

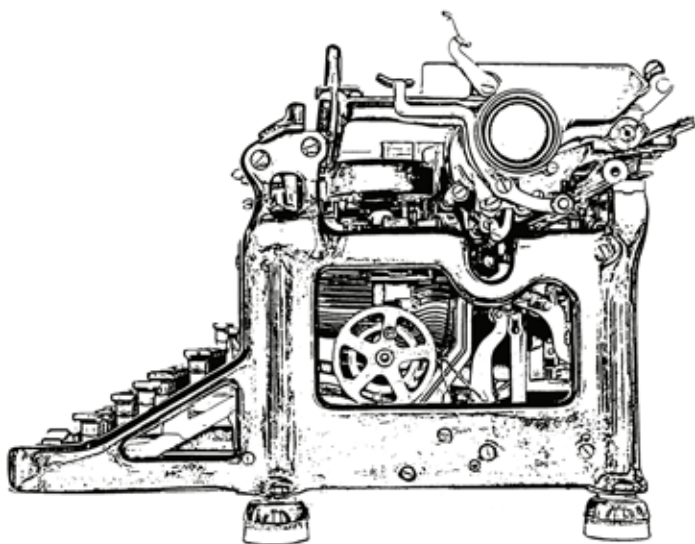
*Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands*

# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

WINTER 2012

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## The Editors



A Sampler of Historical Writing  
From the Editors  
Of the Intelligencer

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### TO OUR READERS

THIS ISSUE REPRESENTS a retrospective on the contributions of the five previous editors of this journal. For two of these editors, just putting it together every quarter was enough. For three others, writing was the key contribution and a labor of love.

In going through the more than fifty years of the journal one by one, I was taken with the evolution of the journal itself from an all-encompassing, one-size-fits-all compendium of annual reports and accessions with bits of history thrown in, to a scholarly journal replete with think pieces and filled with images.

Styles change, and, especially, technology changes. From typesetting and paste-up to Adobe InDesign® each editor put his or her own style to these pages, not out of ego, but in an effort to improve the quality of the *Dukes County Intelligencer*. Along the way the DCI matured and became an invaluable resource for generations of researchers, students, academics and lovers of Island history.

Susan Wilson, editor

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# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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Dorothy Scoville, Editor (1961-1963)  
George Adams, Editor (1977-1979)  
Arthur R. Railton, Editor (1979-2006)  
John Walter, Editor (2007-2008)

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# Introduction

## To a Retrospective

### Five Editors Have Presided with Distinction Over This Journal of Island History

by SUSAN WILSON

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FOR MORE THAN HALF a century, the Dukes County Intelligencer has thrived as a respected journal of the history of Martha's Vineyard. Within its covers professional and amateur historians, storytellers and buffs have explored the who and what we are of Vineyard history. None more so than its several editors.

Gale Huntington, Dorothy Scoville, George Adams, Art Railton, and John Walter each put his or her imprimatur on these pages. Dorothy and George were guides and editors, if not contributors to the body of knowledge. Gale and Art were prolific writers, delving deep into the history they foraged from the ever-growing archives. John's tenure was tragically cut short, but he, too, rooted in the boxes and files and pulled a wealth of new information out to be reported on, as became his background as a newspaper man.

Gale Huntington, for whom the library at the Museum is named, was founding editor. He served as editor from 1959 through 1961 when he signed off with a slightly tongue-in-cheek apology.

"The editor wishes to apologize for the many typographical errors in the last issue of the Intelligencer. This is how it happened. The printer sent the editor two sets of proofs, one of which he corrected very carefully. He then sent the printer the uncorrected set....This is the last issue of the Intelligencer for which the present editor will be responsible, as he leaves the Island in September...."

Dorothy Scoville, the Society's curator, became the de facto editor. By 1964 Gale had been enticed back to the job. "Lastly, the Intelligencer has a new editor, or rather, it has its old editor back again. Miss Scoville asked to be relieved of this duty in order to be able to devote full time to her work as curator." Although he was ever careful to list himself as 'acting' Gale



Art Railton at work in his basement office in the Gale Huntington Library.

remained as the *Intelligencer's* editor for another twelve or thirteen years, until George Adams took the helm.

"After eighteen years of service," as Director Thomas E. Norton wrote in *DCHS News* when Gale Huntington stepped down again, "... Although we regret that Gale will not be working as closely with us as in the past, we wish him a pleasant retirement from his strenuous duties. The new editor is George W. Adams of the *Vineyard Gazette*, who has accepted the challenge with great enthusiasm. We wish him the best of luck."

George Adams edited the journal for exactly one year: February 1978 through February 1979. Norton notes the latest changing of the guard: "This issue of the *Intelligencer* is the last one under the editorship of George W. Adams, who has left the *Vineyard* to resume his career in marine architecture. During the year that he edited the magazine many major changes were made in the format and typography, improving it greatly. The Society is grateful for the work he has done and we will miss him. Arthur R. Railton of Edgartown and Chilmark has agreed to take over the position and we welcome him."

Arthur R. Railton was seduced into taking the helm by Gale Huntington who essentially promised him that it would be a temporary gig. It was. For twenty-eight years. Art's years as editor culminated in the best history of Martha's Vineyard to be written since Dr. Charles Banks' three-volume history published in 1911. *The History of Martha's Vineyard: How We Got To Where We Are* comprised the serialized history that Art began the year that his wife Marjorie passed away; exploring the Island's history chapter by chapter, quarter by quarter, over the course of several years. He wrote in the May, 2006 issue, his last: "Some words are easier to write than others. These are among the hardest. After 28 years of being wedded to this journal and to this cluttered basement office, I am retiring as editor..."

"As many of you know, in 1978 I was asked by my good friend, the founding editor of this journal, Gale Huntington, to take over as editor while the Society looked for a permanent one. 'It will be for a year at the most,' Gale said. I asked him why he didn't do it. 'I am too old,' was his response. 'I'm 72, that's too old for the job.'... Well, at 90, I am beginning to feel too old."

In John Walter, the long tradition of creative and dedicated editors continued. Like Gale and Art, John was a contributing editor, taking on the dual responsibilities of managing the content and adding to the wealth of knowledge with articles on heretofore unexplored topics. Seven issues were produced under his watch, and the last was essentially press-ready at his death from complications from surgery.

Each one of these editors put his or her mark on the journal that is critical to the mission of the Martha's Vineyard Museum. They've guided it through changes in the organization's name: Dukes County Historical Society, The Vineyard Museum, Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, Martha's Vineyard Museum; through advances in the technology of printing, going from typesetting, to digital reproduction of images. Gale Huntington could never have imagined that his quarterly journal, born in 1959 and mailed out free with membership, might someday be downloaded on demand to "go green" members with a password.

The following stories are representative of the work of Gale, Art and John and chosen to highlight their very different writing styles. The reader should note that these articles are reproduced here exactly as they appeared in their original iterations, except for the addition of images in those stories that predate scanning.

E. GALE HUNTINGTON

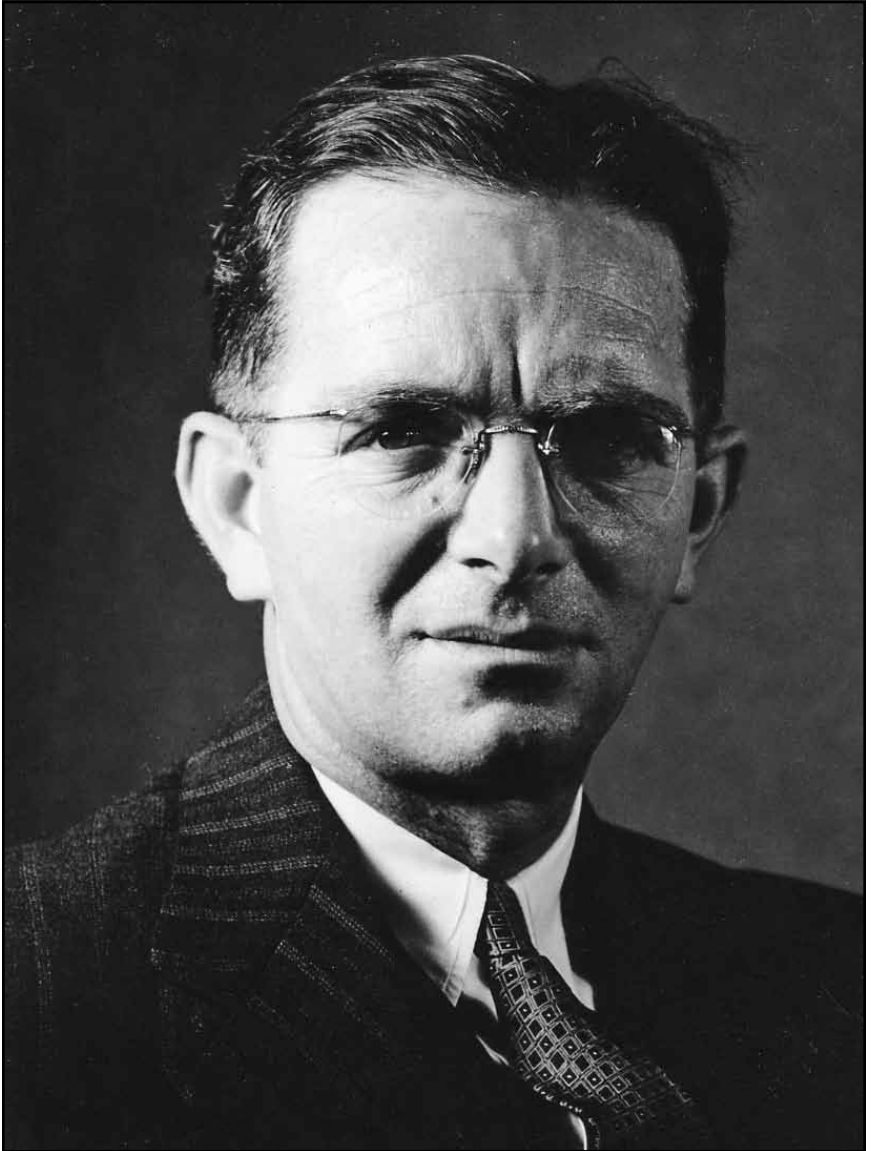


Photo from the Museum collection



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# Dragging — 1934

## Out Early, Home Late: Rough Weather On a Hunt for Fluke and Flounder

by E. GALE HUNTINGTON

VOL. 12. NO. 3, FEBRUARY 1971

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I WAS BACK OF THE HOUSE sawing wood for winter when Tom\* drove into the yard. His mother Hattie, Mil's grandmother, was with him, and Alice and the baby, and George Fisher. George Fisher is Alton's mate.

"What you driving at?" Tom asked me.

"Not much," I told him. As a matter of fact I was quahauging, and sometimes making as much as three dollars a day at it. They were mostly chowders. And all John Correia would pay for chowders was fifty cents a bushel. But there were a few cherrystones and littlenecks with the big ones to bring the total catch for a day up to that three dollars. Sometimes, Mil always took the catch down to Edgartown and sold them. That was where she was that afternoon.

"Like to go fishing for a trip or two?" Tom asked. I didn't answer right away.

"Well, what do you say?" he demanded. "Les is laid up with a sore hand." Les is Mil's brother and Tom's regular mate.

"I'll go," I told him finally.

"Good," he said. "Boat's tied up in the Basin. If there's any chance at all we want to get out early. About four thirty."

"I'll be there," I told him. "Come on in and I'll make some coffee."

"No," Tom said. "Alton's waiting for George and I want to pump the boat out. Where's Mil?"

"Gone to Edgartown," I told him.

After they'd gone I went back to sawing wood, and thinking. Sawing wood is good for thinking. I thought about how many more cords I'd have to saw up to get us through the winter. And I thought about Franklin D. Roosevelt, and if he was ever going to be able to stop the

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\* Tom was the author's father-in-law, Capt. Thomas T. Tilton of Vineyard Haven. Alice was his wife. Alton was Capt. Alton Tilton, Tom's brother; Les is Leslie Tilton, Tom's elder son, who was drowned a few years later when fishing as captain of his own boat.

depression (sic). It didn't look as though he was. But mostly I thought about dragging—that was the fishing Tom was doing—and how I didn't like it very much.

I'd been dragging some. Mostly with Reginald Norton, and it's a mean kind of business. Ask any handliner, ask any lobsterman, ask any fisherman except a dragger and he'll tell you that. It ruins the bottom and it drives the fish and kills them. Eventually dragging will kill itself for when there are no more fish, there'll be no more dragging. Then maybe the bottom will come back and the fish with it and there'll be a chance for the handliners and the trap fishermen once more.

Mil wasn't going to like it very much that I said I'd go with Tom. She takes a dim view of dragging. Next morning the alarm went off at three thirty and the weather looked pretty good, so Mil got up and got me some breakfast not talking much.

There wasn't a sign of life on any of the boats when I got over to the Basin. The weather didn't look so good now. What wind there was, and it seemed to be freshening, was out of the northeast. A bad point. The sky was overcast with a feeble moon just showing through once in a while. I thought maybe I'd have done better to shut off the alarm and go back to bed. But anyway, I got the pump and went to work on the *Artemesia*. After about five minutes it pump sucked, and just then Tom drove up.

Alton in the *Three and One* went out the jetties ahead of us. He was bound for Sam Cahoon's to take out what fish he had, but Tom wanted to fish one more day before going to market. Miller was getting underway astern of us. The explosion from his diesel engine lit up the whole Basin when he started her.

Tom went below to make a fire and get himself some breakfast. I guess Alice didn't hold with getting up at three thirty. So I let her go for the light on Cuttyhunk. There was just a hint of dawn then, and the wind was breezing all the time. Northeast. I didn't think we'd do any fishing that day, which just goes to show how much I didn't know about Tom's kind of dragging. Tom is a driver.

There was a caster anchored off Dogfish Bar, a stone schooner she was, for her two masts were set wide apart. Likely she was bound east, I thought, and waiting for a fair wind. There was a lantern aloft in her rigging and I kept inside of her. It was getting lighter now, and pretty soon I could make out the buoy on the end of Devil's Bridge. From the buoy we set her course for the Vineyard Sound hooter, and from the hooter let her go sou'west about twenty minutes. There's deep water there, about twenty fathom. It's a small ground but sometimes a good one. We let the net go over.

Dragging is a broad term, and there are many types of draggers from the little two man boats such as the *Artemesia* to the great steam trawlers that fish Georges and the Grand Banks and the Greenland grounds. But they all have one thing in common. They drag the bottom and catch every kind of bottom fish for which there is a market. Of course they catch the fish for which there is no market, too, and the fish that are too small for market, and kill them.

Perhaps dragging does not hurt the free swimming fish, the mackerel, swordfish, tuna and many more. But I think it does hurt them. I think dragging hurts every fish and every type of fishing there is, for it destroys the natural balance of ocean life. And what it's doing to the ground fish, cod, haddock, flounders of all kinds and the like, is an open book. And dragging will not be stopped until the fish are all gone, for it is too big an industry.

You hear fishermen say that if dragging were stopped the fish would come back. That's true. You hear them say that if everyone went back to handlining and line trawling and gill netting and seining the price of fish would go way up and every fisherman would have a chance to make a decent living again. And that's only partly true. The price of fish would go up all right, but there aren't enough fish left for fishermen to make a living with a hand line or any other kind of fishing any more except dragging.

When I was a boy, and that's not too many years ago, there were men who went off the beach in dories in the spring and fall for cod and made a good living at it. They couldn't now. Thirty, forty and fifty years ago there were men who made fortunes trap fishing. Last summer the one fish trap still operating in Menemsha Bight failed to pay expenses by more than five hundred dollars. And the answer to almost all of that is dragging. I could go on but I won't. I'll get back to the deep hole to the sou'west of the Vineyard Sound hooter.

Tom said he thought he'd make about an hour and a half set unless the lines came together sooner, but he didn't think there was much trash there. Trash consists of all the fish for which there is no market, all the edible fish which are too small to market, and the grass and weeds on the bottom where the fish are feeding. Sometimes a net will come up so heavy with fish and trash that it can't be hoisted into the boat. I saw that happen once when I was dragging with Reginald. We hoisted the net as high as we could and then cut it open and bailed the fish out on deck, then sewed up the net and repeated the process until finally it was light enough to swing on deck. But that was six years ago when there were still some fish.

After dragging sou'west for half an hour Tom set a waif, then he swung

around and headed back over our course. A waif is nothing more than an anchored buoy, with a flag on it on a pole, to show you where you are. It's a position marker to show where the fishing is good or is expected to be good.

It was rough now. Really rough, and I was feeling pretty seasick, but not quite bad enough to lose my breakfast, and I was hoping I wouldn't get any worse. Any strange boat has a different motion and my stomach didn't like the *Artemesia's*. A number of boats had arrived on the ground now. Miller had set about the time we did, and was fishing off to the southward of us. Warren Vincent was there, and his brother Jerry, the *Pal* from Stonington; a big launch from New London and one or two more.

There was a chill in that northeast wind and a mean looking bank of clouds in the southeast kept the sun from doing any good. I was feeling very miserable and right then I hated dragging more than I always did. But the work of taking in the net warmed me up and made me feel a little better.

