

MVMUSEUM

Quarterly

Martha's Vineyard Museum's Journal of Island History

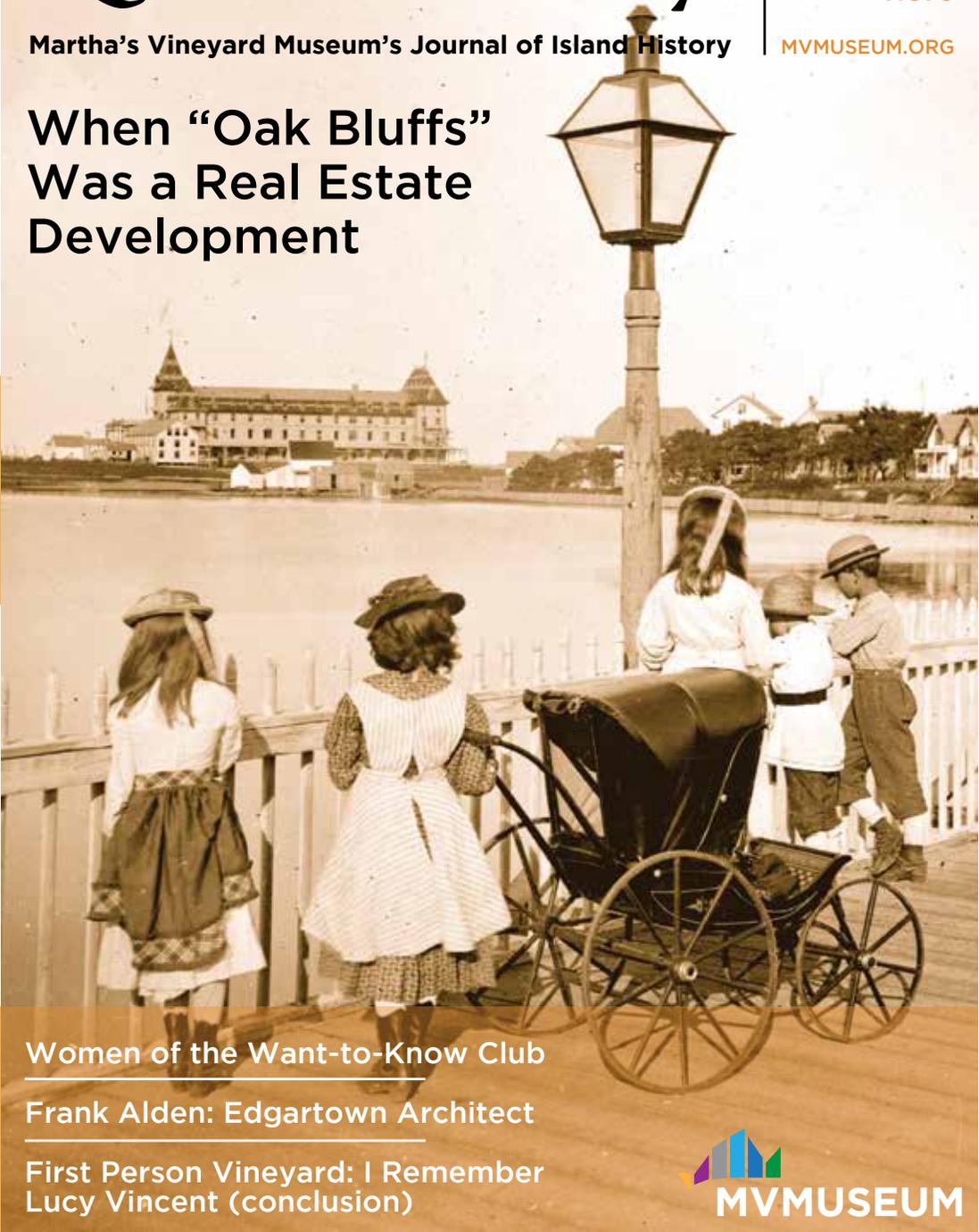
Formerly
The Dukes County
Intelligencer

AUGUST
2018

VOLUME 59
NO. 3

MVMUSEUM.ORG

When "Oak Bluffs" Was a Real Estate Development



Women of the Want-to-Know Club

Frank Alden: Edgartown Architect

First Person Vineyard: I Remember
Lucy Vincent (conclusion)



MVMUSEUM

INDIVIDUALS

We think of those closest to us—family, friends, and co-workers—as uniquely and irreducibly individual. Those more distant from us blur into groups, their individuality trumped (in our minds) by the qualities that we ascribe to the group. Historians are as prone to this as anyone. We write about “whaling captains” or “19th-century women” or “Vineyarders” as if those terms conveyed an identity as crisply defined as “isosceles triangle” or “1965 Mustang.” In reality—though bound by shared experiences and common goals—those groups consisted of people as uniquely, irreducibly individual as those in our own lives.

This issue of the *Quarterly* offers glimpses of the individuals behind three such group labels. Skip Finley examines the six men—natives, wash-shores, and summer visitors; whalers and wharf-owners, merchant mariners and manufacturers—who jump-started the development of Oak Bluffs after the Civil War. Catherine Mayhew pieces together the lives and identities of twenty women who, in the mid-1890s, embraced the ideal of lifelong learning and created an institution devoted to it: The Want to Know Club of Vineyard Haven, now 125 years old. Mary Jane Carpenter traces the life of one of the wealthy mainland visitors who discovered Edgartown in the summers around 1900: Frank Alden, a gifted, Island-born architect who gave the town some of its most iconic buildings. The conclusion of David Seward’s warm, vivid remembrance of Chilmark’s beloved librarian Lucy Vincent rounds out the issue.

Correction

The former South School building in Edgartown was not, as stated in the last issue of the *Quarterly* (May 2018, p. 39, note 3) torn down. Now a private home, it is still standing—screened by tall hedges—at the corner of School and High Streets. The Editor, who clearly needs to get out more, regrets the error.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM QUARTERLY

VOL. 59, No. 3

© 2018

AUGUST 2018

Captains of Cottage City:

The Men Behind the Boom of the Bluffs
by SKIP FINLEY 3

In the Beginning:

The Founding Members of the Want to Know Club
by CATHERINE M. MAYHEW 21

Carnegie's Architect:

Frank Alden and His Edgartown Connections
by MARY JANE CARPENTER..... 32

First Person Vineyard:

I Remember Lucy Vincent, Part II
by DAVID SEWARD 39

A Note from Phil Wallis, Executive Director..... 48

Founding Editor: Gale Huntington (1959-1961, 1964-1977) Dorothy Scoville, Editor (1961-1963) George Adams, Editor (1977-1979) Arthur R. Railton, Editor (1979-2006) John Walter, Editor (2007-2008) Susan Wilson, Editor (2009-2014)

The Martha's Vineyard Museum Quarterly is published by the Martha's Vineyard Museum. Subscription is by membership in the Museum. Recent issues are available in the Museum gift shop or by emailing frontdesk@mvmuseum.org. Back issues may be requested through the Museum library. Membership in the Museum is invited. Visit www.mvmuseum.org and go to the "Support" tab.

Author queries and manuscripts for this journal should be submitted electronically to bvanriper@mvmuseum.org, subject line "MVM Quarterly."

Articles in the *MVM Quarterly* do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Museum or its officers. Every effort is made to confirm dates, names and events in published articles, but we cannot guarantee total accuracy.

ISSN 0418 1379

MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM

Board of Directors

Stever Aubrey, *Chair*
Barbara Alleyne, *Vice-Chair*
Julianna Flanders, *Secretary*
Dale Garth, *Treasurer*
Elizabeth Beim, Nat Benjamin, Jeb Blatt
Marcia Mulford Cini, Meredith Degen, Skip Finley
David R. Foster, Deirdre Frank, Peter Gearhart
Fain Hackney, Fred Jackson, David LeBreton
David Lewis, John E. McDonald Jr., Chris Murphy
Jim Newman, Phil Regan, James B. Richardson III
Juliana Rogers, Paul Schneider
Elizabeth Hawes Weinstock, Cathy Weiss, Lana Woods

Staff

Phil Wallis, *Executive Director*
Anna Barber, *Exhibitions Curator*
Ann DuCharme, *Education Director*
Katy Fuller, *Operations Director*
Teresa Kruszewski, *Visitor Services Manager*
Linsey Lee, *Oral History Curator*
Betsey Mayhew, *Finance Director*
Catherine Mayhew, *Genealogist **
Sam Morris, *Digital Services Manager*
Laura Noonan, *Oral History Assistant*
Beth Seabourne, *Museum Teacher*
Heather Seger, *Advancement Director*
Bonnie Stacy, *Chief Curator*
A. Bowdoin Van Riper, *Research Librarian &
Editor, MVM Quarterly*
* Volunteer

Captains of Cottage City

The Men Behind the Boom of the Bluffs

by SKIP FINLEY

MELTING GLACIERS, or the legendary Wampanoag figure Moshup who dragged his big toe across the land, separated the Vineyard from the mainland. Bartholomew Gosnold gave the “fair isle” he briefly explored its English name. Thomas Mayhew brought the first European settlers to Edgartown, beginning colonization, and all it involved. It was the Methodists, however, who brought folks to Wesleyan Grove—the land that became the Campground—in 1835, creating a growing colony of summer visitors that returned to the Island year after year. Doing so, they planted the idea of the Vineyard as a summer retreat, which sparked, just after the Civil War, the vision of a middle-class resort between the Campground and the sea.

