. Jim's fortune was with coffee; Nephew Henry's was with oil. The Folger pair captured two of the most vital product lines of the growing American economy in a period when the United States showed the strength to challenge the supremacy of the European powers and greatly enhance its place on the international stage.

Norton, Henry Franklin. *Martha's Vineyard: Histories, Legends, Stories*. Hartford: Press of the Pyne Printery, 1923.

Norton was born in Oak Bluffs in 1888 and died there in 1961. One mention of Peter Foulger in the slim volume sheds some light on an un-



known element in his life: what did he think of the Indians he met, got to know, and conversed with in their tongue. Foulger found them “very quick to learn and willing to be instructed in the ways of the English.”

Railton, Arthur R. “Teaching and Preaching: Two Hundred Years of Indian Schools,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, vol. 41, no. 3 (February 2000): 47-65.

In this article, Railton—editor of the *Intelligencer* for 30 years—quotes the Island’s most knowledgeable historian, Richard L. Pease, who wrote that Peter Folger was “employed in teaching the [Indian] youth in reading, writing and the principles of religion by catechizing.”

Railton, Arthur R. “The Indians and the English in Martha’s Vineyard, Part II: Thomas Mayhew Jr., Missionary.” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, vol. 32, no. 2 (November 1990): 43-80.

In a footnote we read that Peter Folger bought Mary Morrell’s freedom for £20.

Salisbury, Geraldine G. *H. Marshall Gardiner’s NANTUCKET POSTCARDS 1910–1940*. G. G. Salisbury, 1995.

H. Marshall Gardiner (1884–1942) had an art shop on Main Street, Nantucket and sold postcards. Geraldine is his youngest of three daughters. Collectors of Nantucket postcards refer to this volume as the go-to source for the tail end of the Golden Age of Postcards about the Island. One of the early black-and-white postcards is entitled, “Birthplace of Benjamin Franklin’s Mother.”



Peter Foulger Museum sign. The Whaling Museum in Nantucket is also called the Peter Foulger Museum. Courtesy Thomas Quigley

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### Connecting the Dots . . .

This being my first full season on Martha's Vineyard as Executive Director, I have had the joy of exploring and discovering every day. Stories abound everywhere I go; creating this diverse tapestry of the Island, its people and places.