I'll go just a little into the technical details of dragging. Properly the net is called an otter trawl. It is a great improvement over the beam trawl that was developed in the North Sea many years ago. By improvement I mean it kills more fish. The mouth of the net is wide. The one we were using had a ninety foot sweep. The mouth of the net is held open by two doors, heavy lead or iron weighted boards which are towed along the bottom at an angle of maybe forty-five degrees from the course of the boat. The pressure of the water against the angle of the boards as they are being towed, keeps the foot of the net with its heavy chain and lead rope taut.

A top line fitted with bobbers or floats may be used to keep the top of the net high enough. The rest of the net is a long tapering funnel with a heavy mesh bag at the end. It really is a simple enough rig. That is it's simple until you set out to make one, or repair one.

Because the water was deep we were using seventy-five fathom of tow line, each line leading to a door. The lines are rove through blocks on the end of a short boom that extends over the starboard side, then through a snatch block and so to the drum. The lines we were using were good heavy manila. The drum works by power from the engine.

The net came in slowly, for seventy-five fathom is a lot of line. When the boards broke water they were made fast, and then I hoisted the net in, section by section, while Tom shook it free of the weeds and trash in the meshes. Then came the bag. I made the fall fast and hoisted it in with only two turns on the drum. It wasn't very heavy. Tom pulled loose the purse line and the contents of the bag spilled on deck. It didn't look like much to me. Then we set the net over again and started on another drag.



Mending nets aboard a fishing vessel. Photo from the Museum collection.

When the net was towing again I started in to clean up the catch. All the trash: goosefish, skates, sand sharks, sculpins, four spots, and God knows what all else, went over the side. Almost all dead, of course, as well as market fish that were too small to keep. What was left had to be sorted and washed and then packed in ice in the pens below deck. That drag we got a dozen or more big flukes; a bushel and a half of blackbacks, sometimes

called pugs, or if they're big enough, lemon sole; almost a bushel of yellowtails; a few sea scallops and one scup. Darned poor fishing, I thought, but Tom said it didn't look too bad.

Flukes are the big summer flounders and they usually bring a fair price. The ones we caught there in the deep hole ran from ten to eighteen or twenty pounds each and we got eight cents a pound for them at Sam Cahoon's. Blackbacks and yellowtails are flounders, too. Though to my way of thinking yellowtail is the best and there's no finer eating fish in the world. But no matter what they are, fluke or pug or yellowtail or whatever, in the retail markets on the mainland, and the restaurants, they are fillet of sole.

After the fish are iced down below, the deck has to be washed and swept, for it becomes altogether too foul and slippery if it isn't attended to after every drag. Finally when everything is shipshape again there's nothing to do until it's time to bring up the net once more. But I've seen the time when so much trash came up in the bag that it was impossible to keep the deck clean between drags. When that happens there's no breathing time at all, not even time to eat, much less catch fifteen or twenty minutes of sleep. Understand that that cleanup work is done by the mate. The captain steers and keeps track of where he is, which is more important.

Just about sunset, and it was a pretty one, we went down and spoke Alton who had come on the ground a little after noon, because Tom wanted to borrow a lantern from him to lash on the waif. The wick on ours was burned down too short to throw much light. We jockeyed the boats together and I caught the lantern as George Fisher threw it. Then we towed down toward the waif, but a lighted lantern was already lashed to it when we got there. The draggers are always doing something like that to help each other. Some other boat was using our waif to make his tows by and now we were using his lantern. It is just that kind of cooperation that often enough saves lives, too.

It was a pleasant night and I ate enough supper to make up for the dinner I hadn't wanted. The moon was in the last quarter and wouldn't rise till toward morning, so it was dark. Dark but clear. Away to the northward there must have been a low overcast, for there were four distinct glows in the sky, reflections from the lights of New Bedford, Fall River, Newport and Providence.

Below the horizon, visible only by the reflected glow of its flash we could make out the position of the light on Block Island, and more faintly still that of a light off Newport. Gay Head and Cuttyhunk showed bright and clear as did the Sow and Pigs lightship. It was a fine night for fishing but from sunset on the catch fell off steadily. We took in the net for the last time that night a little before two o'clock. The bag was pitifully small as it

swung in on deck. Two flukes and less than a half bushel of blackbacks was all that the floodlights showed us.

"Time to go to market," Tom said. "No use risking a net any longer for this kind of fishing."

While we were making the run, and after we tied up at Sam Ca-hoon's we got something like three hours' sleep apiece. When the market gang showed up around six we unloaded and took on ice and a hundred gallons of gasoline, and a big box of groceries, for this time we were bound off shore. Kelly Chase and his mate in the little *Vega* were bound with us. They reported some flukes and a good run of yellowtails at a spot about twenty miles south by west from the Nomans Land hooter.

South by west from Nomans Land is going to sea, and the *Vega* was too small to go that far in the fall of the year. When you come right down to it, so were we, but dollars are hard to come by these days and so are fish.

The weather held fine with a soft westerly wind barely rippling the water of the sound. There had been a land fog earlier that morning, and Jimmy Mayhew, my old lobster skipper, used to say that a land fog before breakfast meant one of three things: it meant fog, or rain, or a storm within twenty-four hours. But right then there was no sign of anything but the finest kind of fine weather. And that's what's wanted when a small boat heads off shore in the fall of the year.

Off Lucas Shoal we passed the old stone schooner that had been anchored off Dogfish Bar bound east. She had her fair wind at last, what little there was of it, and she was making the most of it, wung-out with everything set. Stone schooners certainly aren't pretty vessels, with their masts so wide apart, and the foresail almost as big as the mainsail. But there is something about the sight of a vessel under sail, no matter how old she may be, or how ugly, or how hogged, that makes you feel good. And every year it seems that fewer coasters are passing through the sound.

It was well after noon when we reached the grounds. Nomans Land had dropped astern of us and we were off shore, out of sight of land and on our own. No matter how many times a man goes off shore, he always has that feeling, a little, I think, when the land drops from sight, of being on his own with only his shipmate or shipmates to depend on. And with that feeling comes a quickening of the blood, and a quickening of all the perceptions.

The fleet was there ahead of us. They were bigger boats mostly, schooners, ketches and big launches, and there were twelve or fourteen of them. The work is a little easier on a big dragger than on a small one. For one thing there is more room to work in, and the motion of the boat is not so



Mr. Huntington, out sailing. Photo from the Museum collection.

fast. But mainly the work is easier on a larger vessel because there are more hands to do the work, so there is more time to catch some sleep. Not much but some. For once a dragger reaches the grounds she fishes continuously, day and night until the weather drives her in, or until her hold is full of fish, or until the ice and fuel begin to run low.

It was about two thirty in the afternoon when we put the net over. And the weather was the finest, clear, and warm with scarcely any wind at all. There was a swell coming in from off-shore, though, from the eastward, low and barely perceptible, and wide apart. It might mean something or nothing.

Carlton Mayhew in the *Carrie V.* came down and spoke us. He was swordfishing, late in the season as it was, and the three of them, Carlton, and Ben, and Linus Jeffers were perched in the cross trees like crows in a dead oak, steering from aloft while they looked for fish. They had one fish and had raised another under water but hadn't been able to strike it. They left us, cruising slowly to the northward toward home and a hot supper and a warm house.

After about an hour's dragging, we took up, and the catch was good. Nearly seven bushels of yellowtails and eleven big flukes. But it was dirty fishing, which meant no sleep, for the net was fairly plastered with a fine curly marine grass. It was in that grass that the fish were feeding, and every drag we brought up great wads of it.

The rest of the afternoon and the early night went slowly. The fishing was very good, though it did fall off a little after dark. Over and over



again we went through the routine: take up, clean the net as it came in, dump the bag, pick out the marketable fish, wash them, pack them below in ice, get the trash overboard, and clean up the deck. It is hard tiring work. Tom went below and lay down for twenty minutes or so about midnight. I planned to get my rest toward morning, but that plan didn't work out.

As the night wore on the fleet spread out, covering more ground, until there were lights everywhere in a great circle around us. Red and green running lights, the bright points of the masthead lights, and the glare of the working lights on deck, and every light cast its reflection on the quiet water. It was like the lights of a city, I thought, but a city that was never twice quite the same, a city that moved and shifted and was never still. Sometime after midnight the stove went out, but we didn't rebuild the fire, as the cabin was plenty warm from the heat of the engine.

Things happen fast on the water. There was no warning of that breeze. Tom was in the pilot house holding her on course, and I was on deck picking up fish, when I felt a cold wind on the back of my neck. It was from the northeast, and there was a black streak in the northeast, too, hiding the stars. "A breeze coming," I told Tom.

"I felt it," he said. "Probably won't amount to much." But it did. Within less than half an hour it was blowing all we wanted and then some. "We're going to get out of here," Tom said. We took the net in and got the boards on deck and had the bag alongside. By then it was impossible to stand without holding to something and holding hard. "I'll put her into the wind," Tom said, "And when I bring her up swing the bag on deck, and don't try to dump it now. We'll let it lay."

You wouldn't think a sea could make up that fast. It was short, sharp and very mean and it came at a different angle from the swell, and I was glad I'd been on the *Artemesia* long enough to know her a little. Working at night in a sea like that is no fun. In the daytime you can see a sea coming and brace yourself for it but at night you can't until it's on top of you. It's not so bad either when you can hold on with one hand and work with the other, but sometimes you have to use both hands to work with, and then you hang on with your knees or your elbows to anything that's handy, and hope it's solid.

It was a bad time. Tom had that forty horse Lathrop almost wide open kicking her directly into the teeth of it, and the *Artemesia* was forging ahead, but slowly enough. She rode the seas beautifully, though, not pounding much, nor diving either. But every once in a while she'd stick her nose into a big one and a solid sheet of cold water would come flying aft. Inside of five minutes, in spite of my oilskins, I was soaking wet.

"We wouldn't want any more wind than this," Tom said when I finally

was able to go into the pilot house with him. "I hope Kelly's all right with the *Vega*."

To the west and south of us we could make out an occasional wildly pitching masthead light, but that was all. As soon as that, the fleet had completely scattered, heading for New Bedford or Newport or wherever they figured on taking out the catch, or just for a lee to ride it out. It was impossible at a time like that to look for *Vega* or any other boat. But I could see that Tom was worried about Kelly Chase and his mate. The *Vega* was heavy forward, and had the bad reputation of wanting to bury herself in a sea. They wouldn't be able to open her up and would be lucky if they were holding their own.

There was a bang and crash of crockery under our feet, and I went below to see what I could put stops on. One port had come open and the cabin was as wet as if a hose had been turned on it. Broken cups and dishes were sliding from one side of the cabin to the other as she rolled. Worse, the generator had come loose from its moorings. I got everything as secure as I could, got the port closed, the generator back where it belonged but not running, and lashed down the skylight from the inside. Then I went back to the pilot house and told Tom about the generator.

"I'll get it running," he said. "But it's getting nastier all the time. Think you can take her?" I told him I thought I could. The moon had risen though it was hidden behind the flying scud most of the time, but at least you could see the seas coming a little better, and dawn couldn't be too far away. Presently I could make out Nomans Land, and bleak and desolate as it was, no land ever looked better to me.

Daylight showed us the *Rose Jarvis* of New Bedford maybe a quarter of a mile ahead of us. She was bigger than we were, quite a lot bigger, but she was having a rough time of it. She would rear up on a sea and then smash down, the spray flying as high as her masthead. They had a riding sail rigged to steady her, but it didn't seem to be doing much good for she was writhing and twisting like an eel. Compared to her the *Artemesia* was riding like a lady.

In the lee of Nomans Land we dumped the bag on deck and got the net stowed down, but it was too rough to do much cleaning up. I didn't have the last of the fish on ice and the trash overboard until we were nearly in Woods Hole, and that was just about seven hours from the time we had left the grounds. There were boats ahead of us at Sam's and it was late afternoon before we finally got our fish out and our ice and gas aboard. Just as we were ready to leave the *Vega* came in. They must have had one awful trip. We got a cent and a half a pound for our yellowtails. My share for the trip was sixteen dollars and some cents.

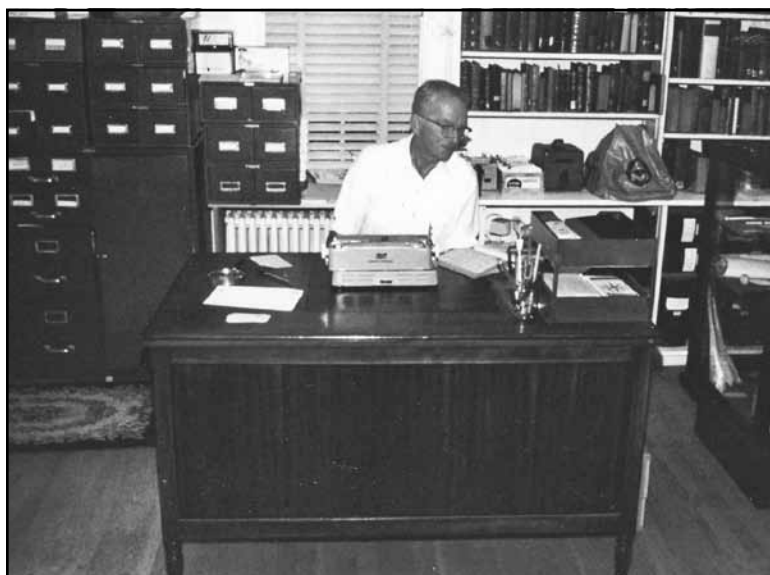
Just about dark we tied up alongside the *Eben Thatcher* at the wharf in

Vineyard Haven and it was still blowing hard. “It doesn’t look like much of a day for tomorrow,” Tom said, “but if this wind does let go we want to get started early. Better set your alarm for three thirty.”



*In the Editorial Notes to the issue in which this personal narrative appeared, Gale Huntington wrote:*

“Dragging – 1934” was found recently with a number of other old manuscripts when the acting editor’s wife (Mildred Tilton Huntington) asked him to please clean out the eaves. It is given here with no changes and it is hoped that the readers of the *Intelligencer* may find it interesting as giving a picture of dragging in a small launch thirty-six years ago, in the days of the great depression. The paper also shows that the results of overfishing were well understood even as long ago as that.



Gale Huntington at work in the Museum library, when a Smith-Corona portable was the height of word-processing technology. Photo from the Museum collection.

ARTHUR R. RAILTON

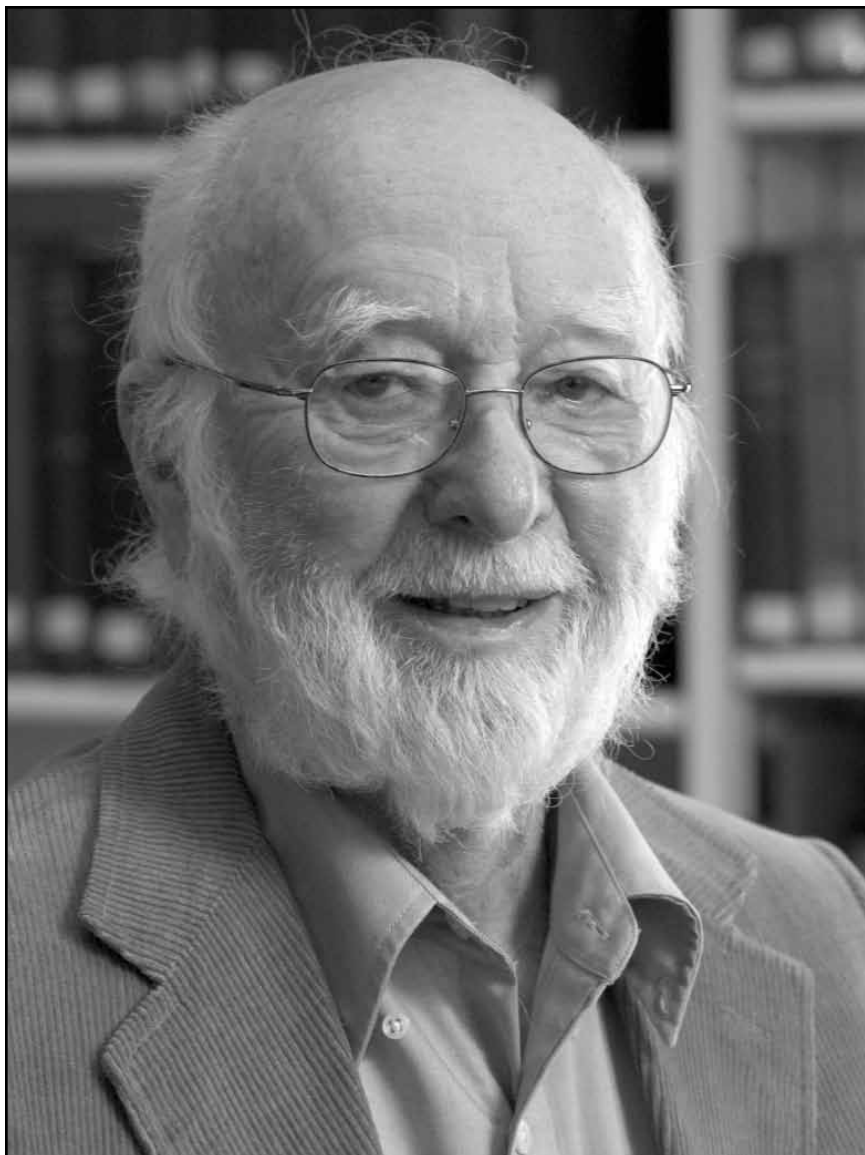


Photo by Mark Alan Lovewell

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# The Hallucinations Of Rev. John Adams

## God's General in a Holy Crusade, The Island His Battlefield

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

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NO PERSON EVER AROUSED the people of Martha's Vineyard with an intensity equaling that of Methodist circuit rider, Rev. John Adams. From Chappaquiddick to Chilmark, Vineyarders were "born again," brought to God by his uninhibited, hell-fire preaching.