Profits from the whaling industry were piling up in the late 1860s, and the Islanders whose pockets they filled sought places to invest them in order to keep them earning. The whaling industry itself—a mainstay of the Island economy since the middle of the 1810s¹—was in decline, however: damaged by Confederate raiders and undercut by the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania and Texas. With whaling ships looking less like the sure-fire investment that they had once been, Island businessmen (even whaling captains) were looking for new opportunities.

The post-Civil-War collision of those two forces put Oak Bluffs (literally) on the map, and Martha’s Vineyard on the road to worldwide fame.

The Company

The Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company (OBLWC), founded in 1866, announced its vision in a *Vineyard Gazette* advertisement on July 5, 1867, which read:

1 Alexander Starbuck, *History of the American Whale Fishery from its Earliest Inception to the Year 1876* (1878), 222.

Writer, broadcaster, columnist, and longtime Oak Bluffs resident Skip Finley is Director of Sales and Marketing for the *Vineyard Gazette*. His book on African American whaling captains is scheduled for publication next year.

Home by the Seaside:
“Oak Bluffs”
A new summer resort
One thousand lots for sale
laid out by Robert Morris Copeland, Esq., of Boston,
the well-known landscape gardener. Cheap and quiet homes
by the sea shore during the summer months. Plans available
for beautiful cottages, costing from \$300 to \$1000²

The Company had already begun to build its namesake development on 75 acres it had bought in what were then the northeastern reaches of Edgartown. The rising popularity of the Methodist Campground on the other side of Circuit Avenue gave them good reason to believe there was interest. Business however was business and there is no overlooking the fact that the development of “Oak Bluffs” as a real-estate-based investment was, at minimum, a highly speculative scheme. It took about six years, from 1866 until approximately 1872, to conceive and build the entire resort, and another ten for the company to self-immolate.

There were far more reasons for the town *not* to have been built than for its success, for which six men were principally responsible. They were led by Foxboro businessman Erastus P. Carpenter, and included:

William S. Hills, a flour merchant from Boston

William Bradley, an Edgartown shop owner and bank director

Captain Grafton Norton Collins, a retired Edgartown whaler and whaleship owner

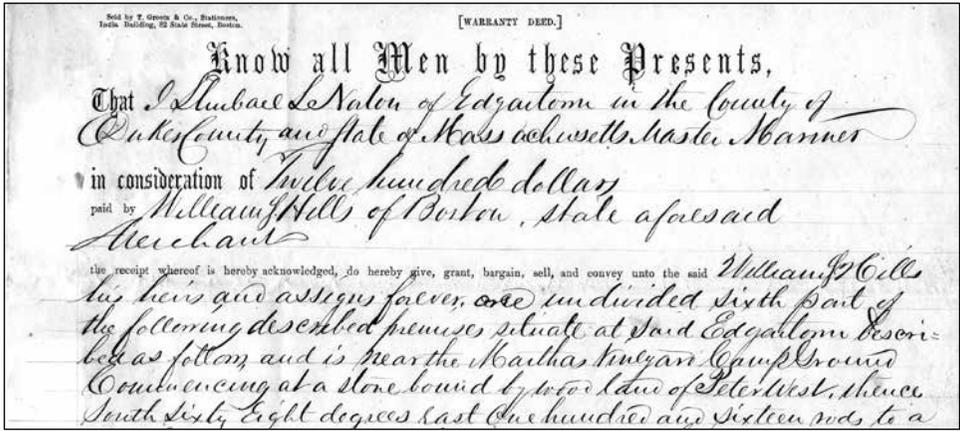
Captain Ira Darrow, a merchant mariner and Edgartown wharf-owner

Captain Shubael Lyman Norton, a merchant mariner and former owner of the land³

Norton, Collins and Bradley, born on the Island, were scions of wealthy families who had taken their inheritances and become richer on their own. Norton, seeking to immediately multiply his gain from the sale of his land with a follow-on investment, reflected the business sense that had brought them success. Darrow had come to the island and become wealthy, partly due to his entrepreneurial abilities and partly due to his political leanings, which were mirrored by many in Edgartown. Carpenter and Hills were new to the Island—summer visitors with simpler motives. They loved it so much they wanted to build homes as trophies of their success. All of these men were visionaries, men of

2 Arthur R. Railton, *History of Martha's Vineyard: How We Got to Where We Are* (Commonwealth Editions, 2006), 244.

3 Henry Beetle Hough, *Martha's Vineyard, Summer Resort, 1835-1935* (Tuttle Publishing, 1936), 62.



Deed recording Norton's sale of land "near the Campground" to Hills, on behalf of the OBLWC [MV Museum, Shubael Lyman Norton Collection (RU 619)]

ego and ambition for whom failure wasn't a consideration. These were leaders who were accustomed to using their social and political appetites to meet their personal goals. At the time they formed the Company they ranged in age from 34 (Carpenter) to 67 (Darrow).

The Partners

William Bradley (1825 – 1895)

William Bradley was a wealthy local merchant, born and raised on the Island. His father, Captain Edmund Bradley had opened a grocery store in Edgartown to which the younger Bradley had added hardware. He also owned tracts of farmland in the distant northern reaches of Edgartown, beyond Farm Pond, including the sheep pasture where, in 1835, Rev. Hebron Vincent, Jeremiah Pease, and four other men laid out what would become the Methodist Campground.⁴ He served as the postmaster of Edgartown, founded Linton, Worth & Co. (a grocery store) in Oak Bluffs, and served—like his OBLWC partner Ira Darrow—as one of the founding directors of the Martha's Vineyard National Bank, established in 1855.

During the Civil War in 1864, short on troops, President Lincoln called for more soldiers requiring a quota from Massachusetts that was shared with its towns. Publisher Edgar Marchant, realizing there were insufficient Island men came up with the idea to use tax money to pay other men to serve. His *Vineyard Gazette* editorial promulgated a concept of "Men or Money" where its towns would buy substitutes to serve in the war. "Money in plenty we have," he declared, "but men we have not, and consequently, money must buy men..." By war's end Edgartown had spent \$23,325 for non-Islanders to serve, and William Bradley was

4 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 35.

COPIES OF BILLS OF LADING,

OF THE SHIP "Union" —

CAPTAIN S. L. Norton —

FROM **CALCUTTA** TO Galle —

WHITNEY BROTHERS & CO.

Agents,

CLEARED AT THE CUSTOM-HOUSE,

CALCUTTA, June 22^d 1863 —

Part of the paper trail from Norton's career as a merchant captain. [MV Museum, Shubael Lyman Norton Collection (RU 619)]

appointed the recruiting agent.⁵

William Bradley died in 1895. An unnamed, undated newspaper article (probably from the *Vineyard Gazette*) indicated that he had arrived at his home—on Trinity Park, in the Campground that had risen from his sheep pasture—in “precarious health” and died soon afterward at age 70.

Shubael Lyman Norton

On January 23, 1790 Robert Seaton, an illiterate “Indianman Labourer,” placed his mark on a sales agreement witnessed by Thomas Cooke, then Edgartown’s Justice of the Peace. The document stated that Seaton, for a sum of £10, conveyed to Samuel Norton a parcel of land “commonly called and known by the name of Farm Neck,” which roughly includes today’s Cottage City Historic District.⁶ Shubael L. Norton was a descendant of Samuel Norton and, at the end of the Civil War, owned the parcel of land that would become the site of the Oak Bluffs development.

Norton was born on October 26, 1824 very close to the site where—with his help—Union Chapel would one day be built. He followed his father

5 Chilmark spent \$5,152 and Tisbury \$22,621. William Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War* (E. P. Dutton, 1968), 164-170; Richard Miller, “The Island’s Civil War Draft Protest: Its Moment in History,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, February 1995, 105-107; *Vineyard Gazette*, 19 February, 18 March, and 25 March 1864.