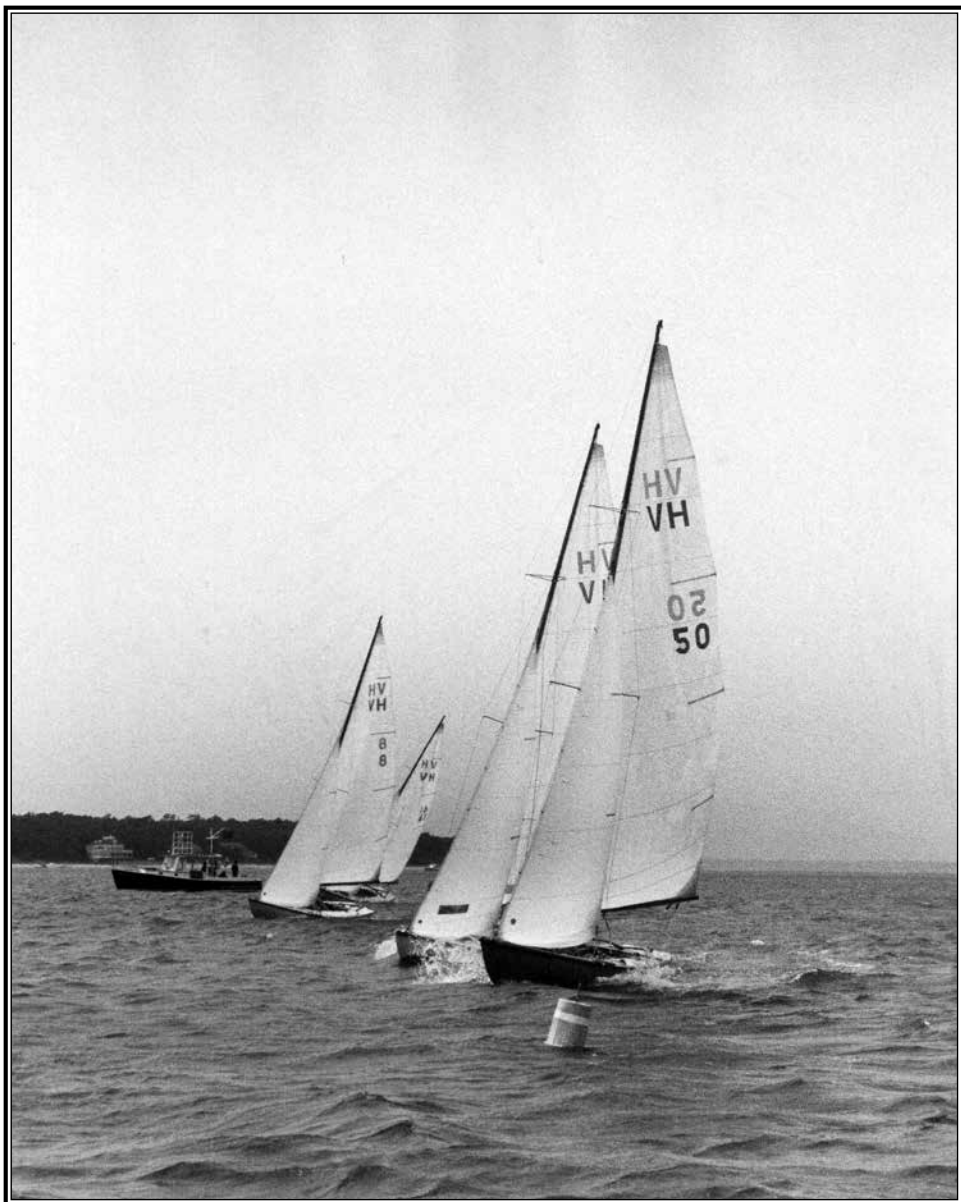
The story of Peter Folger in this issue of *The Intelligencer* did that for me—immigration, the Mayhew Family and Philadelphia. The Peter Folger story weaves an extraordinary tale of emigration from England to Martha's Vineyard and then to Nantucket. As Peter Folger worked for the Mayhew Family, I, too, have been blessed to work side-by-side with a member of the Mayhew Family. As Peter Folger's progeny migrated, one of his grandchildren settled in Philadelphia, becoming one of the founding fathers of our country. My family, too, settled in Philadelphia and now on Martha's Vineyard.

It was however a fourth-grade class held in the Museum's library that connected the dots for me. The class assignment was immigration; the challenge was how to engage the children with the subject. Two weeks earlier, the Museum had presented the twenty-five children with five letters from different ethnic migrant families dating back into the 1800's. Each child had to identify their ethnic group, and then create their own persona from that letter. Dressed in period garb for their immigration to America and carrying a handmade suitcase made for their journey, each student proudly shared their vivid travel journals. Two boys showed me their fifty-page journal, telling their tale of meeting in Boston, travelling to Philadelphia and then deciding to go to Colorado to start a "cowboy company." Unfortunately, Colorado was not yet part of the Union. But they decided to help create Colorado. To whom did they turn as a role model for creating the state? None other than Peter Folger's grandson—a small world indeed.

My world had come full circle as history, place and people connected. That simple letter had unleashed the imagination of two boys. History was relevant and fun for them . . . and had connected me to the Island in so many ways.



Phil Wallis  
Executive Director



A twenty-one-foot sloop designed by master boatbuilder Erford Burt, the Vineyard Haven Fifteen became the principal racing class of the Vineyard Haven Yacht Club in 1936, eighty years ago, and remained so until 1979. A total of fifty were built between 1935 and 1970, making it the largest class of small craft designed and built on the Vineyard. The fleet shown here, crossing a VHYC starting line sometime in the mid-1970s, includes the very last (*Tyche*, #50, built in 1970) and one of the first (*Kanga*, #8, built in 1937).



From the Martha's Vineyard Museum collection, a rug sewn from wool puttees salvaged from the wreck of the *Port Hunter* (story on page 3).