Arriving in 1821, he challenged the Island's religious establishment and when he left two years later, it was in splinters. Sent to the Vineyard by the Methodist Conference, Adams saw himself as God's general in a holy crusade and the Island as his battlefield. He held hundreds of meetings, day and night. He was relentless in seeking converts. His energy and faith were boundless. And his labors nearly killed him.

The fervor which had brought such success, in the end, turned many against him, especially in Edgartown. By converting so many of the proper folk, Adams made Methodism less emotional, more sedate, something he was not comfortable with. And Edgartown Methodists became less comfortable with him.

John Adams (1791-1850) was a Methodist circuit rider whose evangelizing became so famous that in later years he became known as "Reformation John." His two tours of duty on the Vineyard covered only three years: from 1821 to 1823 and 1826 to 1827. But those years were the stormiest in the Island's religious history.<sup>1</sup> During those three years, his preaching, singing and praying brought scores of Vineyarders to their knees, crying out for salvation, trembling with emotion.

He converted so many to Methodism that, when he left in 1827, it was the fastest-growing denomination on the Island and the established Congregational church, after nearly 200 years of supremacy, was tottering.

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1 To him, these three years were the most important in his life, occupying 52 pages a year in his autobiography compared with an average of 15 a year for his ministry elsewhere.

His flock was Island-wide, his buggy being a familiar sight along every back road, in every town, as he crisscrossed the Island, expounding the glory of God and of what he called his “experimental religion.”

But during his second tour on the Vineyard, early in 1827, something snapped. He suffered a severe mental breakdown. For several weeks, he was thought to be dangerously deranged. It is that period that will be dealt with here.

He began acting strangely early in February during a revival time in Holmes Hole. On February 12, several men, including Dr. Daniel Fisher of Edgartown, broke into the room where he was sitting and bound his hands and feet, tying him to a bed.

Jeremiah Pease, one of Reverend Adams’s proudest conversions, wrote in his diary the next day, February 13, 1827:

Brother John Adams is bro’t from H.Hole sick & in a deranged state of mind, having labored there beyond his strength.

Some years later, Rev. Hebron Vincent, another early convert, described the breakdown in his characteristic overblown rhetoric:

...by excessive exertions, Mr. Adams about the middle of the year became so impaired in health as to have superinduced a state of mental aberration so that for several months he was wholly unfit for public duties.<sup>2</sup>

But Reverend Adams denied that it was overwork that brought on his illness. In fact, he refused to admit that he was ill. Instead, as in everything, he saw the hand of God in it, believing his delusions, his hallucinating, were God’s way of communicating to him that he was chosen to lead the war against the devil on the Vineyard. Adams blamed those who tried to help him for his physical suffering:

My brethren that took the charge of me were ignorant of my case. They thought, as I had been at Holmes Hole in the reformation, that I had labored too hard, had gone without food and sleep, and had taken a bad cold, becoming sick by imprudence; but this was not the case. It is true I was sick in body, but more through the treatment I received than anything else. God suffered it to come upon me for some wise purpose; and, although the wicked meant it for evil, God meant it for good; therefore I “could kiss the rod and him who appointed it.”<sup>3</sup>

Adams’ first tour of duty on the Vineyard, from 1823 to 1825, had been a glorious success. When he left at the end of those two years, a crowd of grateful Methodists gathered to wave goodbye. He wrote in his journal:

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2 Manuscripts, DCHS [NB: at the time this article was written, the Martha’s Vineyard Museum was the Dukes County Historical Society]

3 *Life and Labors of Reformation John Adams*; E.G. Adams editor, Geo. C. Rand publisher, Boston, 1853, p. 234. All subsequent quotations, unless otherwise identified, are from this autobiography.

... we leave our weeping friends by the sea-side and on the wharves and set sail for New Bedford. I bless God that I ever went to Martha's Vineyard, and think I shall in eternity, and scores with me.<sup>4</sup>

With his leaving, the fanatical, emotional character of Methodism became diluted. Without his leadership, a more sedate form of worship took place. More rational heads prevailed. As Adams later wrote: "At the first commencement of the revival, when Gideon blew the trumpet (Br. Pease, etc.), there was a great gathering; but after a while the fearful and faint-hearted went back."

Some of the more fervent Island Methodists wanted him back. The Rev. E. Hyde, Methodist elder, was sent by the Boston District to determine what should be done. He concluded that Adams should return to rekindle the flame. He informed Adams in October 1825:

I have just arrived from the Vineyard...you must go on...There is no one but you that will meet their views...it is in vain for me to send anybody else.<sup>5</sup>

John Adams was not surprised. To convert the Vineyard to Methodism was the greatest challenge the Lord had ever given him and there was much unfinished work.

Long ago believing God had more work to accomplish through me on this isle of the sea, I thought...God would send me here again; and through many obstructions, the way was opened...

On June 30, 1827, he and his wife arrived "in a powerful rain...much fatigued" to begin his second tour. He doesn't mention it again, but Mrs. Adams was in the eighth month of pregnancy with their first child after eight years of marriage. Adams wrote that they were received with "joy and thanksgiving, though, no doubt, many felt inwardly sorry; and I believe I should have been here before, if Satan had not hindered."

As Elder Hyde had discovered, the reformation had cooled. "Many stay at home from meeting...while God's 'house lies waste,'" Adams reported. He was more certain than ever than God had chosen him to win the Vineyard away from Satan.

But Edgartown had changed in the three years he had been away. Methodists, once called "crazy Methodists," were more proper. Their congregation had grown; they had their own church building. Prominent citizens had joined the church, men like Jeremiah Pease. Two other Island towns had preachers of their own; Adams, the circuit rider travelling the whole Island, was less essential now. The other two preachers, Caleb Lamb in Holmes Hole and Hebron Vincent in West Tisbury, were just beginning their ca-

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4 Adams, p. 164

5 Jeremiah Pease of Edgartown is our diarist.

reers. Neither was vigorous enough for the theatrical Adams. To him, the ministry was a holy war, not just prayer meetings and Sabbath services.

He saw the young men as his assistants. Lamb was the favorite, his “spiritual son,” he called him. Hebron Vincent, a school teacher and part-time preacher, was too reserved. Adams referred to him as Jeremiah’s apprentice.<sup>6</sup>

Those first months on the Island were not easy on Rev. and Mrs. Adams. She soon gave birth, apparently with considerable difficulty, to a boy. Both mother and infant were slow to recover from the birth trauma, requiring “watchers every night, two nurses besides the doctor who has paid us 20 visits.” Adams, too, was having health problems, including an infected tooth and serious physical fatigue.

Through it all, however, he continued circuit riding, being away from home for days as he travelled up-Island where there were no Methodist churches. He held meetings, sometimes as many as three a day, in private homes. On October 24, in Chilmark, there was a near disaster:

In going to a meeting in a dark night, while my horse was passing down a bad hill, I was thrown out of my wagon; but the Lord preserved me from hurt.<sup>7</sup>

In November, he received a letter telling of the death of his mother in New Hampshire. Soon after, he went north for a brief visit with his father, after which he spent nearly a month travelling and preaching in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Shortly after his return to the Island, he began to fantasize, acting strangely in public.

He seemed to be having doubts about his ability to do God’s bidding, to win the holy war against the enemy. In his first tour on the Island, Edgartown had been his greatest triumph, but now he sensed an apathy there. Chilmark, Tisbury and Holmes Hole were much more receptive to his evangelizing. His greatest successes this time were in Holmes Hole and he spent more of his time there. It was there that he was stricken.

He was staying in what he called his “mansion house” in Holmes Hole when his behavior turned peculiar. He became withdrawn, walking the streets and along the beach by himself, ignoring greetings from friends. He would enter houses, even those of strangers, uninvited, walking through them without recognizing anyone. Sometimes he would stand silently in an empty room for long periods. He walked into shops, speaking to no one, even those he knew. Word spread through the village that he was ill, that he needed help.

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6 Vincent had, in fact, been indentured to Jeremiah as his apprentice for a number of years. Jeremiah was a journeyman cordwainer in those early days.

7 Adams says he was not hurt, but perhaps this accident was a factor in his later hallucinating.



One day, after a walk along the beach in the harbor, he went to the house of Widow West, an early Methodist convert, for a class-meeting:

I was bowed down, while the people were coming to meeting. The place grew darker and darker to me, and great darkness come over my mind. It seemed that I had no power to arise...and how I was to be delivered I knew not...about thirty were assembled for a praying and singing...I soon began our class-meeting...[but] my brethren... had cast me spiritually into the dungeon...I slipped out from among them and went [to my room].

He spent a sleepless night during which,

before day-break I thought a shock of darkness came over me, like the sun in total eclipse...I...realized that Jeremiah, of Edgartown, was like Shadrach; and Asa, in the hill country, Meshach; and Thomas, in Goshen, was Abednego...In the morning we offered incense on the family altar, and fire came down and consumed the sacrifice... We then parted.<sup>8</sup>

He spent the day in “the house where the ark of the covenant rested, and ‘an Ethiopian made me a fire in the king’s council-room.” That evening there was another class-meeting which he attended. Again, he saw the event as a Biblical drama:

...the prodigal son stood in meeting in the light of Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, and Arcturus in the place of Cush. Ahimaaz began meeting, but he had not the king’s tidings; as soon as he left off speaking, Cush brought the true tidings, and the soldiers and officers in the king’s army took courage, and, drawing the bow at a venture, a sea captain from Nantucket, like an Ahab, was wounded...That night I withdrew, and walked by the sea-shore. Before we came around the family altar to offer our sacrifices, I ate an apple, and it distressed my stomach and clouded my mind. I found it forbidden fruit...I then passed on to a mystical inn; but the master, W.D., was gone. There was no room for me there, so I turned aside and went to Sister Jane’s, a mother in Israel.

The next morning, he “gave Jeremiah some instructions in the stable...I also had some conversation with Abigail and Naomi, Sisters Robinson and Beecher.”<sup>9</sup>

Again that evening he went to class-meeting, but was not inspired. “I thought that some would put me in a dungeon, as the princes did Jeremiah...In family prayer, I was much shut up....the burden of the Lord was on me and I realized that this island was typical of Patmos and that John

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8 It seems possible that Jeremiah was with him in the morning. His diary shows him at Holmes Hole. The hill country is Chilmark; Goshen is unclear, perhaps Holmes Hole.

9 Naomi Beecher, cousin of Rev. Lyman Beecher, was one of the earliest Island Methodists. Abigail Robinson probably was Abigail Robertson, who later married Isaac Daggett, son of William Daggett, an ardent Holmes Hole Methodist.



Rev. John Adams, in an undated portrait.

answered to the Revelator and my son in the gospel's name to Caleb, Joshua's companion...<sup>10</sup>

The next day about thirty person assembled for a class-meeting and "they drew up Jeremiah and took him out of the dungeon." Again, when Adams tried to take over the meeting, the group, he wrote, didn't like it:

...my brethren, like the old Jews, had cast me spiritually into the dungeon...before I left them, I cautioned them not to fall out by the way; but they forgot it and went to disputing, while I slipped out from among them and went home.

This was followed by another sleepless night.

I lay a while, and arose again, calling up my colored servant to make a fire. After some compulsion, she

bowed down to be prayed for...In the morning, the Lord taught me a new song, one that I never knew before...[and] three little angels appeared to me, and played around me, clapping their glad wings. Such glory I never knew before. That morning my mind appeared in the chariot of Jesus, King of the Jews, passing through the streets of Jerusalem.

Monday, he remained in his room all morning, asking God to instruct him. He ate hard bread, cheese, drank some tea with milk in it, and spent his time writing.

...my health of body...was very good, and my mind was very clear. In the afternoon I went into the postmaster's house and was invited to take supper, but chose not to...I passed on in silence and came to Jane Godfrey's house. I went in and sat down ...While I was at Jane's there were several came in and went out; but I said nothing to any one...I was urged very hard to drink some coffee and eat some victuals; but I made no reply. I warmed my feet, and going to the back room for prayer, the sable shades of night came on.

He sat there alone in the back room praying and when it became dark, a "mob of wicked men" surrounded the small house, which had only two rooms. He tried to escape, but the front room was "partly filled with men."

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10 Patmos is an island in the Aegean Sea where St. John the Divine wrote the Revelation. Caleb is Rev. Caleb Lamb, the Holmes Hole minister.

They took me and brought me into the front room. Before they could bind me I knocked off Doctor D. Fishers's cap<sup>11</sup>...I knocked off the hats of several...it appeared that all the powers of hell and darkness were let loose upon me...they bound me, and shed my blood from my right arm....I was bound to the bed and had watchers that night,—Anthony Joseph, and one more. The next day I was brought to Edgartown by the way of Willis' Plains,—hauled, feet foremost, about nine or ten miles, which was calculated to cause the blood to flow into my head...Captain Crosby, E. Crowell and John R. Norton, brought me to Edgartown, bound hands and feet with strong ropes. I was brought into the house of Thomas M. Coffin all one as dead. He begged my body, as Joseph, a rich man of Arimathaea, did the body of Christ. Tuesday afternoon was like the "lion of the tribe of Judah;" I did rend, tear and devour.<sup>12</sup>

He was placed in bed, bound firmly to the bedstead while two men guarded him twenty-four hours a day, in shifts. The watchers were among the best-known men in town: Daniel Norton, Isaiah D. Pease, Jeremiah Banning, Uriah Morse, Frank Whimpenny, Henry Cleaveland, John Coffin, Zacheus Norton and others. Jeremiah Pease was not among them.

There was a stream of visitors on that first day. "The more company I had the worse I felt." The doctor tried to get him to take some medicine but

I did not believe in Doctor Fisher's medicine; for, while I was fishing for souls, he was fishing for money. I believe God suffered the devil to afflict me in wicked men, as Job of old was afflicted. They offered me medicine that I had no faith in...they tried to deceive me. They thought I was crazy.

His wife and Thomas M. Coffin, in whose house he was confined, had just about given him up as dying. His pulse could hardly be perceived.

I had the rattles in my throat and my countenance was deadly pale. But...I knew all they said and did in my presence and could hear and understand all that was said and done in the other chamber. Previous to this, some had pulled my hair...smote me with the palms of their hands...I, moreover, was struck or smitten with the fist of a man in my nose and mouth till they bled.

But by Sunday, February 18, he seemed to have improved enough to be made to sweat out the poisons.

Then my watchers and wife, with others, concluded to put me into a hot bath. They did not temper the bath right, and so burnt me...In the afternoon they permitted me to take off [shave] my beard.

On Tuesday, it was decided to try once again to sweat him in a hot bath, but this time the water was too cool and he was taken out and returned to

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11 This was Dr. Daniel Fisher of Edgartown, later to become wealthy in the whaling business.

12 The Coffin house, now demolished, was on Winter Street.

bed, again bound hands and feet to the frame.

More than a week had gone by since he had been carried to Edgartown and, strangely, Jeremiah Pease, his Shadrach, had not stopped in to visit him once. It must have bothered Adams. He wrote on Wednesday,

Br. J.P. [Jeremiah Pease] watched with me by way of proxy; that is, he hired James Wheelden to take his place. That night I had Captain Crocker and Holmes Smith to watch with me. Captain C. concluded that I 'need' not think to get away from him, for he was a very strong man, and there were none in town could throw him...What seemed the most mysterious to them...was that, oft times, they found my hands and feet loosed in bed, after they had tied me fast...and placed the knots where I could not reach them. But the prayer of faith prevailed...it was God that loosed me.

My brethren that took the charge of me were ignorant of my case. They thought...that I had labored too hard, had gone without food and sleep, and had taken a bad cold, becoming sick by imprudence; but this was not the case....I was sick in body, but more through the treatment I received than anything else. God suffered it to come upon me for some wise purpose...

Thursday, his "quack doctors," as he called them, once again put him in a hot bath. This time it worked. He sweat freely and drank cold water in abundance. One of the two men who watched him that night, Aaron Gray, "had become somewhat *gray* and rusty in His Majesty's service because he had not frequently anointed his shield or exercised that faith that works by love." Adams wrote that he was willing to overlook that because he "had come to take the charge of a man that was in some degree insane, according to the philosophy of logic of old Mr. Leviticus, or, in other words, the Rev. J., a Thaxterian. Therefore, I proceeded to read Scripture and pray with them."<sup>13</sup>

Even when bound to the bedstead, there was no way to keep John Adams from trying to lead those who had gone astray to his God.