6 Edgartown Deeds, p. 384, Office of the Recorder of Deeds.

(also named Shubael) to sea, but spent his career in merchant ships—a far safer occupation than his father’s trade of whaling. He became captain of his own ship in 1852, and remained at sea until 1865, expanding his fortune with voyages to ports in India, China, and Australia. He married Phebe A. Davis of Edgartown in 1849, and the two raised a family of three daughters: Susan (born 1850), Annie (1855), and Ellen (1866).⁷

It was Norton’s idea to divide up his own land into salable lots and turn it into a summer resort. The first map of the resort-to-be drawn up by the OBLWC was dated September 14, 1866, and Norton was president of the Company for its first two years (1866-1868). A document recording the transfer of the land from the Norton family to the Company—signed by both Shubael and Phebe Norton, and dated June 22, 1870—records the sale price as \$1,613.40 (nearly \$27,000 today).⁸ The couple built their own home on Hartford Park, the long strip of green space bordered by Pequot and Massasoit Avenues.⁹ Norton was no longer president of the Company by this time, but he remained its principal agent until 1880.¹⁰ More than half of the thousand lots that the Company offered for sale were sold by Norton personally, from his office at the head of the steamer wharf.¹¹

Norton died in 1901 at the age of 76. Erastus Carpenter’s sometime friend and partner and sometime antagonist, he is hailed today as “The Father of Oak Bluffs.”¹²

Grafton Norton Collins

Captain Grafton Norton Collins was born in Edgartown at the beginning of the whaling era, the oldest of eight children born to Palfrey and Dorcas Worth Collins. His father was a ship rigger who made his living on Osborn’s Wharf, doing maintenance and repair work on the ships that docked there in order to prepare them for their next voyages. Grafton himself chose to go to sea as a whaler, becoming a mate while still in his 20s and a captain at 32. He commanded the Edgartown-based whaling ship *Walter Scott* on two back-to-back voyages to the North Pacific: the first from January 1852 to August 1855 and the second from November 1855 to June 1859. The profits from his harvest of sperm oil, whale oil and whale bone (as baleen was called) was worth the equivalent of \$1.3 million dollars today, of which his share would have been roughly \$120,000.

Collins retired after the second voyage of the *Walter Scott*, preferring—

7 *Vineyard Gazette*, 13 September 1889.

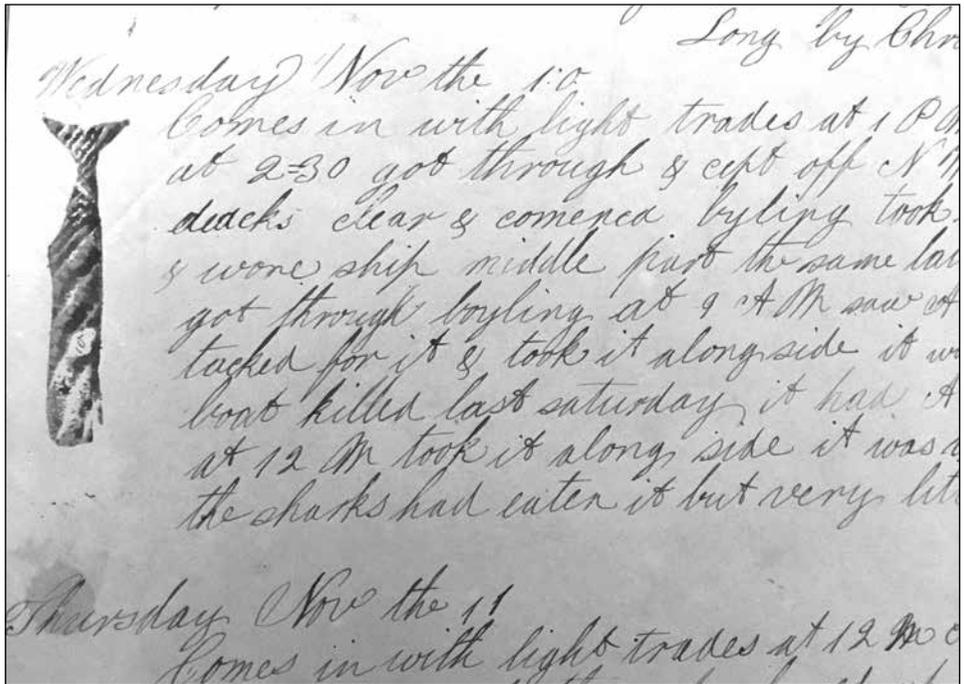
8 Edgartown Deeds, pp. 89-90, Office of the Recorder of Deeds

9 Chris Stoddard, *A Centennial History of Cottage City* (Oak Bluffs Historical Commission, 1980), 80.

10 *Vineyard Gazette*, 13 September 1889.

11 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 244.

12 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 163.



Log entry from the second voyage of the *Walter Scott* under the command of Grafton Norton Collins [MV Museum, Whaling Log Collection, Log #9]

like his uncle and namesake Grafton Norton—to invest in whaling ships rather than sailing them.¹³ He married Averick H. Norton in 1860, and the first of their three sons was born in 1861.¹⁴ In 1862 his uncle died, and—having no family of his own—made Collins the heir to his fortune and his business interests: whaleships, wharves, and companies on both the Island and the mainland. Collins was described as short and stout, bald on the back of his head and bewhiskered.¹⁵ When the OBLWC was formed, Collins became its first treasurer, and his summer house was one of the earliest built in the Oak Bluffs development.¹⁶

Ira Darrow

Ira Darrow was born in Waterford, Connecticut. The master of a fishing vessel, he came to the Island in 1825, married Martha Wyer Norton of Nantucket in 1828, and began operating a packet ship—a vessel that car-

13 Grafton Norton (1777-1862) was one of the most successful shipowners, and one of the wealthiest men, in Edgartown. He owned major interests in a half-dozen whaling vessels (including the *Walter Scott*), and was the proprietor of Commercial Wharf, located at the foot of what is now Cooke Street.

14 *Vineyard Gazette*, 15 August 1944.

15 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 62.

16 *Vineyard Gazette*, 2 August 1867.

ried passengers and freight over a defined route on a more or less regular schedule—between New Bedford and Edgartown. He was appointed master of the Nantucket lightship (a specially designed vessel with oil-burning lamps at the top of its masts, which functioned like a floating mid-ocean lighthouse) in 1844, and won the respect of local mariners for his handling of the job. He owned “Darrow’s Wharf”—the third of the five that lined the Edgartown waterfront¹⁷—and went on to hold a series of municipal offices ashore, including Commissioner of Wrecks, Notary Public, and (briefly) Customs Collector.

Throughout his life and career Darrow was deeply involved in national politics, often on the wrong side of history. The Vineyard, like the nation, split into four factions—two Republican and two Democratic—during the run-up to the bitterly contested election of 1860. Republicans outnumbered Democrats on the Island, as they did throughout the North, but Darrow’s leadership of the local Democratic faction that (in an effort to appease the South) supported pro-slavery candidate John Breckenridge made him a minority within a minority.

The post of Customs Collector was a political appointment, and in 1860—the last year that pro-Southern Democrat James Buchanan held the White House—its Republican incumbent, Constant Norton, was ousted in favor of Darrow. *Gazette* editor Edgar Marchant, aligned with the Northern Democrats who supported the candidacy of Stephen A. Douglas, chose party over faction and declared Darrow, leader of the Southern Democrats, “a smart, enterprising, energetic man [who] will doubtless make a good and faithful officer.”¹⁸ Darrow did, but not for long. After Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln—who won 59% of the vote Island-wide and 62% in Edgartown—took office in March 1861, he was quickly ousted again to make way for a Collector (Jeremiah Pease, Jr.) from the winning party.¹⁹

Darrow been connected to Marchant for more than a decade. Little more than a year after he published the first issue of the *Vineyard Gazette* on May 14, 1846, Marchant began promoting the Island as a resort destination, declaring it the “Watering Place” of the East Coast.²⁰ Darrow became one of the first to work toward implementing Marchant’s prediction when, in 1851, he erected a “commodious bathing house. . .opened for the accommodation of the public” on land between his North Water Street home and Edgartown Harbor.²¹ Darrow also partnered with Shubael Lyman Norton

17 Also known as the Coal Wharf, it is now (2018) the site of the Seafood Shanty restaurant.

18 Florence Kern, “Customs Collectors at Edgartown, 1855-1861,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, February 1991, 99-120, on p. 114.

19 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 200.

20 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 170.