Friday, he managed secretly to loosen the straps around his body and sit up in bed. He took the lower part of the window shade as a staff and, leaning on it, was able to look out the window. This attracted his guard's attention and he was put back into full restraint. But that night,

Blessed be God!...the Lord sent his angel, J.P., ...I had been bound all day, like Peter between two soldiers, and he kindly loosed me. I believe I was like Mordecai, the Jew; for the king in the place, spiritually speaking, delighted to honor me by letting me sit up, clothed in 'royal apparel,' which I used to wear before I was bound.

Finally, J.P. Jeremiah Pease, his proudest convert, had come to see him and, it is obvious, that John Adams was pleased.

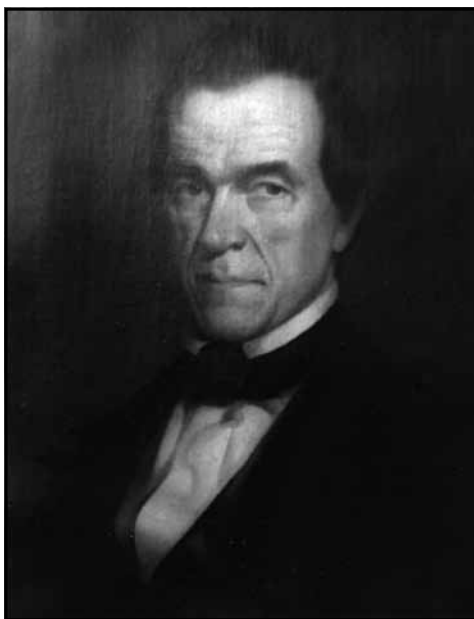
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13 He was referring, of course, to Rev. Joseph Thaxter, long-time pastor of the Congregational Church. Thaxter was ailing at the time. He died five months later, age 84.

Adams urged Jeremiah to take his place on the Sabbath and lead the Edgartown Methodist meeting. But Jeremiah chose to sit with Adams while his former apprentice, Hebron Vincent, preached. That, said Adams, “was good enough for the unbelieving Jews in this place.”<sup>14</sup>

For another week, the patient was kept in bed, most of the time bound hands and feet. Jeremiah, after his Sunday visit, remained absent. Reverend Adams had many visitors, almost all of them women, some of whom acted frightened in the presence of the sick preacher.

During that week, Caleb Lamb, the Holmes Hole minister, Adam’s “son in the gospel,” stopped in to see him:



Jeremiah Pease, Rev. Adams’ proudest convert.

It seems that he had come to himself...and said, “I will arise and go to my father,” so he mounted his steed and travelled towards the east, not knowing what reception he would meet with from his father, J.A. [John Adams]. When he knocked at my door, it was with trembling; but I arose, and had compassion on him; and, although I treated him with some neglect at first, it was only to bring his past sins to his mind...the pilot’s wife wanted to row him away, but did not succeed. Then Nancy, the Merchant’s wife, came and looked sly, and delivered a pie, and went in haste; but another Merchant came and knocked at the door...but, being reminded of *Gal.2:4,5*, he gained no admission into my mansion.<sup>15</sup>

After Caleb Lamb left, he had two other visitors, both of whom prayed for him, but Adams felt that the prayer of one, Jeremiah Banning, was “like a sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.” Then,

...a man knocked at the door and I said, “Who comes there?” The reply was, “A friend.” I said I doubted and opened the door and, behold, it was Br. Morse, who lived at the sea-side. Once he loved Jesus and John, but now he was a Jonah, and consulted with J.P.’s pupil, \*\*\*, who lied to him about me; and they two together said my watchers gave me too much liberty and that I ought to be bound faster. It was

14 To Adams, all non-Methodists and, as in this case, lukewarm Methodists, were “Jews.” Hebron Vincent was acting as Methodist minister in Edgartown, but Adams was not impressed by his preaching.

15 The Biblical reference describes “false brethren secretly brought in...to spy out our freedom...to them we did not yield submission even for a moment...”

with fear and trembling that he entered...He inquired for Br. Lamb, and hastened out of the room.<sup>16</sup>

After being absent more than a week, on Tuesday, March 5, Jeremiah returned, this time discreetly:

This day I had one visitor; he came up the back way and returned the same way he came. We had a pleasant interview together; we talked, read, sung, and prayed, and my Sarai told Br. J.P. that she could say as an individual she had been deceived about her husband's case.

The following afternoon, Adams was allowed to go out of the house, after being "somewhat worried in my sleep" the night before. He walked to Jeremiah Pease's house where he "talked and prayed...and came home refreshed." In the evening,

I was directed to read in *Ezekiel*; and when I read the third chapter, 24, 25, and 26 verses, I found it to be just what I had passed through at Holmes Hole; and yet I had not realized this scripture before. This was very convincing to [my wife] Sarah.

What he had read in *Ezekiel* did seem relevant to the events of the previous month:

But the Spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet; and he spoke with me and said to me, "Go, shut yourself within your house. And you, O son of man, behold, cords will be placed upon you and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people; and I will make your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be dumb and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house."<sup>17</sup>

On March 8, the next day, Adams suddenly announced that he would go up-Island where, it is clear, he felt more needed than in Edgartown.

When Jeremiah Pease heard of the plan, he came over and tried to persuade him to wait another day, as did Thomas Coffin, in whose house he was staying. Reverend Adams remained firm:

...I considered the Lord had the greatest claim on me; so I repaired my carriage, and set my house in order, and, taking my wife and child, we girded up our loins and this scripture followed my spouse, *Isaiah* 55:12, "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

They went to Holmes Hole where they "were received kindly at my old mansion-house, T.W.'s and many expressed joy at my return. I call at Br.

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<sup>16</sup> J.P.'s pupil was Hebron Vincent, Jeremiah Pease's apprentice.

<sup>17</sup> *Ezekiel* 3:24-6. Caleb Lamb had asked Adams why he had not shouted out when "the wicked laid hands" on him at Holmes Hole. Now, he knew why: the Lord had cleaved his tongue to the roof of his mouth.

C.'s; but his wife was somewhat afraid." The following day, Friday, March 9, he walked around the village stopping in various shops and houses, translating each encounter into Biblical events. At one place, a peddler was selling trinkets:

I availed myself of an opportunity "to counsel him to buy of me gold tried in the fire" but he seemed so earnest for dollars that he appeared quite unwilling to hear about crowns. His carnal mind arose and the viper hissed and, crooking his tail, slipped off. As his name was Burnham, I gave them a caution not to get *burnt* by him.

In the afternoon, after a prayer session with several of "the daughters of Zion," he resumed his trip up-Island.

I then took horse and carriage, and taking Sarai and son, made my way towards the plains of Moab. As we passed on by the meeting-house, it appeared like a whited sepulcher, full of dead men's bones and uncleanness, — the bone of Fatalism and sinful pollution.<sup>18</sup>

They spent the night at Harrison Paine Mayhew's in Chilmark<sup>19</sup> where Rev. Caleb Lamb, his spiritual son, and several others assembled for a prayer meeting. The following morning, Adams was given the latest news by Lamb:

I learn by Brother L—b that Elihu<sup>20</sup>, the physician in church affairs for the Isle of Patmos, has written to the high priest on Boston District to send them a [Preacher], and that Br. [Horton] from the Isle of Crete, or [Nantucket], is expected. I say Amen to that.

He spent several days in Chilmark, seeing every meeting in ancient Biblical terms:

The ship that was chartered from Joppa to Edgartown, and from thence to Holmes Hole,—or, in other words, from Asia to Macedonia,—fell in with pirates; but the commander would not give up the helm, and the conflict was so sharp that they mustered all their forces and in the contest bound him with cords and shed his blood....

The ship's commander, John Adams, was determined not to give up the helm. He continued to get his instructions:

March 20<sup>th</sup>.—The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, "Write as I shall direct, beginning back at the house of Br. S.L. [Seth Luce] at North Shore." Here I received some favors. I now purposed to visit

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18 This was the Proprietors' Meeting House on Main Street, used by various denominations since 1788. The Methodists built their own church in 1833. See *Sketches of Old Homes in Our Village*, Mrs. Howes Norris, 1921.

19 Harrison Mayhew later moved to Edgartown and lived in the handsome colonial house at School and Cooke Streets (now the Shinn house).

20 While Adams was confined, he wrote, "the Lord said I must go to [Nantucket] Island; and so I expect to go." Horton's transfer must have reinforced this expectation.

Br. \*\*\* (Sennacherib, King of Assyria)...I informed him that I had a claim on him and that he was my property...For a while the spirit of unbelief raged in him; but through faith, God's Spirit and word, it was checked. I then requested all to leave the room but him and me; and with them the Egyptians were put out and the spiritual father was revealed to the son and he became like a lamb, bowing on his knees and committing himself to God. When he was conquered by love, we departed in peace,—that is I, my wife and child; and he piloted us through several pairs of bars.

The family returned to Holmes Hole where, after two days of prayer meetings, a messenger informed him that he “was desired to meet Br. D.D., the high-priest on B.D., who had just come from N.B. to the island.”<sup>21</sup>

Two days later, the meeting with Br. D.D. took place in Edgartown. Jeremiah Pease was the go-between. The meeting was held in John Adams's house. After an opening prayer,

Young Elihu strove to rend the kingdom like an Absalom out of his father David's hands; but, not moving in God's order, the oxen shook the ark, and I withdrew a while by request. In the upper apartment I committed my case to God; and then returning, we finished our business about temporal and spiritual things and concluded.<sup>22</sup>

The group still had not resolved the problem of getting, John Adams to leave Edgartown. From the meeting, they went to hear Brother Dorchester preach, the matter of Adams leaving still on everybody's mind. After preaching, Dorchester said, “Brethren, you know your privilege.” Several others spoke after the sermon, including Adams:

And then “Me” spoke. And while “me” was speaking, Br. D. [Dorchester] kicked me “easy” to stop; but “me” kept on moderately, remembering *Phil.* 4:5. Then D. pulled my boat; but “me” spoke a little longer; then he closed by prayer, and went off, and left “me,” but “me” prayed, and came home, grieved on account of their unbelief and hardness of heart.<sup>23</sup>

That was on Monday. Tuesday afternoon, Rev. J. Horton arrived from Nantucket and came to the Adams's house, along with Daniel Dorchester, the presiding elder. They had come to take over in Edgartown:

The presiding elder conversed with me on the subject and I told him there [would] be no difficulty betwixt Br. J.H. [Horton] and me on the subject of temporal support. Br. D.D. wanted me to relinquish my charge in this place to J.H. and said if I did not they should scold

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21 Br. D.D. was Dr. Daniel Dorchester of the Boston District, who had been sent, via New Bedford (N.B.) to persuade Adams to leave Edgartown.

22 He gives no clues to identify Elihu, “the physician in church affairs for the Isle of Patmos.” It may have been Jeremiah Pease.

23 It was a custom for Methodist preachers to allow the congregation the “privilege” of speaking after the sermon. Hence, Dorchester's invitation.



at me; but to this I gave no consent. Br. H., I was informed, said he was willing that Br. A [Adams] should have the charge.

With the Reverend Jotham Horton now the minister in Edgartown, John Adams spend the rest of the year on the up-Island circuit. His family continued to live in Edgartown, but he rarely preached there. He still translated the events of each day into Biblical terms. He had been told by God that he had been sent to this Island to win the war for God and his war plans continued. He recruited his soldiers in Chilmark with Rev. Caleb Lamb serving as his lieutenant.

There I found several officers in the king's army...Then came in some of the under officers to take counsel, so that they might know how to prepare for battle. I now see how the battle is coming in a triangular form...in the order of Bonaparte's army...Gideon's army was divided into three parties...so we must have three in the Hill country,—one east, one west, and one north...and the plains of Moab will be taken<sup>24</sup> and the work will spread on the south part of the Island. S. Smith's family at P. [Pohogonet] will not be excepted; and then the army at Edgartown will be in the same order, pointing to C. [Chappaquiddick], the little isle, one way, to the plains the other, and to the east side the other....By this time the troops in the north will be mustered, and pour their forces into Holmes Hole and upon the Neck, on as far as Tarpaulin Cove. Falmouth will feel the flame, and, when the camp-meeting comes, God's forces will muster from all quarters and Infidelity will feel an awful shock...I see "through the fall of the Jews"(my brethren at E.) "salvation is come to the Gentiles in this place to provide them to jealousy"...Thanks be to God, who gave us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

The following day was the Sabbath. He preached at Sister P.T.'s, his "mansion-house on the frontiers of Canaan." In the afternoon, there was another meeting,

...and many were pricked in their hearts and hundreds on this island alarmed by the mighty power of God...from this island of the sea God will revolutionize the world and...many will be raised up here to preach the gospel.

On Monday morning he "held a private council with a number of the officers in the king's army and we are preparing for the battle of the great God..."

Tuesday, Jeremiah Pease took Reverend Horton to meet with Adams on "the plains of Moab...We took counsel together and parted in a triangular form; he to the north, Br. Lamb to the west, and I to the south-east." That night at Br. Joseph Mayhew's, Miss Maria Norton "experienced religion" at Horton's meeting and spent the night at Jeremiah's house.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The plains of Moab is the area south of Lambert's Cove.

<sup>25</sup> *Pease Diary*, April 27, 1827

Later that week, after virtually continuous meetings up-Island, Adams returned to Holmes Hole, “like Jesus riding into Jerusalem in triumph. At the meeting that night the children sung Hosanna to the King of David... and sinners cried for mercy.”

The following week he

...went to the Cove of Nashuan Island and preached at the tavern house...that island will yet serve as a gunboat to the ship Vineyard.

From there he sailed to Falmouth and the next day returned to Holmes Hole:

I crossed the Sound in the mail-boat, with one more passenger. O God, have mercy on him!<sup>26</sup>

After a few days up-Island, he returned to Edgartown and

...called the friends and neighbors together for a meeting...sinners were awakened and come on their knees to pray for mercy...the next night our meeting was crowded...Br. J.H. [Horton] began the meeting...at length God rolled the power upon my soul and I prophesied...that the city would be given into the hands of the King of Babylon's army and should be destroyed by sword, famine and pestilence; and that if our brethren would save their souls alive, they must scatter and hunt up the lost sheep, and that while they staid here they were like Jewish doctors nursing up a dead carcass...The message was from God; so I let it rest...I felt great peace in God.

Again the following week he left the Island, this time going to Nantucket, as he had been instructed to do by God:

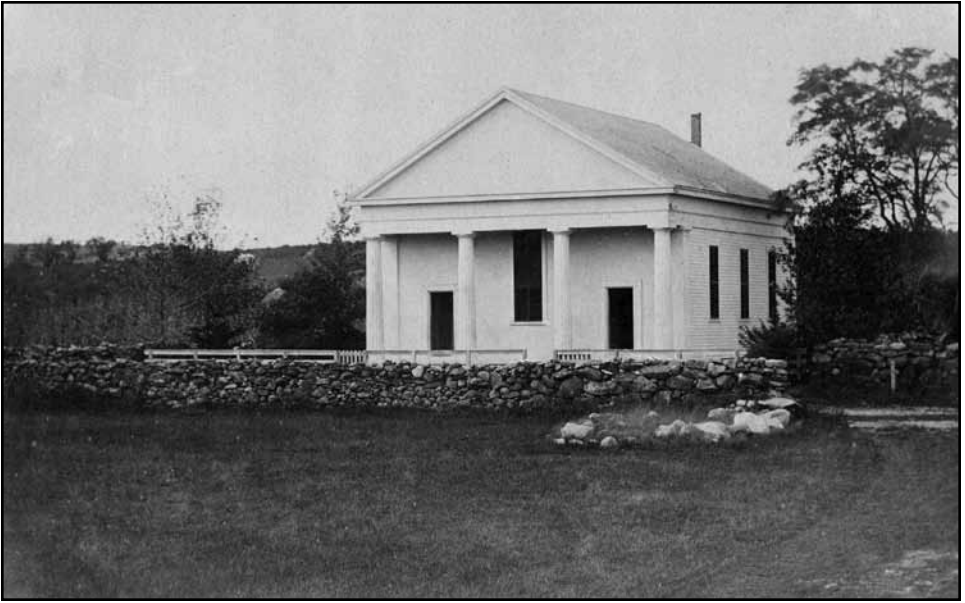
I have been suspected of being a crazy runaway from the Vineyard by some, and others are in doubts about me, arising from their own imaginations; but this is working for my good. Lord, pity those unbelieving Jews!...Some said if I was crazy they should like to have my head-piece.

After five days of meetings on Nantucket, he returned to Edgartown in time for an evening meeting. The next morning he went up-Island. He was away from Edgartown for nearly two weeks, returning for only one night before heading back to Holmes Hole. He was still organizing his war, spending each night in a different house, holding meetings twice a day. The religious fervor was building.

It seemed somewhat like old times. A number...who had professed the blessing of sanctification were remarkably happy...I left the place, not knowing which way the Lord would direct us. After much fatigue of body and mind, and missing our way, we arrived at North Shore, where we had a powerful time...Here the reformation is spreading powerfully; and, thank the Lord, it is spreading on different parts of the island!...My soul was happy...The melting power of God was displayed, sinners were wounded and saints shouted aloud for joy.

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26 It was not relaxing to be the only other passenger on a boat with John Adams.



The Chilmark Methodist Church, in an early photo from the Museum collection.

For two weeks this revival continued with Adams moving from house to house, preaching and exhorting, day and night. The Methodists were making converts everywhere. Adams was convinced that the war would be won:

There is a greater union in the Methodist church than I ever knew before. On the subject of my affliction I am more and more confirmed that I was right in my views and that those who took the charge of me were mistaken in regard to the origin of my affliction. I believe a proper explanation of *Daniel* 8:27 is applicable to my case: "I fainted and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it."

But the devil persisted. Sunday, the 27<sup>th</sup>, he was in Tisbury (West Tisbury):

...it was a time of trial...I found the enemy at work. The wicked carried off my horse; so we set out for meeting on foot...I preached and wept...Monday, I redeemed my horse...I rode some miles; my horse fell and threw me over his head, but I was preserved.

Indeed, he was preserved, full of energy as always. Despite disappointment in Edgartown, he covered the rest of the Island, holding meetings and converting sinners. He began a subscription to raise funds for a larger meeting house in Chilmark. In three days he raised "almost four hundred dollars." Encouraged by his success, on June 20, 1827, the Chilmark Methodists voted to sell their old meeting house and build a new one.

The Methodist Conference that month recalled him from the Island, assigning William Barstow as his replacement. But Adams was not ready to pack his things. There was too much still to be done. He sailed to Tarpaulin Cove for “preaching, praying and exhortation.” Returning, he met with the Edgartown Methodists and signed an agreement to buy their meeting house and have it moved to Chilmark. He helped the new preacher, Reverend Barstow, find a place to live. He sold more subscriptions for the purchase of the Edgartown meeting house. He was as busy as ever.

But there was one dream left unrealized: to call together a camp meeting at which “God’s forces will muster” for the final battle he had so many times predicted and had organized his troops to fight. It was a battle that, he had said, would spread “the flames” as far as Falmouth.

He selected a camp-meeting site on the west side of Holmes Hole harbor, paid the owner \$25 for the rent of the land. He purchased lumber and hired carpenters to build a preachers’ stand. He was making final preparations for the battle.

Then, on August 1, 1827, the Vineyard’s first camp meeting opened on West Chop. It was eight years before the start of the campground at Oak Bluffs. It was a personal triumph for John Adams:

August 1<sup>st</sup>, our camp-meeting commenced, and more than twenty preachers were present and not far from thirty tents were on the ground. The people came from different islands, and many from the Cape, New Bedford and Boston. All parts of the Vineyard were represented. There was but little disturbance. Good order was generally observed.

In the first part of the meeting but few were converted, but the meeting grew more powerful and interesting and it was hoped more than forty experienced religion, while many back-sliders were reclaimed, old professors quickened, young converts strengthened, and imperfect believers sanctified to God. Our meeting continued a week and we had a solemn parting...I exhorted a few times, preached once with freedom and prayed often. The care of the meeting...devolved considerably on me.

Attending the meeting on Sunday was a large contingent of Edgartown Methodists, including Jeremiah Pease, who wrote in his journal, August 1, 1827:

Set out this day for Camp Meeting in the Sloop *Chancellor*, Capt. Geo Osborn, who with his other Owner Mr. Wm. Cooke very politely & generously offer to carry our Minister, Revd. Jotham Horton, all our Brethren & Sisters of the Methodist Society & those who wish to accompany us to the meeting free of expence. The Sloop lying at the end of Coffin & Osborn’s Wharf, all the passengers being on board, about 90 in number, Brother Horton delivers an address then commends the company to God by Prayer. We then set sail with a pleasant breeze from the S.W., arrive at the West Chop in about an hour

& twenty minutes. Meeting commences this day...There were about 40 very large Tents erected & on Sunday there was tho't to be about 4000 people present.

Jeremiah listed the names of the preachers taking part. There were 19 of them. He made no special comment about the role John Adams had played in this, the Island's first camp meeting.

One week after the camp meeting ended, the Rev. John Adams, returned from Holmes Hole to Edgartown, the details of closing the meeting finished. He got ready to leave the Island. The holy war would have to wait:

Taking my leave, I came to Holmes Hole, with a bill of sale of Edgartown meeting-house for Chilmark subscribers. I brought my concerns to a close and we crossed the Vineyard Sound for Falmouth.

Adams left virtually unnoticed. There was no crowd at the dock waving him off this time. Jeremiah Pease did not mention the departure in his diary.

Four years earlier, in 1822, a few months after Jeremiah Pease had been converted to Methodism by Reverend Adams, the preacher had left the Island for another post. The day he left, Jeremiah wrote:

Brother John Adams the late Methodist Preacher leaves Edgt. For Conference, having Laboured 2 years on this Is'd and I think has been an Instrument in the hand of Almighty God of awakening a vast number of the Inhabitants of this Isle to a sence of their situation in the Sight of the Creator; may God reward him for his labour of love.

Now, in 1829, only four years later, Jeremiah makes no mention of his departure. Something had changed. And it wasn't just the hallucinating Reverend Adams; Jeremiah and Edgartown had changed as well.



*For some time around the publication of this article, Art Railton had been transcribing the diary of Jeremiah Pease, and much of it appeared in the same issue as this detailed examination of the life and hallucinations of John Adams. In the November 1980 issue, Art wrote a more extensive article on Pease, calling him a "...reasonable, sensible person."*

JOHN W. WALTER

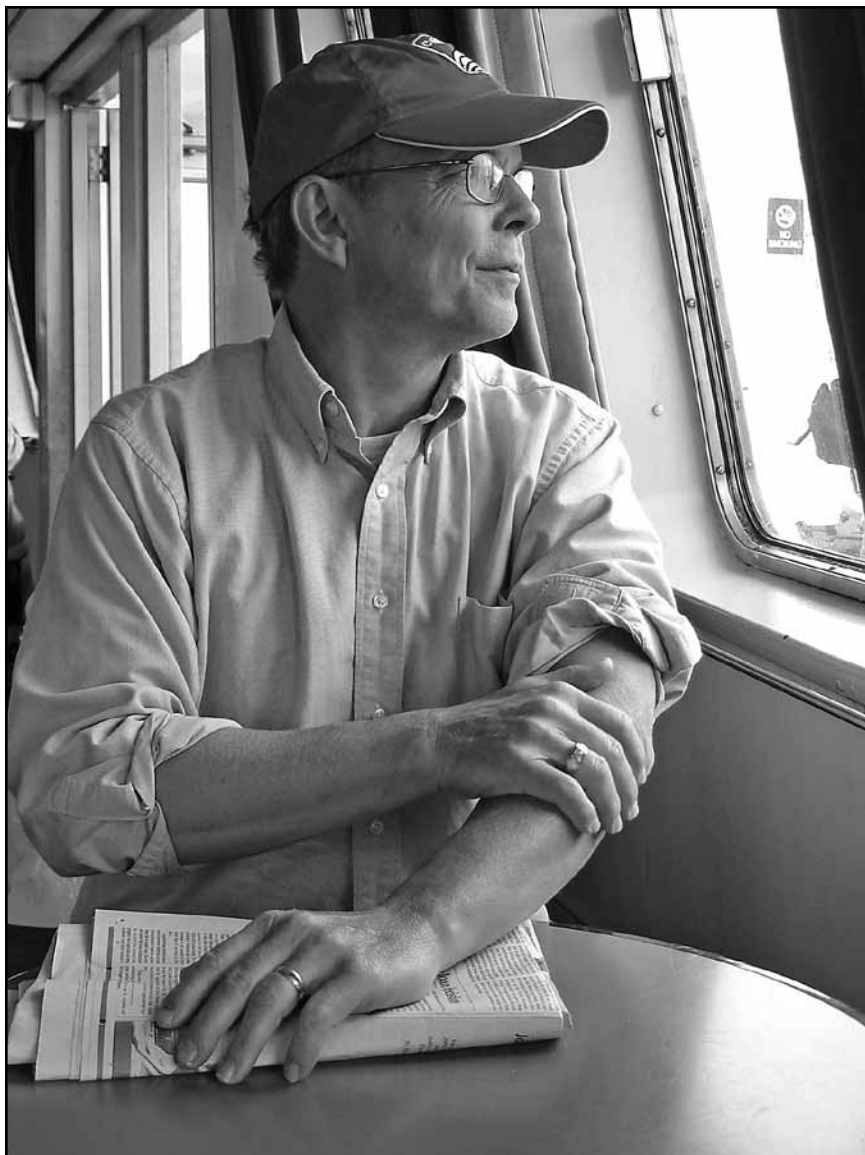


Photo by Nis Kildegaard



# That Summer of 1908

## Consider a Bygone Year

Circuit Avenue Is Mobbed, A Star Visits,  
Noise, Traffic & Development Are Issues

by JOHN WALTER

VOL. 50 No. 1, AUGUST 2008

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**I**N THOSE DAYS, coming up from New York, you caught the steamers of the Fall River Line, departing Pier 28, North River, daily at 5:30 p.m. It was an elegant and stimulating overnight trip. The steamers were highly designed, their fine interiors including deep-carpeted staterooms. In the corridors and the grand salons, the richest men in America, on their way to Newport, rubbed shoulders with the merely well-to-do and the middle class, bound for Boston or the Cape or the Islands.

“Floating palaces,” the historian Roger Williams McAdam called these steamers, and songs were written about the fabled Fall River Line.

That summer, the New Haven Railroad, operator of the line, brought forth the newest and largest of its inclined engine fleet: The new flagship

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In addition to sources individually cited, supporting material for this article may be found in the tourism collection of the Martha's Vineyard Museum library, and in files of the *Martha's Vineyard Herald* and the *Vineyard Gazette*.

was *Commonwealth*, 456 feet long; draft, 22 feet.

She was meant to impress: Her interiors combined seven architectural styles — a cacophonous display including a Louis XVI library trimmed in ivory and gold; a Louis XV saloon with a paneled ceiling, creamy white walls, green carpets and upholstery; an Italian Renaissance café.

You could, if you chose, be seated in her topside dining room — 50 feet above the water, with broad windows. As *Commonwealth* eased out of the East River, the skyline of New York and the waterfront of Manhattan fell behind; as dark descended she moved at a stately 17 knots up the sheltered waters of Long Island Sound, out over the open ocean and into Narragansett Bay, past lighted towns and winking lightships.

She stopped at Newport and then, in the early morning, at Fall River, where you transferred to the express train for the New Bedford pier and caught the 8:10 steamer of the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket Steamboat Company. Your luggage had been booked through, all the way from New York, and was waiting for you on arrival at Oak Bluffs, just after 10 a.m.

And so your vacation began.<sup>1</sup>

### **Everything's Up to Date on 'the Circuit'**

That summer, the Island was upbeat.

The winter population of the Vineyard was then 4,000; on summer days, it was said to swell to 20,000, though perhaps those totals, just as in the estimates of seasonal crowds today, were one part fact, one part pick-a-number. Nevertheless, the draw was undeniable. "There is no watering place on the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Newport News combining so many advantages," said E.A. Jones, treasurer of the Boston Suburban Book Company, writing of Oak Bluffs in particular and the Vineyard in general.<sup>2</sup>

"We're in full swing; everything going," the weekly *Martha's Vineyard Herald* said on July 2, reaching out to potential visitors. "Trolley cars, skating rink, dance hall, moving pictures, flying horses, fishing, boating, automobiling, bicycling, driving, etc. Everybody come down and have a good time during the season when it's too warm to stay in the city."

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1 *Commonwealth* was, it turned out, last of the Fall River Line steamers. She and three other surviving ships were sold for scrap after the company collapsed in 1937, its business worn down by the expansion of Northeast train service, the building of the Cape Cod Canal, the impact of the Depression, and, of course, growth of the automobile.

2 His company had published, the previous summer, its first *Martha's Vineyard Directory, Containing Lists of Residents, Street Directory, Business Houses, Town Officers, Churches, Societies, Schools, Etc., of Oak Bluffs, Edgartown, North and West Tisbury, Vineyard Haven, Chilmark, Gay Head etc.*, today an invaluable resource to the period.





The Tivoli (its two square towers visible behind the Flying Horses), the carousel and the Civil War statue are prominent in this view of Monument Square in Oak Bluffs, looking toward the wharf. The statue is at its original location; by 1930, it will be moved as a traffic hazard.

Oak Bluffs was a town in a hurry. The name itself was new then — just a year old, and only now Dr. Edward Worth was getting around to changing the sign on his “Cottage City Drug Store” to “Oak Bluffs Drug Store.” Three other institutions — the Cottage City Water Co., the Cottage City Ring Company, the Cottage City House — hadn’t caught up yet. Neither had the roadside directional signs outside of town.

Landing at the wharf — and ignoring an unsightly, mounting rubbish heap accumulating along the bluff edge 200 yards to the south<sup>3</sup> — a visitor was quickly swept into the happy spirit of the place. Circuit Avenue’s unique architecture beckoned invitingly — “a succession of verandas and double verandas, supported by slender pillars, edged with ornamental railings, facing the street with all the imaginative fancy and graciousness that wood, as a material, and the tireless ingenuity of the builders could supply. Towers, gables, single and in pairs,

3 The *New Bedford Standard* of August 6 upbraided town fathers on the matter: “Tin cans, old books and papers, bottles, boxes, kegs, ashes, shavings, in fact a little of everything that has been thrown away ... is all left to fly whenever a breeze may lift it,” the newspaper said, illustrating the story with a photograph of just that, in an area within sight of the bandstand at Ocean Park. As the newspaper pointed out, the landing was already unsightly: For some reason, the abandoned trestle of the now-defunct Martha’s Vineyard Railroad, running along the beachfront, had been allowed to rot in place for years.

flagstaffs, ornamentation in unflagging detail, abound.”<sup>4</sup>

The visitor hurried past a row of American flags snapping in front of the distinctive twin towers of the Tivoli (in its second season, it was being used as a skating rink this year), the Flying Horses, a bowling alley and Dreamland, a two-story stone-faced structure that offered dancing and movies. He turned toward Circuit Avenue at the Civil War statue (then in its original location, in Monument Square), and gazed up toward a riot of commerce — shop signs (Soda! Cigars! Special Today!) and striped awnings all the way up the street. In the narrow confines of the roadway itself (there were neither sidewalks nor curbs), pedestrians strolled, arm in arm, and stopped to converse in small clusters, apparently oblivious to the motor cars and horse-drawn wagons putt-putting and clattering by. The selectmen had placed a speed limit of 5 miles per hour on automobiles when driving on “the Circuit.”

In those next two blocks alone, the ways in which a visitor could be parted from his money were almost beyond counting:

- An Automobile Station had sprung up on the western side of the street at the foot of the avenue (where the Island theater is now), and the Sea View Boarding and Livery Stable next door was under new management that year, leased by J.H. Thaxter; he rented out wagons and drivers to take visitors up-Island.

- Mattair Brothers, operators of an Oriental arts parlor (“interior decorators — finest line of art goods”), had not one but two locations on the street.

- The Old Popcorn Store, run by Carroll J. Darling, and known popularly by his last name, offered not just the famous corn but also saltwater taffy and potato chips fried in olive oil.

- Four big hotels (Island House, the Metropolitan, the Pawnee, and the Vineyard) elbowed each other for space on the avenue. On the first floor of the Metropolitan, at the corner of Circuit and Park, was James G. Norton’s Pharmacy. At A.J. Rausch’s ice cream parlor next door were sold Schrafft’s chocolates and salted almonds, fresh daily.

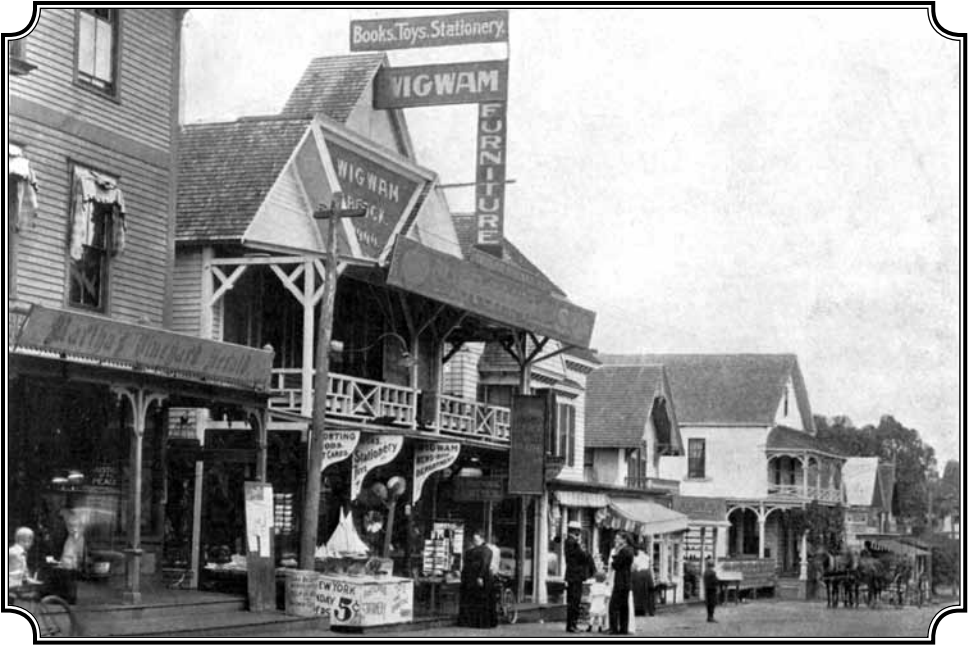
- New plaid dress gingham and kimonos were selling for 25 and 50 cents at Mrs. A.C. Smith’s Dry and Fancy Goods (and: bathing suits, souvenirs, gent’s furnishings).