21 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 198.

to build a second set of bathhouses—popular with summer visitors to the Campground—on the oceanfront in Oak Bluffs, on the beachfront known as the Inkwell today.²² In 1861, out of a job after only a year, Darrow went back to his business enterprises, which were rapidly making him one of the wealthiest men on the Island. In 1865 he took another step into the rapidly growing tourist industry when he was elected vice president of the Martha's Vineyard Steamboat Company, a company dedicated to acquiring ships to transit the hordes of new visitors, attracted to America's brand new "watering place."²³

Ira Darrow died in 1871, leaving his wife and children 20 shares of the Martha's Vineyard National Bank (of which he had been a director since its founding in 1855), a \$10,000 interest in the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company, half-interest in a store on Osborn's Wharf in Edgartown, half-interest in each of three ships, a cottage with a barn on the Campground, and the family home in Edgartown (then valued at \$3,500).²⁴ Altogether, the value of bounty may have had a value of over a half million dollars in 2016.

He lived to see his and his partners' dream of a summer resort come to pass, to participate in its financing and construction, and to see just a touch of its early success, but he was gone before the beginning of the long downward spiral that led to its financial demise.

The Off-Islanders: E. P. Carpenter and William Hills

Left on their own, these four Islanders might never have pooled their resources to start a company dedicated to turning empty land into a thriving resort. That they did so owes much to E.P. Carpenter and William Hills: summer visitors from the mainland who came to the Vineyard and saw its potential with fresh eyes.

Erastus Payson Carpenter was born in Foxboro, Massachusetts in 1832, the son of Captain Daniel Carpenter—a veteran of the War of 1812 who became a successful manufacturer²⁵—and Abigail Payson. By the time he came to the Vineyard in 1864 and 1865, to attend the Methodist camp meetings in Wesleyan Grove, his own business achievements were already impressive. He had built the world's second largest straw manufacturing company, the Union Straw Works, which employed thousands of people. He also served in local political offices, acting as Selectman, Surveyor of Highways, and Overseer of the Poor for his home town.²⁶

22 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 57.

23 Railton, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, 238.

24 Kern, "Customs Collectors," 120.

25 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 62.

26 The titles are listed on the letterhead of his business correspondence, some of which is in the Grafton Norton Collins Collection (RU 403) in the Museum archives.

Delighted by the Island, and sensing its potential as a summer resort, Carpenter set out to build a cottage in the Campground but found that, according to the rules of the newly formed Camp Meeting Association, he could not buy a lot outright, only lease it—a fact that remains true to this day. After setting the development of Oak Bluffs in motion the following year, Carpenter built his own home on Ocean Park. Completed in 1868 at a cost of \$12,000, it is assessed today at over \$1.5 million.²⁷

William Hills, a close friend of Carpenter’s, also made his fortune in an ordinary but essential product. Hills’ specialty was flour, and with his brother Joel he operated Hills & Brother, a firm that sold its own flour as well others’ flour on commission. Together, they conceived of the idea for the OBLWC, inviting Bradley, Norton, Collins, and Darrow to join the enterprise, bringing their capital (and, in Norton’s case, their land) with them.²⁸

Triumph, Disaster, and Secession

The six partners’ total investment into the new resort is widely acknowledged to have been \$300,000 total. William Bradley’s contribution was \$30,000²⁹ but there are no specific figures for the other five. They spent their pooled money quickly and aggressively, creating roads, parks, and public buildings. Several of the latter—like Union Chapel and the Arcade building at 31 Circuit Avenue—still remain, and are among the jewels of the Oak Bluffs Historic District. The landmark Sea View House hotel, however, lasted only twenty years.

<u>Structure</u>	<u>Cost</u> ³⁰	<u>Year</u>
The Land	\$3,000	1866
The Wharf	5,000	1867
The Arcade	6,000	1867
Union Chapel	16,000	1871
Sea View House	132,000	1872

The development was guided by a plan drawn up by Robert Morris Copeland, a cemetery designer from Boston who they had hired for the purpose. Carpenter, sensing the value of open space in increasing the desirability of the lots, insisted that the Company should allow for more of it than originally planned, and expand the total number of parks.³¹ The village of Riverside, Illinois, designed in 1869 by Calvert Vaux and Frederick

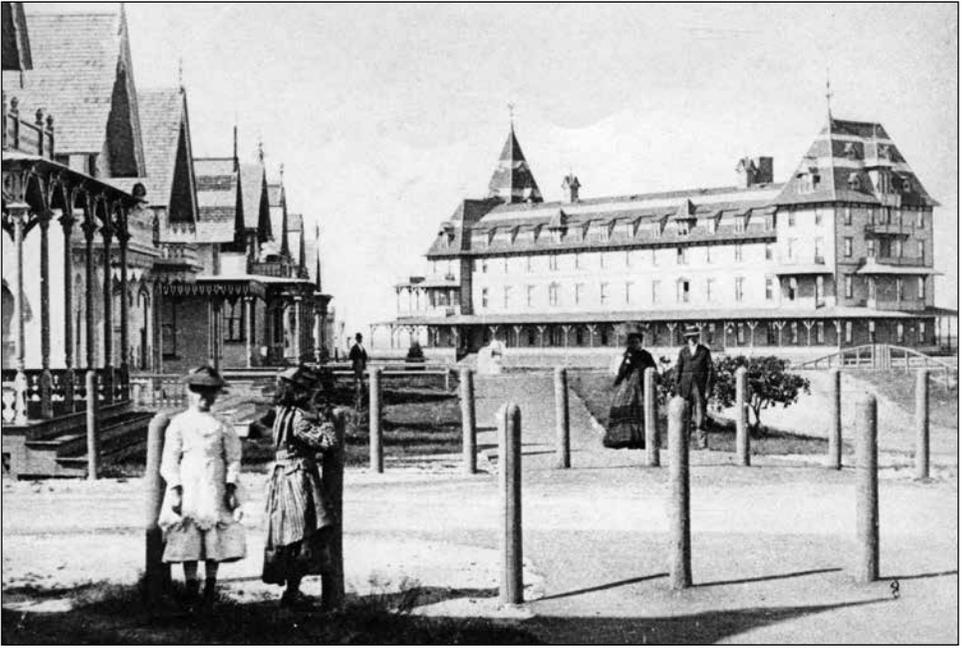
27 Peter A. Jones, *Oak Bluffs: The Cottage City Years on Martha’s Vineyard* (Arcadia Press, 2014), 67. The cost of construction was the equivalent of \$183,480 today.

28 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 242.

29 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 62.

30 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 70, 76, 77.

31 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 244.



Two of the jewels of the OBLWC development: The Sea View House, as seen from Ocean Park [MV Museum, Basil Welch Collection (RU 465)]

Law Olmsted,³² is often claimed to be the first planned community. The development of Oak Bluffs actually preceded it by 2-3 years, however, due in large part to Carpenter's vision and determination.

Early Oak Bluffs blossomed, its growth geometric as middle-class people from Massachusetts and other parts of the Northeast discovered the pleasant new seaside watering place with its wonderful summer climate and quaint, picturesque homes. The Company's business model, based on lot sales, proved unsustainable and quickly unraveled. Despite their clear vision and conviction, the partners often found they were conflicted as the financial situation clarified itself.

A balance sheet from October 1872—halfway through the Company's lifetime—shows the total outlay to date as \$279,955.19 (a little over \$5 million in today's dollars). That figure, however, was heavily discounted through depreciation. The four-story Sea View House, located at the head of the wharf and then open only a few months, was carried on the books at a value of \$80,000. In reality, the furnishings alone had cost nearly 40% of that amount. The aggressive depreciation of the Company's assets was designed to hide its most glaring financial problem: It had only 183 lots remaining for sale, and virtually no cash on hand. On the other side of the

³² Olmsted, the best-known landscape architect of the nineteenth century, was responsible for (among other projects) Central Park in New York City.

ledger were formidable liabilities: loans of \$40,000 from the New Bedford Institute for Savings, \$5,000 from Norton and Darrow's Martha's Vineyard National Bank, and nearly \$17,000 from other banks, for a total debt obligation of nearly \$62,000.³³

By 1873 everyone had heard of the magnificent seaside watering place that was Oak Bluffs. Norton had personally sold more than 500 of the available 1,000 lots, and Carpenter himself had sold hundreds more, including most of the choicest parcels along the border of Ocean Park. In the cold light of day, however, there were not enough unsold lots remaining to generate the funds required to extinguish the debt. The financial crisis known as the "Panic of 1873" and President Ulysses S. Grant's response—contracting the money supply and raising interest rates—made matters even worse for those in debt. The nearby Bellevue Heights development went bankrupt, along with most of the 17 others that speculators had established in the wake of the OBLWC. The Company itself would barely make it into the 1880s.