- Cooper A. Gilkes ran the billiards and pool establishment (also selling cigars and tobacco) at Number 118, in the Island House annex.

- The Arcade, with its path leading through to the Camp Ground, had shops tucked invitingly in its corners: Bryant and Co. Jewelers offered silverware, jewelry, souvenirs. Frank Perry had a fruit stand there, and the

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4 Henry Beetle Hough, “Oak Bluffs in Its Youth,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, February 1980.



The Wigwam calls itself “headquarters for sea shore supplies.” The store dates from the 1880s; its current home (the Wigwam Block) from 1900. Next door is the Herald; subscriptions are \$2 per year. Proprietor E.F. Landers also offers job printing.

Maine Ice Cream Co. concocted ice cream sodas with syrup for 5 cents, sodas with fruit for 10. (“Physicians recommend ice cream for weak people, both young and old,” their promotions said.)

- The Wigwam Block Department store, dominating the eastern side of the avenue further up, caught the breathless nature of the whole: It sold everything (“almost anything wanted can be found here”) — furniture, china, rugs, hardware, trunks, window shades<sup>5</sup> — and placards in the front promoted it all: “Books, Stationery, Toys, Sporting Goods,” and “New York Sunday Papers 5 cents.” Next door was the *Herald* building, with a notary, justice of the peace and auctioneer tucked conveniently in the corner.

- Ernest A. Pease ran the Globe Fish Market at Number 121½, and T.S. Swift’s grocery, marked by a blue sign with white letters, was next to the post office (hours 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.)

- And there were at least three real estate offices in business: E.H. Matthews was located in the Oakwood Building at Number 137 (he was also a

<sup>5</sup> Stuart MacMackin, a resident of Edgartown and East Chop, wrote about Oak Bluffs in the ’20s for the *Intelligencer*, February 1983. His Wigwam memory was of “a whole section devoted to model boats: sailboats of varying sizes from 10 inches to 4 feet, all working models; also a variety of mechanical ‘motor-boats,’ some spring wound by a key that fitted into the smokestack.”

carpenter and builder); F.R. Sawyer could be found in the Pawnee House Store; W.H. Dutcher handled real estate and insurance at Number 123.<sup>6</sup>

Oak Bluffs was the hotel town, with more visitor rooms than either Edgartown or Vineyard Haven. Hotels and guest cottages operating there that summer, besides those on Circuit, included the New Wesley, with one of Oak Bluffs' five public pay telephones (of 20 on the Island); the Pequot, fully supplied with electricity, and bragging of the food at its dining table; the new Sea View, situated on the bluffs and just 60 feet from the bathing beach; the Grand View House; Attleboro Cottage; the Brookline; the Beatrice House; the Hotel Naumkeag. At the Nashua, George S. Wheeler, proprietor, who resided in Nashua, N.H., in the winter months, rented pianos.

And, of course, Oak Bluffs was the beach town. Both Highland and Oak Bluffs beaches were public then, and lined with bathhouses — the ugly, boxlike structures obliterating views of the water and occupying great swatches of sand. There were 700 such rental bathhouses in Cottage City at the turn of the century (and 100 more at the Vineyard's third formal bathing beach, Edward Chadwick's facilities at Chappaquiddick Point, home today to the Chappy Beach Club). From these cubicles trooped, each morning, eager families in their bathing costumes, wading into the warm sea. And warm it was: The average water temperature was 67 degrees that July, and 69 in August.<sup>7</sup>

That summer, the Oak Bluffs Association had placed new "settees" along the paths at Ocean and Waban parks. The Oak Bluffs Street Railway, connecting to Vineyard Haven, had new cars, brightly painted.<sup>8</sup>

### **A Way of Life, Aided by Montgomery Ward**

Yet that summer the Island was also still a place inextricably linked to its past.

Edgartown would not, until that fall, get electric lights, and pigs were raised off Pease's Point Way.

In Tisbury that year, there were 417 dwellings, 664 taxpayers on town rolls. One hundred horses resided within the town, 46 cows.

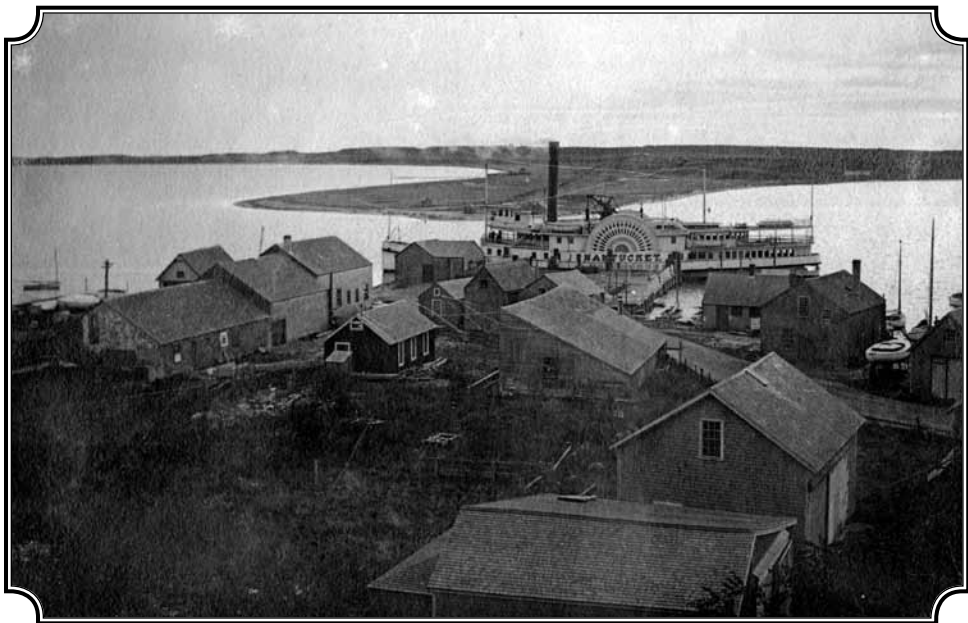
Gas lights lined Main Street; H.L. Tilton and E.R. Tilton kept them cleaned and trimmed.

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6 Not all of Circuit was commercial. Hamilton J. Greene lived amidst the hubbub; in the fall, he would yank his residence up and move it away, then in its place build, in brick, Greene's Block for new businesses.

7 We know this because George W. Eldridge, chart maker and scholar of tidal currents, a Vineyard Haven resident, kept a record.

8 This is the electric trolley, covering seven miles, formerly known as the Cottage City and Edgartown Street Railway (although there was never an Edgartown branch). It ran only in summer.



With collapse of the whaling industry, Edgartown has fallen into decline. Chappaquiddick, in the distance, is still rural. Daggett Street, from North Water to Steamboat Wharf, is being “concreted,” to ease foot travel. Sidewheel steamer is the Nantucket (built 1886, 629 tons).

Professor Nathaniel Southgate Shaler once wrote that Vineyard Haven was “one of those accidental villages with none of the premeditation belonging to the towns which have straight streets and well-aligned houses. One of those natural asylums where old sea captains come to end their days, and today we can say old captains of finance come to prolong them. Here still flows the blood of the sea kings....”

Now, if few of the sea kings were left, some of the romance remained. This year C.G. Hine, son of the man who first summered on Hines Point, self-published a book about the Island, and his passion for place was fired most strongly by the image of Vineyard Haven. He contrasted “the distant village sleeping on the western slope” with the harbor, “the foreground a moving scene of vessels and laughter.”<sup>9</sup>

It was 25 years since much of Vineyard Haven had burned to the ground, 40 acres of rubble, 60 buildings lost. Two old homes — the Nye and Daggett houses — guarded the entrance to the village where the trolley track crossed and Beach Street began, but most of Main Street was rebuilt, and, to some eyes, not particularly attractive.

The Seaman’s Bethel stood at the shore end of the wharf; it was a busy working harbor in those days. Schooners unloaded lumber, and took on

9 C.G. Hine, *The Story of Martha’s Vineyard*, Hine Bros., New York, page 70.

Island produce in return (cranberries, quahaugs, fish). Capt. William Randall ran a modern-day version of the old “bumboat”; his *Susie D*, a little steamer, circled the harbor each day and pulled up to new arrivals, selling dry goods and other necessities to the crew and anchors, water and other supplies to the captains.

If it was not as picture-perfect a waterfront as in years past — sails of the schooner fleet had begun to disappear, replaced by barges bearing coal and ocean-going tugs — it yet had its charms. Hine described the harbor at dark, “riding lights gleaming,” and said:

The evening silhouette of the village as one approaches along the Beach Road will, seen under proper conditions of light and shade, be long remembered, with its trees outlined against the dusk of coming night; the shadowy forms of its homes, the lights suggesting comfort and cheer and the church spires crowning all, finishing and humanizing a picture that warms the hearts of the wayfarer.<sup>10</sup>

Up-Island, the rural way of life endured. Chilmark was a land of fishermen, farmers, carpenters. Its farmhouses, white with green shutters, or yellow with white trim, were neatly painted. Everyone, including commercial fishermen, kept small gardens. Twenty-two residents obtained dog licenses that year. There remained about 10 deaf people in Chilmark; sign language was still common.

The fishing that summer was good. Bluefish, flounder, sea bass all were abundant in Vineyard waters. Swordfish, too. Off Nomans Land, Capt. Fred DeWolf of the schooner *Priscilla* spotted schools of ravenous sharks.

A state-sponsored dredging project was underway at Menemsha Creek. There were three stores at the head of the basin at Menemsha, along with what was then the Creekville Post Office.

In West Tisbury, S.M. Mayhew’s store carried the old *Farmer’s Almanac*, and for the privilege was given the back page to advertise its wares: “Dry and fancy goods ... straw and oil carpeting, paper hangings, curtain fixtures, boots, shoes, nice groceries, provisions and flour; paints, oil, varnish; farming tools, grass and garden seeds; patent medicines; horse blankets, carriage robes. The whole comprising the largest variety of goods to be found in any store in Dukes County.”<sup>11</sup> For other goods, the mail order house of choice was Montgomery Ward.

### Long Days and Short Tempers

In July, they had a prolonged hot, dry spell. At the Cape Pogue light-station, keeper W.A. Eldredge noted in his journal 28 days without rain — June 24 through July 21. The grass on the lawn at the Edgartown Court

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<sup>10</sup> Hine, pp. 86-87.

<sup>11</sup> The almanacs from this period are in the collection of the Museum.



Chilmark center: Author C.G. Hine calls Chilmark “a wonderful living, moving picture...a foreground of pasture lands dotted with sheep and occasional homes, with here and there a well ... off in a field by itself. Beyond are the quiet waters of the pond, the strip of sand beach and the limitless Atlantic...”

House withered and turned rusty brown. The dust on the unpaved town roads — and there were still many of them — swirled up in choking clouds, particularly as drivers in their shiny new automobiles — and there were still relatively few of them — sped by.

On Tuesday, July 7, it was 92 degrees at 11 a.m.

At Squibnocket, the cisterns went dry and gardens wilted. In Vineyard Haven, it prompted a weak joke: “We may advertise ‘no hay fever’ this summer as it is too dry for hay of any kind.”

It was also the summer of an infestation of the gypsy and the brown tail moths, and the elm beetle. Jon F. Hoft was paid \$150 by the Town of Tisbury for spraying the elm trees.

Perhaps the heat shortened tempers. An article in the *New Bedford Standard* suggested all was not well with the Vineyard tourist economy, hinting at tensions between Islander and visitor. This prompted an outburst from summer resident George F. Hadley of Oak Bluffs, whose letter to the *Herald* said that, contrary to the *Standard*’s report, prices here were not exorbitant when you factored in the costs involved, that year-round-

ers were “always courteous” and “very appreciative of the patronage of the summer visitors,” and that the visitors were not, as the *Standard* may have suggested, tightwads, but instead “liberal spenders ... willing to pay a good price for every luxury as well as necessity.” His boosterish letter is notable not just for its passion but for its description of the role of the Vineyard’s Portuguese community:

With our family we have been summering here eighteen years, and have not found or expected an Arcadia. But we have found a “God’s Country”; its duplicate in air, and water, and sky, its glorious sunrise, and sunsets, and its health-giving properties cannot be found in America.... We have further found a supply of drinking water pumped into our houses city-wise, in amazing abundance, pure, and attractive to the taste. We have over fifty miles of superior drives, upon well-kept macadam and state roads, and excellently cleaned.... We have found those necessary conveniences in this day and generation, gas and electric light. The Boston markets land at our doors every day the country’s best available food, and our law-abiding, sober, and industrious colony of Portuguese furnish us with summer vegetables, the like of which cannot be duplicated in any city in the Union. They also raise “Island” lamb, the superior of the famous “Southdown” mutton of old England. They also bring us in early morning, milk, cream, and new-laid eggs in abundance. ...<sup>12</sup>

Mr. Hadley may not have noticed, but there *were* signs of strain as the price of progress.

In Oak Bluffs that year, three of the Vineyard Grove Co. lots at Lake Anthony were sold to a Philadelphia dentist, who promptly erected a house and garage, thereby angering citizens who had considered the old plank walk formerly laid across his grounds a public way.

On Chappaquiddick, summer residents Lester and Irene Clark announced they were going to court to stop the Martha’s Vineyard Telegraph Co. from locating poles and wires through what the Clarks claimed was their property. Their sense of offense was echoed by author Hine, who, in his otherwise mild-mannered musings, complained of the telegraph company, too:

The writer would like to express his disapproval of the telegraph-telephone-trolley poles and wires that line so many public highways to the serious detriment of their beauty; the generation is probably not far off that will wonder why such disfigurements were allowed.<sup>13</sup>

And that summer in three towns — Oak Bluffs, Vineyard Haven and Edgartown — seasonal residents were on the warpath about the motors on

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12 *Martha’s Vineyard Herald*, August 13.

13 Hine, pages 81-82. Hine would no doubt be cheered by the news that the telephone lines along North Water Street in Edgartown are being buried this fall.



fishermen's boats; the noise roused vacationers from their slumber in the pre-dawn hours, they said.

This debate had rippled up and down coastal communities for the last few years. The Submerged Exhaust Co. of Newburyport offered, for \$8 to \$10, what it said was equipment that would muffle the motors now proliferating through every harbor.

After Philip Saltonstall and other seasonal residents, mainly of West Chop, presented a petition declaring power boats to be a "nuisance and a menace to health," Tisbury town fathers called a meeting in Association Hall. There Saltonstall and his brethren said if the boats weren't quieted in some way the West Chop summer residents might just stop coming to the Island. Charles Brown, representing the fishermen, said underwater exhausts would lessen the power of their engines, and make them useless.<sup>14</sup>

### **Early Risings and a Parade Mark Independence Day**

That summer, as so many summers since, there was a great rush to be here for the Fourth of July. The Fourth fell on a Saturday.

On Friday night, fog descended over Vineyard Sound and Buzzards Bay, and the crew of the steamer *Uncatena*, bound from New Bedford for the Island, decided it was not prudent to proceed past Woods Hole. The anchor was dropped in Hadley's Harbor, and there crew and passengers remained till dawn. At Woods Hole, several hundred pleasure-seekers waiting for transit from the train had to spend the night, piled on top of each other in the cars or stretched out by the track.

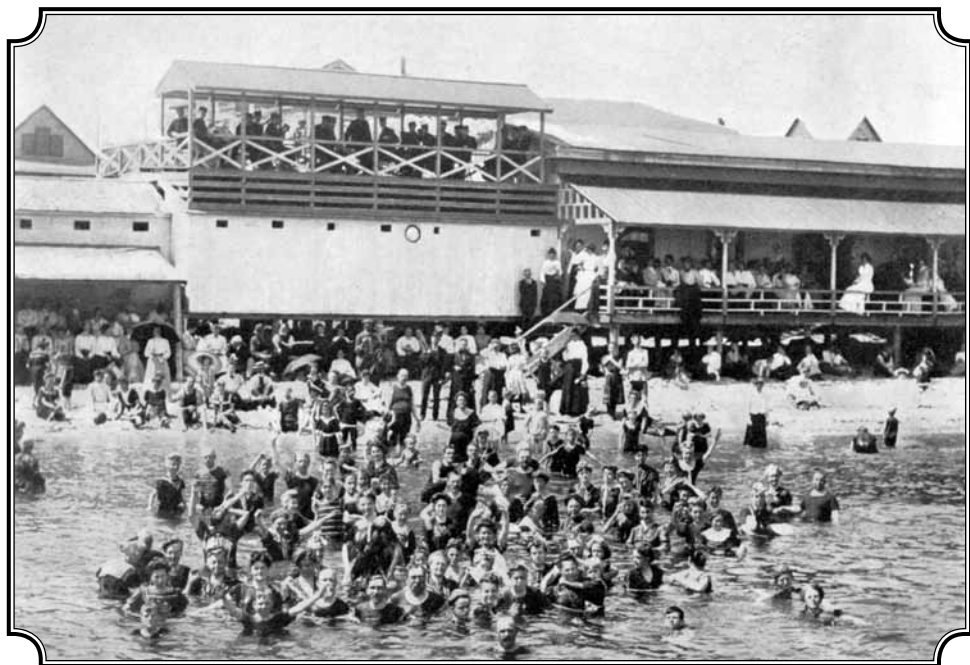
In those days, the holiday on the Vineyard was ushered in before dawn with a usually lighthearted game of hide and seek played between the villages' young men and boys, on the one side, and crews of special policemen, hired for the occasion, on the other. The challenge, for the policemen, was to keep the youths from getting to the bell ropes of the churches and the town high school and ringing in the holiday while everyone was still asleep. Every year, somehow, the policemen failed. It was no different this year: In Edgartown, the clamor awakened town residents just before daylight — a confusion of bells and the sound of firearms and firecrackers being set off. Whooping and hollering, the victorious protagonists vanished down Main Street, littering as they went — leaving paper wrappings, pasteboard boxes and the hangdog policemen, defeated once again, in their wake.

The weather was lovely, crystal-clear and not too hot.

The central events of the day were in Oak Bluffs, where the parade started at 9:15 a.m. The Edgartown band was at the head; autos festooned

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14 Somewhat related: Vineyarders that year noted a movement in Nantucket, spurred by seasonal residents, to have the annual town meeting moved from February to August. Taxation without representation — it was an old complaint.



Oak Bluffs' Highland beach and bathhouses are on the far side of Lake Anthony from town; the beach has not yet been taken private. Watching bathers from the pavilion is almost as popular a sport as going in. Bath houses will continue to be used in Oak Bluffs until 1944.

with flags and flowers followed it. Weston Chase's car, filled to bursting with young passengers dressed in white, was covered with a latticework of white ribbons with red rambler roses fastened at each crossing of the ribbon. Marching units included those of the GAR, the Odd Fellows, the Red Men, the Portuguese Association and the school children.

Down Circuit they went, to Pennacook, Waban and Ocean Park, circling back to end up at the Tabernacle, where the orchestra played "Hail Columbus" and the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and declarations were read. The Rev. J. Wesley Johnston, president of the Martha's Vineyard Camp-Meeting Association, delivered the main address: "America for Americans."

In the afternoon, there was horse racing at Girdlestone Park.

At dusk, celebrants kindled a bonfire on the high bank of the Oak Bluffs jetties, and this was followed by fireworks from a float in the harbor.

Elsewhere, celebrations were simpler. In Lambert's Cove, families picnicked in the grove by the schoolhouse; chowder was served at noon. For Squibnocket residents, Mrs. Jared Mayhew organized a strawberry festival; Rose Mahan sang.

And as night fell, individuals on Chappy and around Edgartown Harbor — from Cape Pogue to Tower Hill — and Vineyard Haven and Oak

Bluffs and Chilmark set off fireworks, too. In Edgartown Mrs. John Carter's cottage caught fire, apparently the victim of errant fireworks. Neighbors squelched it.

"Which feature or incident of the Fourth did I enjoy most?" Charles Harris, summering with his family that year in a tent on the hills of Menemsha, asked in a journal. "Easy to ask, hard to answer. The morning swim? The walk over the hills? The gathering at Sydney's, where all the family met together for the first time in some years, the lunch? The first view of the tent? The fireworks in the evening? Which is best? Who can say? I liked them all the best, for how can one tell which was best when all were equal? Eureka! Eureka! The evening's entertainment by the children of their fire works, that I may say I liked best."<sup>15</sup>

### **Recreation: First and Foremost, the Yachts**

That July 4, summer resident Elmer Jared Bliss, grandson of the whaling captain Jared Fisher, head of the Regal Shoe Company (with stores in cities from Maine to the Pacific) was not on the Vineyard. Instead, he was speeding across the Gulf of Maine in his 65-foot schooner, *Venona*, to win the race for small schooners from Isles of Shoals to Portland, an event sponsored by the Eastern Yacht Club. The distance was 35 miles; *Venona* led her nearest competitor by 16 minutes.

In the decade of the great yachts, this was *Venona's* year: She had started the season, in the spring, winning the Bermuda Race — Marblehead to Bermuda — a "gallant little craft which beat the big schooners."<sup>16</sup>

Where once columns of the Vineyard newspapers had been filled with shipping news of the great whaling fleets, now they recorded the comings and goings of passing yachts: "Steam yacht *Machigonne*, Ex-Gov. Douglas owner, was anchored here last night, as were also steam yachts *Surprise*, *Jessie* and others."

Years before, the New York Yacht Club had taken control of the bleak old abandoned New York and Portland boat wharf at Eastville and, constructing a small building, christened it Station Number 7 for their annual cruises. Here the "naphtha launches," which served as tenders for the big yachts, could land, bringing passengers ashore for a look at the place, while Islanders gathered to look at them in turn; in one 24-hour period in August that year, hundreds of viewers flocked to the shore to watch the magnificent yachts pass through.

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<sup>15</sup> Sydney was Charles' brother, who was staying in a house elsewhere on the Harris property. The diaries that Charles' children kept that summer are the subject of an article by Tom Dunlop in *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, May-June 2004.

<sup>16</sup> *Vineyard Gazette*, August 13.

The Edgartown Yacht Club (founded 1905) was a splintered outgrowth of the old Home Club, an Edgartown social organization (founded 1899), where whaling captains, other town residents and visitors played cards and cribbage and which — in summer months — sponsored catboat races. The original Yacht Club clubhouse was a modest two-story affair on Lower Main Street, presided over by the legendary Lott Norton, son of a Cape Pogue lightkeeper who grew up to sail aboard various merchant ships and, for a time, served as sailing master for Tom Thumb in the *Maggie B.* Norton's official job was custodian of club property; he also served, that summer, on the Membership, By-Laws, Finance and House committees of the club.

Under Commander Thomas D. Mills, the club claimed more than 100 members and a fleet of 72. It opened its season Saturday, July 18 with the Club Regatta. On July 25, there was a clambake at the Harborside. On August 1, an Open Regatta. On August 8, a Ladies' Race, "in which boats must be steered by ladies only, and any boat whose tiller or wheel is touched by a man, excepting to prevent accident, shall be disqualified."<sup>17</sup> On August 22, another Open Regatta, for Island and Nantucket boats and boats of members. On August 29, another Club Regatta. In events such as these, boats were handicapped by load water line, over-all measurements, extreme beam and horsepower rating; the entrance fee was \$1.

In and out of competition, the yachting crowd provided good business for Islanders. When the steam yacht *Corsair* left Edgartown harbor that July, it had stocked up with 100 loaves of bread from the Edgartown Home Bakery.

The boating crowd was a traveling bunch. Island native Charles S. Simpson, now a part-time resident, was the biscuit king of New Bedford, owner of Snell and Simpson Crackers (maker of the famous "butter thins").<sup>18</sup> This summer, he took his power boat *Mahdeen* to the Harvard-Yale races at New London, and then set off with a party of friends on a tour that went to Nantucket, New York, Albany, Lake Champlain, up the St. Lawrence to Quebec and then, via the Saguenay River, to Halifax, coming home via Maine and Marblehead. With him went S.K. Smith and D.J. Johnson of New York, and Martin J. Canole, a 25-year-old Irish-born lightweight boxer, the first of two professional prizefighters to whom Simpson became attached, sharing his Chappy summers with them. Home in August,

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17 This description is from a club advertisement. Since 1906 women had been eligible to be members of the club — "to fly the Club burgee, enroll their boats and enter all races," according to George F. Brown III, *As We Were: The Edgartown Yacht Club 1905-2004*, Edgartown Yacht Club, 2005.

18 Profiled in the *Intelligencer*, November 2007; he donated portions of his art collection to the Edgartown Library.



Roque (above; a form of croquet) and baseball are both played at Waban Park. Spectators can wander over from the new Seaview Hotel, opened at the waterfront's edge in 1907. On the ballfield, Oak Bluffs beats New Bedford, 12-5, in the season opener July 17.

Simpson, scouting more land purchases in the Wasque area, tripped over barbed wire concealed in high grass, broke his knee-cap, was carried away to New Bedford aboard *Mahdeen*.

### **Other Recreations: Roque, Roads, the 'Flickers'**

In August, the rains, so long delayed, played havoc with the plans of the pleasure-seekers.

A gale on Saturday, August 1, sank a power boat just off Nomans Land. Heavy storms and a fine shower followed at noon on Tuesday, and Vineyarders were startled from their beds by a sharp electrical storm just before dawn on Wednesday. There was a fine drizzle that Friday, more showers Sunday.

Another gale on Thursday, August 27, closed in much of the Island, though the *Uncatena* sailed as usual. On Wednesday, Sept. 2, it poured so hard that one day of the 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Cattle Show and Fair in West Tisbury was washed out.

Through it all, those who didn't have yachts pursued other recreations, outdoor and in.

Baseball was played at Waban Park, an Oak Bluffs team taking on visitors from New Bedford and Middleboro. As many as 600 watched the contests.<sup>19</sup> Roque and tennis were played at Waban, too; golfers went to Edgartown, where the Pine Side links were modeled on Scottish courses.

As for "auto-ing" or "motoring" or "going for a drive," though the Vineyard was still a place of winding, dusty dirt roads, railway brochures were, like letter writer Hadley, accentuating the positive: "miles and miles of macadam, concrete and shell roads — smooth and hard as asphalt."<sup>20</sup> Not only visitors were thrilled at the opened-up vistas: When Captain and Mrs. Marshall of Edgartown were driven Up-Island by their friend and neighbor J.W. Vose, they marveled at parts of the Vineyard they hadn't seen in 26 years of residence.

The rise in popularity of the automobile was not without controversy: Nantucket that summer had rules banning its use from June 15 to Sept. 15. The Vineyard had no such qualms, but on New York Avenue July 21 an auto crashed head-on into the mail stage. No one was injured.

Dr. Orlando S. Mayhew had a new runabout that summer; he joined a list of other doctors in deciding they were good for house calls. Philip Corbin, summer resident of Oak Bluffs, brought his car with him from Connecticut. Carleton Dexter of Edgartown had a "fine Maxwell car" to let for hour or day, for "private parties, with services of chauffeur," seating five adults.

On clear summer evenings, visitors could take a moonlight cruise from Edgartown to Oak Bluffs, hosted by Antone Prada Jr. on his catboat *Gem*. Or they could play whist. Young people would make a beach fire, have a corn roast, toast marshmallows.

The movies were shown not just at Dreamland but also nearby, at Tivoli Temple; and on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, the American Vitograph Co. sponsored movies at the Tabernacle.

This was the age of the nickelodeon, when old storehouses, lecture halls, the rear of amusement parlors — anything that could be turned into a modest theater — showed "flickers" and "galloping tintypes" — simple stories whose outline could be contained in a single reel. D.W. Griffith this year made *The Adventures of Dollie* and *Lines of White on a Sullen Sea* for Biograph Pictures; but it was not until the coming year that he would introduce the idea of close-ups, cutting and editing that formed the basis

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19 The Oak Bluffs nine on August 7: Howland, lf; Metcalf, 2b; Noyes, 3b; Tasker, c; Jackson, 3b; Knoop, rf; Rhodes, 1b; Flint, cf; Livesy, p.

20 Patricia Rodgers, *Three for a Nickel, Martha's Vineyard Postcards 1900-1925*, Aqua Press, 2002, p. 13.

for the motion picture as we know it today. Never mind: These short movies were the perfect summer amusement, and, at 5 cents admission, priced right for the crowd.

### **The Talk of the Vineyard: Bobbing Bottles, Accidents**

The Vineyard was, then as now, a place where a letter in a bottle was big news. That summer, Sylvanus Norton picked up such a bottle on South Beach, where visitors liked to go to watch the surf. The stationery inside was from the Hamburg-American Line steamer *President Lincoln*, dated May 26; it didn't say where it had been thrown into the Atlantic.

Excitement was generated by homecomings: Back to the Vineyard that season came the wandering sailor Shadrach D. Tilton of Vineyard Haven. A cousin of George Fred Tilton of Chilmark, Shadrach had been away 20 years. Landing at New Bedford on the bark *Alice Knowles*, he surveyed old Vineyard haunts, then announced he preferred the Pacific Coast to the Atlantic, and the sea to the land; he would head off to look for a ship sailing out of San Francisco.

In July, a summer guest of J.F. Adams in West Tisbury made news by falling from a second-floor window in the middle of the night. Fay Conant said it happened while he was walking in his sleep, that he had been "troubled with somnambulism" for some time. This time he broke his arm. Cutting short his holiday, Conant went home to Newburyport.

Occasionally things took a more serious turn. On the night of July 11, six summer residents of Marion and Falmouth took the motorboat *Dolphin* over toward the Vineyard; there was an explosion, and four men died. Two others clung to bits of wreckage all night in heavy waves; in the morning, a fisherman, Walter Bowman, found them as he went out to pull lobster pots. Boat owner Arthur Tarbell of Marblehead, one of the survivors, had started out from Marion at 5:15 and was hurrying to get through the dangers of Woods Hole before dark. The blast set the launch on fire. Tarbell grabbed a life preserver, and the other survivor an oar, before they jumped; fastening them together, they drifted about Buzzards Bay all night until Bowman heard their shouts two miles off Scraggy Neck. All along the bay that day, residents and fishermen with yachts and launches searched in vain for the boat or its other occupants. There was no trace.

On the Island, on Wednesday, August 12, a clerk in the ice cream parlor in the Circuit Avenue Arcade was filling the soda tank with gas when it exploded on him. Antonie Batty was blown through the door, along with the tank, into the Arcade, and broken glass was carried into the fruit stand opposite. Batty broke two legs and one arm, tearing his other arm at the

shoulder; he was transported to the hospital at New Bedford.<sup>21</sup>

Just beyond the news columns of the papers, more personal sorrows lurked. On August 28, John H. Foster of Gay Head took out legal papers to declare the end of a marriage: “Whereas my wife, Ann J. Foster, without just cause has left my bed and board, I hereby forbid all persons trusting her on my account, so I shall pay no bills by her contracted after this date.”

### **A Great Singer Visits Her Cousins**

It was the summer of a singular sensation.

Her name was Lillian Nordica (nee Norton) and she was an American operatic soprano, a rock star of opera’s Golden Age.

Born in 1857 in Farmington, Maine, Nordica was related to the Nortons of Martha’s Vineyard (and also the Mayhews, Allens and Athearns).

Trained as a singer in Boston, and graduating from the New England Conservatory of Music, Lillian took the stage name Giglio Nordica (“Lily of the North”) to perform in Europe, and not long after her debut in 1879 was the premier Wagnerian soprano of European opera. For years she roamed the Continent, performing in Russia, Germany, Paris, London and, back in the U.S., New York, gathering applause, wardrobe (elaborate gowns), jewels (countless) and husbands (three).

On August 13, the *Herald* ran a Vineyard Haven item: “Madame Nordica’s sister, Mrs. [William] Baldwin, with a party of relatives and friends, have the Wilbert Call house on Greenwood Avenue. It is rumored that her gifted sister will be with her for a brief stay.”

Just ten days later, accompanied by a cousin, Nordica drove her touring car north from her Hudson River estate, boarded the ferry (the car came, too), and began a two-week visit that was part Royalty Visits the Hinterlands, part Genealogy Quest, part Island Tour — everything but a summer idyll by the seaside.<sup>22</sup>

She visited the Bayside Hotel and Cottages, on the shore of Vineyard Haven harbor, the new operation by the old Innisfail management, Innisfail having burned two years before. She attended a tea at the Historical Rooms of the DAR and church on Sunday morning and a clambake on Lambert’s

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21 The Vineyard would not have its own hospital until the summer of 1922.

22 She was not a stranger to the Vineyard. As a young woman, visiting her cousins here in the summer of 1874, Lillian worked part-time sorting mail at the Tisbury post office, and, hearing old family stories became “immensely proud of [her] courageous ancestors.” That, according to Ira Glackens, *Yankee Diva: Lillian Nordica and the Golden Days of Opera*, Coleridge Press, New York 1963, page 24. Two years later, in March 1876, as a student at the New England Conservatory, she performed at the Town Hall in Edgartown on a program headlined by G.C. Wheeler, a singer and composer of the day.





An American girl: Touring the Vineyard, opera star Lillian Nordica visits the William Street home of seasonal resident Capt. James B. Robinson. She poses with what is presumably the flag presented to her one day before, at her public performance in Vineyard Haven.

Cove. She sang for the Camp Meeting at Ocean Grove. She descended on Edgartown to visit the Old Mayhew House, and went to Gay Head, where L.L. Vanderhoop ran the restaurant at the Cliffs, and to the fair. Meeting Mrs. Chester Pease of Edgartown, a locally highly-praised soprano, Nordica asked for a private performance, which occurred two days later in the music room of a Vineyard Haven home; Mrs. Pease sang three selections and went away flushed with praise from the great singer herself.