Katama and the Railroad

Oak Bluffs, along with nearby developments like Wesleyan Grove and Vineyard Highlands, was still part of Edgartown in the 1870s. Edgartown, suffering economically from the collapse of the whaling industry, greedily sought to capture some of the cash being lavished on summer homes in the northernmost part of its town by creating a new resort community in the southernmost part, on the sandy plains beside Katama Bay.

Captain Nathan Jernegan, who had lost a substantial amount of money when the Dukes County Shoe and Boot Company failed in 1861, founded the Katama Land Company in 1872. He enlisted his close friend and fellow whaling captain Grafton Collins, along with Erastus Carpenter and Joel Hills (the "Brother" of the Hills & Brother flour company). Carpenter was selected as chairman of the new company, Hills became secretary, and Robert Morris Copeland was again hired to lay out the new plan for the development. As in Oak Bluffs, a newly-built wharf with an elaborate hotel at its head was intended to serve as a formal entryway to the development. Visitors would arrive by ship, pass through an archway at the center of the hotel, and emerge into a mosaic of house lots beyond. The hotel was completed at the end of the 1873 season, but it became readily apparent that boat transportation was too inefficient to bring the throngs of visitors the success of the resort required.

The new, seemingly better plan involved building a nine-mile, narrow-gauge railroad from the docks at Oak Bluffs to the outskirts of Edgartown, and then onward to the development at Katama. Darrow and

33 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 72-74.



The MVRR train at Katama, with the Mattakeset Lodge in the background [MV Museum, Photo Collection]

Bradley chose not to participate, but the other members of the OBLWC threw themselves enthusiastically into the new venture.³⁴ E. P. Carpenter (\$2,000), Grafton Norton Collins (\$2,000) and Shubael L. Norton (\$500) all invested their personal funds in the new project, and Carpenter's Foxboro company added another \$500. Together, they put up 17.5% of the total \$40,000 cost. The largest investment by far, however, was that of the Town of Edgartown, which contributed \$15,000 that it borrowed from two off-island banks. This act of financial hubris resulted in condemnation by the *Vineyard Gazette* even though its publisher, Edgar Marchant, was an incorporator.

To the investors, it seemed like an obvious money-maker. Railroads were, after all, booming in mid-century America. Thirty-three thousand miles of track—including the transcontinental line completed in 1869—had been laid between 1862 and 1873.³⁵ What could possibly go wrong?

The answer turned out to be: "Practically everything."

The Panic of 1873—the worst possible moment to build a new railroad—had struck as work on the MVRR began. When the line was completed, and service begun, in 1874, ticket sales were tepid, and limited to the three summer months. The MVRR's most persistent problem, how-

34 Arthur R. Railton, "Katama: How the Railroad Came to Be and Not Be," *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1995, 77-107, on p. 107.

35 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 100.



A dream literally built on sand: the most exposed stretch of the MVRR line, along the crest of what is now State Beach [MV Museum, Basil Welch Collection (RU 465)]

ever, was its tracks. Edgar Marchant, extolling the new company's virtues in the *Gazette*, had crowed that "nothing has ever equaled the building of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad. Sixty-six days ago the trees from which the ties were made were growing in Maine, and the iron for the rails was in the mines in Pennsylvania."³⁶ The ties and rails, however, were laid along the Oak Bluffs waterfront, and along the low strip of sand that is now State Beach. Grafton Norton Collins, whose mariner's eye saw they would likely be swept away by wind, wave, and tide, argued for a more sheltered, but more expensive, route further inland . . . and lost.³⁷ The railroad, designed to operate only in the summer months, had to be partially rebuilt each spring, to undo the damage done by winter storms.

Nearly \$91,000 was ultimately spent on the MVRR, which limped through twenty-two years of operations without ever turning a solid profit. It closed down in 1896, leaving behind financial default and a right of way marked by raised roadbeds in the Katama woods and pilings along Nantucket Sound still visible at low tide today.³⁸ Long before, in 1877, the off-island banks that

³⁶ Hough, *Summer Resort*, 112.

³⁷ Sarah Hutcheson, "A Finding Aid to the Grafton N. Collins Collection, 1862-1888" [Record Unit 403], Martha's Vineyard Museum.

³⁸ Walter Blackwell, *Tracing the Route of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad* (Self-Published, 1973); Tom Dunlop, "Relics, Ruins, and Remnants," *Martha's*

held Edgartown's \$15,000 note sold it at auction to Antone L. Sylvia of New Bedford. He paid \$315. The resort at Katama suffered a similar fate. The houses were never built, and the Mattakeset Lodge, like the railroad that served it, struggled to turn a profit. It was sold at auction for \$16,250 in 1879, to cover unpaid taxes for the years 1876 and 1877.³⁹

Cottage City

A *Porter's American Monthly* correspondent, writing in 1877, reported that: "Oak Bluffs exceeded our anticipation . . . the walks along its borders next to the ocean having no equal, within our knowledge, except that of the Cliffs at Newport. The cottages are numerous, large and attractive. . . ." The leaders of Edgartown, whose town center was being eclipsed by the new summer resort, could not have been happy. The *American Monthly* article mentioned Edgartown village only in the context of being connected to Oak Bluffs by its railroad.

The partners of the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company also had little reason to be happy, despite such glowing reports. They were under tremendous financial stress. People continued to visit Oak Bluffs, and to build summer homes on lots they had purchased, but it was the Company's obligation to provide repairs and render service to the new community they had brought into existence. Edgartown, not surprisingly, was unwilling to assist. The town had invested \$15,000 into the railroad to take visitors away from Oak Bluffs, and another \$70,000 to build a road from Oak Bluffs to Edgartown in 1872. It refused, however, to construct a bridge over the opening to Lagoon Pond, which would have benefitted residents of Oak Bluffs, Eastville, and the Highlands by shortening the six-mile trip to Vineyard Haven.⁴⁰ Taxes paid by the 15,000 seasonal homeowners in Oak Bluffs accounted for over 60% of Edgartown's revenues, but the 500 year-round residents were refused fire or police protection.⁴¹

It wasn't long before the cries for secession began to crescendo. The movement was backed by twenty-five prominent Oak Bluffs taxpayers and led by three year-round residents: Joseph Dias, a retired whaling captain who owned the Vineyard Grove House hotel; boatbuilder Ichabod Norton Luce of Farm Neck; and businessman Howes Norris of Eastville, whose business interests included a wharf on the east side of Vineyard Haven Harbor, near the present hospital. Norris used his money to buy the press and equipment of the struggling *Island Review* newspaper, and used it to publish a new paper, the *Cottage City Star*, which became the first serious rival to the Edgartown-focused *Gazette*. The *Star* printed news from across the Island

Vineyard Magazine, December 2007, <http://mvmagazine.com/news/2007/12/01/relics-ruins-and-remnants>

39 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 209.

40 Railton, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, 251, 260-262.

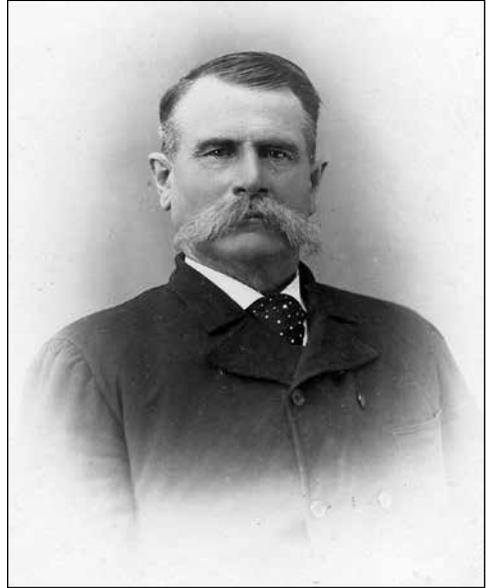
41 Railton, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, 266.

(everywhere *but* Edgartown), and advocated tirelessly for secession.