Public highlight of the trip was a reception in Vineyard Haven, at the Methodist Episcopal Church, from 4 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, August 29. "The invitation is general, and doubtless hundreds will avail themselves of the opportunity to meet this charmingly gifted singer," the *Vineyard*



Ocean Park and its “cottages” date from the plans laid down by landscape architect Robert Morris Copeland and developer Erastus Carpenter in the years just after the Civil War. In the park, children sail small boats in the pond, and a hired band greets the arrival of steamboats at the pier. The turreted mansion at

*Gazette* reported. So hundreds did. Throngs gathered long before the appointed hour, filling up the sanctuary and spilling over far outside; a Chicago man was heard to offer \$50 to get in. So jammed were the streets that Madame Nordica’s car, upon arriving, had to turn around and try twice before finding access for the guest of honor.

Her accompanist was down from New York for the occasion. Nordica wore a Parisian gown and performed German, French and English songs. The crowd outside stood in rapt silence as the soaring voice of the soprano wafted from the windows. They presented her with a rich silk American flag, prompting an impromptu singing of the Star-Spangled Banner. Making what she called “the first speech of my life,” she announced plans to build an opera house (“a replica of the German Wagner Opera House at Bayreuth”) on the slopes of the Hudson River, and to create there an Institute of Art for girls.

And still she was not done:

She visited her cousins, the Nortons, on their farm, spreading her jewels on the kitchen table. She plucked a rose in the garden and sang, “The Last Rose of Summer.” She rode one dawn with handsome 18-year-old Franklin Norton on his milk route, astonishing the customers.



right (erected 1891) is that of Philip Corbin, hardware and lock manufacturer from New Britain and former Connecticut state senator. The newspapers note the arrival of the Honorable and Mrs. Corbin just before July 4, their departure in September. Mr. Corbin, born 1824, will live only two years more.

In pouring rain, Wednesday, Sept. 2, her motorcar slogged through mud and sand to the old family homestead in Farm Neck. There she spent an afternoon browsing the attic, studying old deeds and talking with Henry Constant Norton, owner of the pre-Revolutionary farmhouse since 1887. She sang for him, too.

After her entourage steamed away, there was an interesting coda. Boston police, the *New York Times* reported on Sept. 15, were searching for “a large collection of jewelry stolen recently” from “the summer home of Mme. Lillian Nordica, the singer, at Edgartown. .... The local police failed to find the thieves. The articles of jewelry stolen are worth at least \$4,000 and probably more. Among them were jewels which Mme. Nordica prized very highly.” This incident apparently went unreported in the local papers. But the Vineyard Haven correspondent of the *Gazette* ran a cryptic sentence on Oct. 8: “Wanted! A Sherlock Holmes.” The remark was not explained.<sup>23</sup>

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23 Other notables on the Vineyard that summer included two artists, Enid Yandell and George D.M. Peixotto, and two authors, James Barnes and Frederick Van Rensselaer Dey of Westport, Conn., who, under the pseudonym Nick Carter was author of a highly popular series of boys' books. Dey sought solitude; he rented the Binnacle on Chappaquiddick.

## **That Year, a State Forest Was in the Making**

Another rock star dwelt on the Vineyard that summer, too. She was 18 inches tall and lived in the oaks, the bayberry and the dwarf sumac of the Island's center.

The heath hen was much on the minds of Islanders that year. The battle to protect this distinctive bird — the size of a ruffed grouse, light red-brown feathers above, rusty white below, with a gray-brown tail tipped in white and spots of orange on neck and eye — had gone on for decades. At least once (1876), it had been believed the bird was extinct.

As early as 1831, the State Legislature had tried to prevent hunting it during breeding season, and by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century there were many years when hunting was banned completely. The heath hen had vanished everywhere but the Vineyard; a terrible fire in 1894 left skeletons of dozens of birds and reduced its numbers significantly.

Still the heath hen lived on; in the summer months it ate grasshoppers, crickets, spiders and worms and nipped at the leaves of red clover. It had a peculiar toot — sometimes like a tugboat in the fog, sometimes like the hoot of a barred owl. The state hired a deputy to live on-Island and enforce the no-hunting rules, although the prime nesting grounds of the bird were on private property.

In 1907, a survey by the State Commission on Fisheries and Game estimated that only 45 to 60 were left on the Island, and John E. Howland of Vineyard Haven proposed that a heath hen reservation be created. The idea was soon endorsed by George W. Field, chairman of the state game commission. A fundraising effort, to finance purchase of the land, followed; a total of \$2,420 was collected, including donations from the towns of Tisbury and West Tisbury.

Then, in the first week of July, Field's office announced the state had under consideration purchase of the 600-acre farm of Antone Andrews. A bill introduced by Rep. Mayhew of Martha's Vineyard authorized the taking of 1,000 acres. (Later, it would grow to 2,000 acres.) The bill, supported by the Audubon Societies and sportsmen's organizations, passed, and \$2,000 was appropriated for the purpose. The Andrews acreage would be purchased before the end of the year; Field announced the closing of the deal on Dec. 8.

By the next summer, the heath hen count was estimated at 200. There was a collective sigh of relief: The bird would be saved.

## **A Changing of the Guard**

That September, Susan Clapp Bradley died in Brockton. Years before, she had turned daily supervision of the Oakland Mission in Cottage City over to O.E. Denniston, who "with the cooperation of his wife and other faithful Christian workers," Denniston wrote, "has endeavored to main-

tain the earnest and loving purpose that was in the mind of the friends of the mission ... founded for Portuguese, colored people and for the good of all the people." The Mission would be the precursor of Bradley Memorial Church.

At Seven Gates Farm, too, a new era had begun.

Professor Shaler, the Kentucky-born expert in paleontology and geology who had acquired for his summer home 2,000 acres of North Tisbury land, had died two years earlier. Control of "Shaler's Farm" had passed to his daughter Gabriella and her husband, Willoughby Lane Webb.

Webb is described in Elizabeth Bramhall's book about Farm history as "a 'tweedy gent' who always wore a coat and tie and straw hat and had a 'natty little goatee,'" a New York lawyer who gave up his practice "probably 'for reasons of health' (it has been speculated that he had a nervous breakdown)." <sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, he seized the reins, with an ambitious plan to build a model dairy farm.

He started with a herd of registered Jerseys, and, this summer, was producing milk and cream in sealed glass bottles, each bottle bearing words, blown in the glass, that proclaimed its origin: "SEVEN GATES FARM, NO. TISBURY, MASS."

Down the way, in an ancient farmhouse on the Edgartown Road, half a mile from the post office in West Tisbury, Joshua Slocum was transitioning, too. Slocum, a Nova Scotia native, and his wife Henrietta (Hettie) had purchased their farm with earnings from his book, *Sailing Alone Around the World*, and he had tried to settle down. It hadn't taken; the winters were too cold for him, and for three years now he had mostly been away, sailing on a series of voyages in the 37-foot sloop *Spray*, alone again.

That summer, in June, he had sailed *Spray* into New York harbor bearing a two-ton chunk of coral from the Bahamas; scientists had hired him to carry it to the U.S. for delivery to the American Museum of Natural History.

Now he came back to see Hettie. Both he and *Spray* had seen better days. *Spray* was damp, cracked and in need of paint, and Slocum, 64, was more shabbily dressed than usual, wearing a ragged black felt hat. Some wondered if *Spray* was no longer seaworthy; this was the year before Slocum sailed her south and was never heard from again. <sup>25</sup>

But this summer, on a sunny, clear day, with the wind out of the North-east, Nat Harris, 10, and his sister Catherine, 9 — the children of Charles Harris — went aboard *Spray* at Menemsha Creek and met Slocum. It was a moment they would never forget. He pressed into their hands some shells — and a piece of yellow coral.

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24 Elizabeth Bramhall, *Seven Gates Farm — The First One Hundred Years*, Seven Gates Farm, 1988.

25 Walter Teller, *The Voyages of Joshua Slocum*, Rutgers University Press, 1958.



New Wesley House, Oak Bluffs, Mass.

Originally known as Wesley's Hotel, with a front entrance facing the Campground, the New Wesley now faces the water, has a sun parlor warmed by steam heat and a fine piano and polished floor for dancing. Transient rooms, \$2 to \$3 a day; catboats for rent "at a reasonable cost."

### A New Generation Is in Residence

Some of the youngsters at work and play on the Island that summer would figure in Vineyard life for years to come.

Joseph Chase Allen was 16 that year, and working in Menemsha aboard Everett Poole's famous catboat, *Goldenrod*. Built in 1897, *Goldenrod* originally sported a huge sail — a spread of 525 square feet of canvas — and had a reputation as the fastest cat in the water. Equipped with an engine about six years later, she was used for lobstering in summer; handlining, codfishing and trawling in winter.<sup>26</sup> Allen, who became a prolific and long-running writer for the *Gazette*, would always remember how in those days the local catboats in Menemsha Creek and Down-Island were joined by those of summer visitors from the Cape; "the fleet was inspiring."<sup>27</sup>

Henry Beetle Hough, future *Gazette* editor (and Allen's boss), was also here that summer. He was 12 years old, and with his mother and brother, stayed at Fish Hook, in North Tisbury; his father George, the newspaper editor in New Bedford, commuted on weekends.

<sup>26</sup> John Leavens, "Up-Island Catboats," *Intelligencer*, February 1986.

<sup>27</sup> *Gazette*, June 11, 1965.

Dorothy West, then just one year old, was brought here that year for the first summer of many. Her mother, Rachel, loved the Island; her father, Isaac, was bored by it and stayed home in Boston to run his wholesale banana business in Haymarket Square.<sup>28</sup> That summer, the Wests shared a duplex with Phoebe Moseley Adams Ballou, on the waterfront in Oak Bluffs, next to Call's Market (now Our Market). The next year, it would burn down and the Wests would move into the Highlands; they were, West later said, one of about a dozen of the first seasonal black cottage owners, all from Boston. (New York blacks came later, a group whose style and attitudes astonished her crowd.) In West's childhood summers here, her mother, unlike their neighbors, would not return to Boston till long past Labor Day: "My mother could not bear to leave. Fall was so lovely. Winter would be so long to wait to see an Oak Bluffs sky again. We lingered for those magic days until my father wrote, as he wrote every year, 'Come on home; there are no more flowers to pick.'"<sup>29</sup>

And it was the first summer for some Island newborns.

Wesley Mayhew Whiting, later the distinguished Harvard professor, was born that June at Quenames. At the agricultural fair, his big brother Henry Lawrence exhibited Wesley, along with a tray of 11 varieties of vegetables in big brother/little brother sizes.

Thelma Luce, daughter of Harry and Irene Mayhew Luce, was also born that year, in Edgartown; growing up, she played on the family dairy farm on the site of what is now Farm Neck. Thelma Luce Baird would live 100 years.<sup>30</sup>

### **Enthusiasm for the New and Different**

The Vineyard was changing; in Ocean Heights, the latest "resort" development was underway. Blocks were marked off alphabetically and cottage lots numbered. A plant on site was churning out concrete to support the new construction. Isaac Burgess of Plymouth was building on Lot 24, Block K, and Andrew Cassidy of Waltham, with grander ambitions, bought four lots for a single residence in Block J.

Change, of course, would be a way of life on the Vineyard from that time to this. Yet in spite of that, looking through the contemporary documents of that summer, a reader today is struck not by the differences between their time and ours, but by the similarities.

All the major mechanisms of the Vineyard as summer resort are by then in place. The pleasures, and conflicts, of a year-round community welcoming seasonal visitors in its midst (and depending on them, economically) were as familiar to the Islanders of that day as they are in our

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28 James Robert Saunders and Renae Nadine Shackelford, *The Dorothy West Martha's Vineyard*, McFarland and Company, Jefferson, N.C. 2001, pp. 5-6.

29 Dorothy West, *The Richer, The Poorer*, Doubleday 1995, p. 176.

30 She died Jan. 22, 2008 in the Windemere Nursing Home.

own. The obsession with weather, the importance of ice cream and entertainment, the wary eye on development — all these were already part of the Vineyard story. The delicate dance between year-round and summer visitor had begun.

Only one thing is missing, and its absence is striking: In none of the contemporary accounts can be found a sense that the Vineyard's best days are past; on the contrary, everyone is filled with enthusiasm for the new and the different. They haven't invented Nostalgia yet.

Much later, *Gazette* Editor Hough would yearn for days he had never himself seen:

After the turn of the century there came a freshening of different winds, a new spirit, a different dominance. The summer community was all at once aware of itself, began to act as a separate social force, broke with the drifting of the past and directed its own affairs. The naïveté of the old age had gone beyond recall, and in place of the regime of sea captains projecting railroads and hotels to develop a watering place, there was a new regime in which summer residents formed clubs and associations to lay out golf courses and provide for their own entertainment.

In this new period there was a slighter overlapping, a narrower contact between the summer community and the all year residents of the island. The early summer visitors had mingled with the islanders; in the early clubs, the two worlds had met on something like equal terms.... Now the summer visitors were apt to be strangers who remained strangers, except to themselves.<sup>31</sup>

But if that was noticed at the time, one searches in vain for evidence of it. Only a single phrase in the North Tisbury social column of the *Gazette* that July 30 perhaps inadvertently, or wistfully, hints at Hough's complaint. The unnamed columnist reports:

"The residence of the late John B. O'Brien is occupied by people from away."

### **At Season's End, A Rush to the Exit**

That summer, on Labor Day weekend in Oak Bluffs, there were balloon ascensions over Lake Anthony, in front of the Wesley House, and fireworks on Saturday evening. The Banda Rosa played music during the display, and Wesley House management provided sittings for hundreds on their 85-foot-long piazza, while hundreds more watched from the embankment.

At Tower Hill Cottages in Edgartown on Monday, Sept. 7, just after breakfast, guests gathered on the lawn and Jay B. Benton, on behalf of

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31 Hough, *Martha's Vineyard, Summer Resort*, Turtle Publishing Co, Rutland, 1936, pp. 268-269.



the guests and employes presented the owner, Mrs. Goell, with a new flag. They all sang the Star-Spangled Banner as they ran it up the pole. Rev. Rowland Nichols gave a speech about what the flag means to true Americans, and children gave the School Salute to the Flag.

There were extra steamers to handle the crowds on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, connecting to trains at Woods Hole and New Bedford.

Public schools opened Tuesday, Sept. 8.

Some visitors lingered; like Rachel West, they found it impossible to leave. The weather remained fine and they sought the best of the waning days. Soon there would be a chill in the air. The Tivoli closed. Dreamland remained open. The Casino on Oak Bluffs Beach gave free admission that Tuesday night. (In the basement of the Casino, you could have a salt-water bath, hot or cold.)

At one of the Oak Bluffs shops — perhaps the Wigwam, where postcards were displayed in racks right on the front porch — a woman named Katherine bought one of the “view postcards” popular in those days, cards showing Island scenes artificially colored by the manufacturer. Her card was of Ocean Park, a particularly popular scene. In it, summer visitors are scattered across the lawns near the bandstand, which has been painted with a bright red roof. In the foreground, three children play near a large rock, and a couple lounges by the fountain, she in white blouse with her hair piled on top of her head, he in a white shirt, leaning on one arm and wearing a straw hat. A bicycle lies, on its side, behind them. Another couple lounges on a park bench nearby, the woman in a long dark skirt. The young trees at the edge of the fountain are tinged red and yellow. The grass is green. In the distance, the houses that circle the park have windows thrown open. It is the perfect image of peace and tranquility, romanticized, frozen in time.

Katherine addressed the card to a friend named Mary, who lived in Oak Bluffs. On the back she wrote a brief, teasing message whose meaning has been lost to time: “Mr. C. thought you were a fine Little Girl.” And on the front she wrote her own name and the date: “Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1908.”<sup>32</sup>

And then that summer — 100 Vineyard summers ago — was gone.

## Volunteerism Is Key To *Intelligencer* Success

LIKE THOUSANDS of other cultural institutions, the Martha's Vineyard Museum is dependent upon its volunteers. This issue of the *Dukes County Intelligencer* is an example of how contemporary and historic volunteerism has added greatly to the Museum's reputation and the meeting of its mission. The editors—past and present—of the *Intelligencer* have contributed countless hours of research, writing, and editing to produce articles that provide a more permanent document of Vineyard stories, both big and small. Their work insures that members and others better understand the past of this very special place.

Our current editor's introduction is a brief and delightful review of how the volunteer leadership has evolved over five decades. Although our model for producing the *Intelligencer* has more recently become a blend of professional and paid editorial support, all of the time, energy and effort of its editorial leadership are, to put a contemporary value on it—priceless! Submissions, usually three or more per issue, are the work of volunteer scholars and devoted amateur researchers who want to share their passion for Island history with like-minded members and a curious public.

Subscription to the *Dukes County Intelligencer* always comes up as a leading benefit to the purchase of a membership. Indeed, one the Museum's most enthusiastic members, Olga Hirshhorn, declared that "Getting the *Intelligencer* alone makes MV Museum membership the best deal on the Vineyard."

Volunteers, including for the past few years a cadre of unpaid summer interns, are the support staffing for many other primary functions here—exhibitions, events and program—that we are able to present. The American Association for Museum Volunteers (AAMV) represents the more than 1,000,000 volunteers that are at the core of museum and cultural institutional activity across the country—an enormous number. Our volunteers are in that number, and we have the very best!

David Nathans  
Executive Director

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



Thomas Norton and Arthur Railton hang the sign on the School Street wall of the Museum research library. Photograph by Alison Shaw.