Splitting off the northern part of Edgartown as its own town would, however, require an act of the state legislature. That, in turn, required a change in representation. When the calls for secession began the Vineyard's representative to the state legislature was Beriah T. Hillman, a Chilmark native who had become a leading citizen of Edgartown and firmly aligned with its interests. Opposed by Edgartown, and so by Hillman, petitions for secession had died on the floor of the legislature three years in a row. In the election held on November 4, 1879, however, Hillman was narrowly defeated, 449 votes to 409 (307 of which came from Edgartown), by Stephen Flanders of Chilmark. Flanders owed his small plurality to two groups: "colored" residents of Oak Bluffs, and Wampanoag men from Gay Head who had recently been granted the right to vote. Twenty-four of the twenty-five new voters from Gay Head cast their ballots for Flanders, and an attempt by Hillman supporters to throw out the entire Gay Head vote failed.⁴²

Ichabod Norton Luce was not only a vigorous secessionist (and a vociferous opponent of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad) but a widely known abolitionist who had become friends with Frederick Douglass.⁴³ After the election, Hillman supporters composed—and circulated in Edgartown—an insulting parody of a popular children's song aimed at those they saw as responsible for their loss. Norris reprinted it in the *Star* under the headline "Stolen Thunder," describing it as "an attempt at parody at the expense of our worthy colored friends" and expressing the hope that "our Gay Head friends will read this 'poem.'"

*One little nigger feeling rather blue,
Sent for another nig to vote for Flanders too.
Three little niggers thought they needed more
Sent for another nig and that made four.
Four little niggers feared their number small,
Beckoned to another nig just within call.*



Stephen Flanders of Chilmark, whose election to the state legislature presaged the independence of Oak Bluffs [MV Museum, Photo Collection]

42 Railton, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, 265; Hough, *Summer Resort*, 163.

43 Skip Finley, "Oak Bluffs" [column], *Vineyard Gazette*, 2 September 2016.

*Six little niggers standing in the hall,
 Shouted for the seventh nig as loud as they could bawl.
 Seven little niggers knew their cause was great,
 Called for another nig, and that made eight.
 Eight little niggers standing in a line,
 Called for another nig, and that made nine.
 Nine little niggers—neither voting men,
 Called for another nig and that made ten.
 Up stepped Ichabod now to applaud,
 And praise the little nigs who helped in the fraud . . .*⁴⁴

Flanders, meanwhile, took his seat in the legislature, and shepherded through legislation to split off the northern parts of Edgartown—Oak Bluffs, Wesleyan Grove, Vineyard Highlands, and Eastville—as the new town of Cottage City.⁴⁵ It became independent on February 17, 1880. Erastus Carpenter was delighted, Edgartown homeowner and stalwart Grafton Collins less so.⁴⁶

The End of the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company

In 1878 the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company sold the Sea View House, along with the wharf, boardwalk, and bath houses, to Henry Brownell, whose company—Bullock and Brownell—had been the hotel’s management team. The sale brought the company \$110,000, which it used to pay down its considerable debts.⁴⁷ The *Boston Herald’s* story on the sale summed up the problem succinctly: the company had “expended several hundred thousands of dollars in improvements, or considerably more than has ever been received from the sale of its lots.”⁴⁸

Three years later, seeking ways to recoup more funds through the sale of land, the OBLWC—picking up on an idea proposed by Carpenter—floated a plan to offer the town of Cottage City ownership of Ocean, Waban, Hartford and Pennacook Parks, along with nine avenues. The plan contradicted Carpenter’s earlier assurances to buyers that the Company had never actually conveyed the land, or counted it among its assets. Grafton Norton Collins was inalterably opposed to the plan, insisting the company had no authority to make such a gift. Shubael Norton, who had mortgaged what was left of his

44 Arthur R. Railton, “When Gay Headers First Got the Vote They Changed the Island Forever,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 2000, 129-137. Composed in 1868 and performed both as “Ten Little Nigger Boys” and “Ten Little Injun Boys,” the original song was a staple of blackface minstrel shows. The nursery rhyme “Ten Little Indians” is a heavily modified version.

45 Changed to Oak Bluffs in 1907.

46 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 305.

47 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 62, 79; Stoddard, *Centennial History*, 79

48 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 277-278.

farm in a last-ditch effort to keep the Company afloat, agreed with Collins.⁴⁹ Writing to him in August 1882, he stated that—along with mortgaging his farm—he had done all he could to sell the parks in an effort to recoup some of his own investment and legal costs. He agreed with Collins that the parks ought to be sold, strongly disagreeing with Carpenter.⁵⁰

Retrospectively it isn't patently clear if Carpenter's purpose was desperation or mildly extortive or a practical means of pricing the parks for sale. The company's position was they had supplied the design, construction—and even the concrete of the streets and were looking for recompense. Over a multi-year period the town refused to decide what to do about the ostensible gift. Carpenter eventually changed tactics in 1884, offering to sell the parks to the town for \$7,500 payable over 25 years, interest free. The town, however, still refused to move on the offer. In March 1885, the Company's investors, lost patience and insisted that they be put up for sale to the highest bidder. The Company had admitted defeat; its business life had outlived its future. They proffered a sale to a Boston attorney, George C. Abbott, and his financial partner Alvin Neal for \$7,500 and a convoluted legal battle ensued.⁵¹

The OBLWC directors were split, at times agreeing the parks had value on the open market, but at others agreeing that they should remain the property of the Town. Ultimately though, all of the Company directors—except Collins, who sided with Abbott—eventually testified that the parks could not be separately sold. The case went to trial in May 1886 and, to the delight of George Abbott, the judge ruled against the town, declaring that the parks were Abbott's property and that he was free to sell them if he wished. The town appealed to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in 1887, and the court—in an opinion delivered by future US Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.—overturned the lower court's ruling. Abbott, chagrined, bought out Collins' shares of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad, in order to gain enough leverage to oust Carpenter and his allies from the company's leadership.⁵² This gave him a position from which to reopen the case, which he did in 1891. The OBLWC directors (aside from Darrow, who had died, and Collins, who continued to support Abbott) repeated their testimony that the parks were always in the public—not private—domain. More than one thousand pages of testimony later, the Supreme Judicial Court issued its final ruling in September 1891.⁵³ It went against Abbott, who lost the \$7,500 he had paid for the parks.

49 Stoddard, *Centennial History*, 80.

50 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 168-169.

51 Railton, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, 279-281.

52 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 176-177.

53 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 178-182; a copy of the printed transcript of the trial is in the Museum library.



Ocean Park, the largest tract at issue in the Parks Case [MV Museum Postcard Collection (RU 359), Box 2, Parks section]

The Success of Failure

A later publisher of the *Vineyard Gazette*, Henry Beetle Hough, eloquently summed up the achievement of these visionary men:

The Captains who dominated the summer resort development of the past century had much in common, although they were as different as the planets. They were individualists, accustomed to command, and with a strong passion for persons and things which they regarded as their own. To them there was no sharp dividing line between adventure and business...it is impossible to imagine what the course of events on the Island would have been if it had not been for the captains and the promoters.”⁵⁴

Today, arriving on a ferry, Oak Bluffs framed by Ocean Park is the picture visitors see in their mind’s eye when they think of Martha’s Vineyard, the iconic scene created by the passion of the Captains of Cottage City. Oak Bluffs’ nine original parks—Ocean, Hartford, Waban, Penacook, Niantic, Hiawatha, Naushon, Nashawena and Petaluma comprised 25 acres,⁵⁵ fully a third of the new town’s total area. Oak Bluffs—recognized as the town with the most parks per capita, worldwide—continues to fulfill Erastus Carpenter’s dream.

54 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 266.

55 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 168.

In the Beginning

Founding Members of the Want to Know Club

by CATHERINE M. MAYHEW

Author's Note: To honor the 125th anniversary of the Want to Know Club this year, I wanted to learn about the ladies who were the first members of the Club. I hadn't expected the difficulties of determining who "Mrs. Addie Smith" was, or discovering that the first ladies had invited one more than the specified number of 20 members. This is the result . . . originally presented at a meeting of the Club in February 2018.

ELIZABETH DAGGETT CREATED the Want to Know Club of Vineyard Haven, the first women's club on the Island, in 1893. The idea was new then, but other women's clubs soon appeared across the United States. The timing was perfect. By the end of the nineteenth century the growth of the middle class had changed life for many women at home; it became common to hire help for housework and childcare. The Chautauqua adult-education movement, founded in upstate New York in 1874, was gathering momentum (though itinerant "tent Chautauquas" did not begin for another decade) and there had been an increase in church-sponsored intellectual lectures. You may smile, but these were considered an important alternative to theater and vaudeville.

Newspapers focused on global news; everyone knew what was happening locally. Most Island men were Republicans, owned their houses, and many were involved in town affairs. Husbands and brothers of the Club women had fought in the Civil War though they called it "the War of the Rebellion." Veterans joined the Vineyard chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), and its associated Women's Relief Corps included Club members. Most of these ladies were suffragists and also Baptists or Methodists, with a few Episcopalians. Several belonged to the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the new Island chapter of Daughters of the American

Catherine M. Mayhew has been associated with the Martha's Vineyard Museum since it was the Dukes County Historical Society, of which she was a Council member and treasurer. She has been the Museum's genealogist for more than thirty years.

Revolution (DAR), also headed by Elizabeth Daggett.¹

She was the daughter of Constant Norton, a farmer on Farm Neck. At only 16 she had married a 19-year-old cousin, George Luce, but he was lost at sea only four months later. At age 20 she married another cousin, Grafton Luce Daggett, who was captain of the steamer *Nantucket*—one of several paddlewheel ferries that served the Island in this period.

Captain Daggett's home—now the Vineyard Haven office of the Martha's Vineyard Savings Bank—was just up the hill from Mansion House corner. Elizabeth was home on August 11, 1883, the day of the terrible fire that burned the buildings along both sides of Main Street, including the Baptist Church at the corner of Spring and Main. As the fire rushed nearer to her house, she spread quilts and heavy blankets on the roof and wet them thoroughly, bringing water in buckets up through the skylight. Desperately she called for help. The story is that an unknown young man appeared, saying he came from a vessel in the harbor. He promptly began carrying the heavy buckets to the roof. When the fire was finally over, the young man disappeared, leaving his cap which he had laid aside. The house was saved, and he never came back for the cap.² The Daggetts later moved to William Street—or Williams Street, as it was then called—and their daughter's family later lived there.

In 1892 Mrs. Daggett was the first woman elected to town office in Tisbury and served for nine years on the Tisbury School Committee. This was many years before women could vote. Her daughter Annie, married to a teacher named Charles Lord, left the Island for Pennsylvania the same year.³ Elizabeth was 57 when, in 1893, the earliest Club minutes record that she suggested the idea of a club to two younger married women—Carla Coye, 47, and Caroline Castello, 46, both childless—who lived on Main Street.⁴

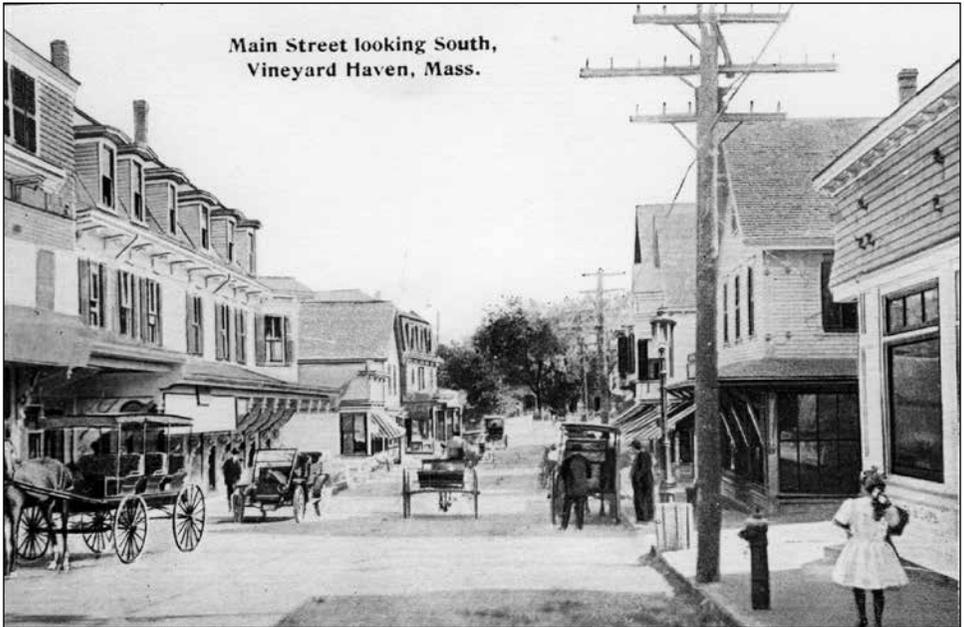
Carla Coye was born Carolyn Holton in Vernon, Connecticut, but gave her name as Carla when, at 18, she attended the Providence Musical Institute in Rhode Island. She married watch repairman Henry Coye in 1872, becoming his second wife. They came to the Island in 1882, and Henry established himself as a jeweler and optician, with shops in Vineyard Ha-

1 On Vineyard life in the late 1880s and 1890s, see Arthur R. Railton, *The History of Martha's Vineyard: How We Got to Where We Are* (Beverly, MA: Commonwealth Editions, 2006), ch. 9.

2 Doris S. Hough and Rebecca Renear, *Old Houses in Vineyard Haven, 1712-1830* (Vineyard Haven: Tisbury Tercentenary Commission, 1971).

3 Except where otherwise noted, information on the lives of the Club members is drawn from standard historical and genealogical reference sources on Vineyard Haven available in the library of the Martha's Vineyard Museum and listed at the end of the article.

4 Carrie Castello, Minutes of the Want-to-Know Club, 1893-1896. Held by the Club (hereafter WTK Minutes).



Main Street looking South,
Vineyard Haven, Mass.

Main Street, Vineyard Haven, about 1904. The girl in the foreground is standing in front of "Castello's Block," built in 1901 on the site previously occupied by the Tashmoo Inn. Carolyn Coye's house is on the same side of the street, just beyond the parked wagon [MV Museum, Postcard Collection (RU 359), Box 4, Main Street section]

ven and Oak Bluffs. They lived on Main Street opposite Union Street, a few houses from the Tashmoo Inn. She died a widow in 1921.

Caroline Castello, born Carrie Walker, was 46. She and her husband Harry were both born—the children of English immigrants—in Barrington, Rhode Island, where they married in 1872. The couple moved to Vineyard Haven in 1887, joined the Episcopal Church, and opened one of the town's first hotels, the Tashmoo Inn. Carrie mostly managed the hotel because Harry was busy helping develop the town water system. The Inn originally stood at the northwest corner of Church and Main Streets, diagonally opposite the current Leslie's drugstore.⁵ In 1901 the Inn was moved to the corner of Tashmoo Avenue—the lot where the Montessori School now stands. Carrie died at her home on nearby Greenwood Avenue in 1934, aged 85.

These three—Elizabeth, Carla, and Carrie—met at Elizabeth's home and decided they would each invite two more ladies to the Club, making a total of nine members.⁶

They first invited Anne E. Woods, who was much older and a widow, new to the Island.⁷ Born in Ohio, she'd lived in Alabama and Georgia, and

5 Eliot Eldridge Macy, ed. *The Captain's Daughters of Martha's Vineyard* (Old Greenwich, CT: Chatham Press, 1984), 91.

6 WTK Minutes

7 WTK Minutes

still had a home in Washington DC, where she died in 1911. Her husband had been an Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court, and her brother was a US Senator from Alabama. Both men were carpetbaggers—northerners who went south to take advantage of opportunities created by Reconstruction—who left Ohio for Alabama immediately after the war. Mrs. Woods withdrew from the Club before the first meeting, though her unmarried daughter Florence Woods did join two years later.⁸

Addie Smith, a wealthy childless widow of 48 and a DAR member, joined next. She had been born Martha Adelina Beetle, daughter of Capt. Henry Beetle of Edgartown, but was known as Addie. She was the second wife of master mariner and ship owner Capt. Pressbury Luce Smith of Tisbury, and they lived on William Street. He had died in 1891, and she later lived on Spring Street, near Main, where she herself died in 1928, aged 83.

Addie Butler was 53. She lived in the house at the southeast corner of Spring and Franklin Streets, which was built by her father John Howland. A Vineyard Haven girl, Adelaide Howland had married a town boy, Winthrop Butler. Winthrop was in Harvard Medical School when they married in 1863, and they moved in with her family. He quit school to serve as a surgeon in the US Navy during the Civil War, and returned to school after peace was declared. He became a very popular doctor on the Island and died in 1897. Addie died a widow in 1928, age 88, having no children.

Sarah A. Buckley, 53, had been born Sarah Ann Luce, the daughter of Capt. Obed Luce of Eastville. She was married to another master mariner—Capt. William Buckley, from England—had who retired as captain of a coastal steamer. They had two daughters and a son. One daughter married Stephen Carey Luce and she, Mary J. Luce, became a Club member two years after her mother. Sarah died an invalid on March 3, 1907, at the age of 72, and her husband died exactly 4 weeks later.

The next name on the list of original members was “Mrs. Fannie Smith;” this was a puzzle. There were two women named Fannie Smith in Vineyard Haven. Both had married Islanders named Alexander Smith. The older woman was always “Fannie W.” and was busy with several children. After comparing several records, I selected the other Mrs. Fannie Smith as the more likely Club member, as she appeared with no initial in Club records.

This Mrs. Fannie Smith was 44 years old and lived on William Street. Fannie Bradford Fish was born in Westport (with a Vineyard name) in 1849, and raised, along with two siblings, in the New Bedford Orphan’s Home, after her father died. She was adopted and raised in Mattapoisett. Her first husband was Pierre Lair, a mariner from France who abandoned her and their two sons. In 1880 she divorced him in absentia and moved to Vineyard Haven to live with her married sister. In 1884 she married Alexander

8 WTK Minutes

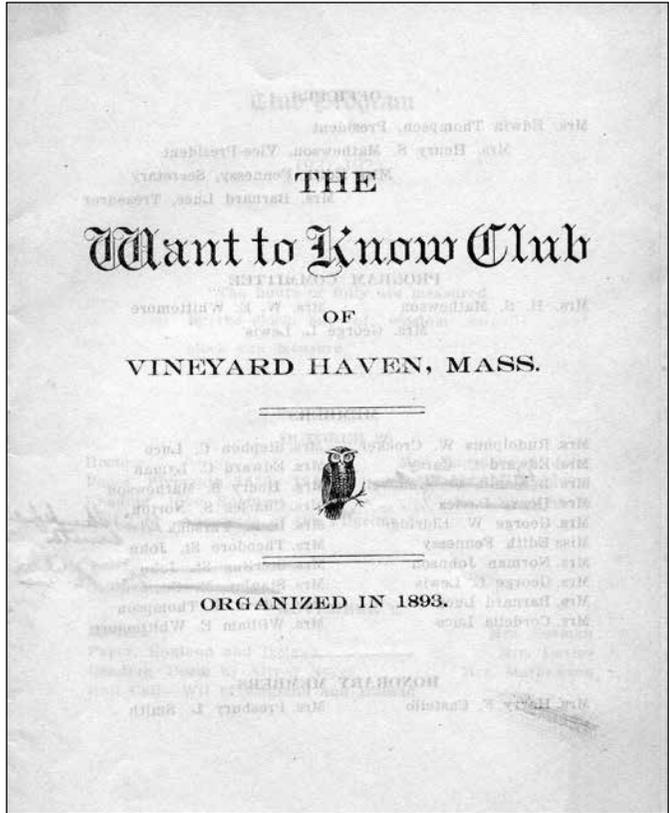
Smith, who helped raise her two sons. She died a widow at 83 in 1930.

Miss Lydia Kidder was born in Edgartown. She and her widowed mother bought a house on Center Street in Tisbury; her mother died in 1888. By 1893 Lydia was a dressmaker, age 53. Five years later, ill with cancer, she moved in with a brother in West Tisbury where she died in 1900—shortly before her sixtieth birthday—and was buried near the West Tisbury Baptist Church.

The last member to join before the first meeting in 1893 was Sarah O. Luce, age 44. Born Sarah Osborn Coffin in Edgartown,

she married Capt. Barnard Luce, a master mariner and ship owner. She enjoyed many adventures as she traveled with him to distant ports around the world. They were Baptists and lived on Main Street, a few houses away from the Tashmoo Inn. After retirement, he bought shops on Main Street, including one that sold dry goods and even ready-made clothing. He died in 1898; she later sold the shops and died age 80 in 1929, leaving two sons.

These first nine members of the Club lived within blocks of one another in Vineyard Haven, most near Main Street or Williams Street. Their first official meeting was at the Tashmoo Inn, at the corner of Church and Main, in 1893. The fairly new building was set back with lawns at the front and side with a vine-covered porch that ran around it. At this meeting Elizabeth Daggett was elected President. The members also decided that “the Want-to-Know Club will meet on Wednesday afternoons and the club color is blue.”⁹ This was not a social club; “no tea or even a cracker” was served at



The Club's use of an owl—a symbol of wisdom—as an emblem (here on the program booklet for 1921-22) suggested its seriousness of purpose [MV Museum, Want to Know Club Collection (RU 387), Box 1, Folder 1]

meetings for the next ten years, probably not until after Mrs. Daggett died.¹⁰

In 1894 Lizzie Daggett was reelected as president, and the Club decided to increase to twenty members. Carrie Castello was the secretary and composed the first minutes. Her report goes through 1896. She states that they discussed “the New Woman, Women’s Suffrage, Electricity, the Venezuelan Question, Arctic Explorers, and X-ray,” and also notes that “Bicycling and Flying Machines had been explained.”¹¹ These topics were very much of the moment. Venezuela’s border dispute with Great Britain became, in the summer of 1895, a key test of the Monroe Doctrine, and Wilhelm Röntgen first discovered X-rays in December of that year. Both Otto Lilienthal (who inspired the Wright Brothers) and Octave Chanute (who would mentor them) were experimenting with gliders in the mid-1890s, and the “safety bicycle,” with two wheels the same size, had launched a boom in the sport.

Referring to one of the discussions, Carrie noted the town did not yet have electricity and that it possessed very few telephones. She also wrote that “12 members voted in the affirmative for ... suffrage and four in the negative, two were on the fence” and she added “our finances are in a healthy condition.”¹² Members then were expected to read a selected article, pay annual dues of 25 cents, and make suggestions to improve Vineyard Haven. There were at this time no paved roads, and all vehicles were still horse-drawn.

Most of the next group of members were in their forties when they joined over the ensuing year. A few were unmarried. Elizabeth Daggett’s cousin Miss Margaret L Norton was just barely forty. She grew up on a large farm on West Chop, and by 1900 was a milliner who owned her own home on William Street. She died in 1910. Miss Thankful B. Smith was a teacher at the Tisbury School (then located on Center Street, where the town tennis courts are now). The daughter of Capt. George Smith, she was born in the Great House, which had stood since the early 1700s at the top of what is now the Stop and Shop Parking lot, overlooking Vineyard Haven harbor. At that time, Thankful wrote, the house was near enough to the water “that a vessel which had come ashore ran its jib boom into the [house].” That vessel was not easily removed; later it was said the lady of the house used the spar to hang her wash.

The MV Museum has a lovely painting of Thankful at age 10. She had just turned 39 when she joined the Club. She was then assistant to the principal

10 Gratia Harrington, “Early Days of the Want-to-Know Club,” *Twenty Voices*, vol. III [MV Museum, Want to Know Club Collection (RU 387), Box 1, Folder 14].

11 WTK Minutes

12 WTK Minutes



The old Tisbury School on Center Street, where Thankful Smith taught. [MV Museum, Postcard Collection (RU 359), Box 4, Institutions section]

and described as “small and spare with blue eyes and black hair which she wore parted in the middle.” On Wednesday afternoons she would appear at the Tisbury School “wearing a light blue satin blouse and was allowed to leave a little early for the Club.”¹³ Miss Thankful Smith died in 1937, aged 83. *The Vineyard Gazette* noted that she had loved books since a child, when books were rare, and she taught summer classes for years after she retired from the high school. The article also said the D.A.R. believed Miss Smith was the last living granddaughter of an Island Revolutionary War soldier.

Mrs. Sydna Eldridge, born Sydna Saurbaugh in Ohio, was 49 when she joined the Club in 1895. She helped establish the high school in Tisbury. She married Capt. George W. Eldridge, still famous for the *Eldridge Tide and Pilot Book*. Active in the Methodist church and in many civic groups, such as the Relief Corps and WCTU, she was the first woman delegate to the Republican state convention in Massachusetts, as well as an accomplished violinist. The family lived on William Street and later on Grove Street; she died in 1936 at her home in Newton. Her daughter, Gratia Eldridge Harrington, became a Club member in the 1920s.¹⁴

13 Harrington, “Early Days.”

14 See Macy, *Captain’s Daughters*—the recollections of Sydna Eldridge’s four daughters—and Sydna Eldridge, “Glimpses of Vineyard Haven and Vineyard Haven Harbor,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1965, 231-237.



The First Baptist Church, spiritual home to Club members Clara Crocker and Anstice Fairbrother, whose husband was the pastor. [MV Museum, Postcard Collection (RU 359), Box 4, Churches section]

Clara Crocker joined at 47, born Clara Farnsworth Hinckley in Barnstable on Cape Cod. She married Rodolphus W. Crocker, Jr., a Baptist and a self-made man. Too young to enlist in 1863, he was twice arrested for trying. He owned a lot of real estate, including most of what was called Crocker Terrace (now Crocker Avenue) and also the harness factory on Main Street where the terrible fire began in 1883. Clara was an active member as well of the Relief Corps, Eastern Star, and DAR. Their home was at the bottom of the road, below Havenside. They had no living children. Clara died in July 1901, only 53; the funeral at her home was led by Reverend Fairbrother, the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Vineyard Haven and husband of a fellow Club Member.

Cordelia Luce was related to many of the other Club members; her brother, for example, was married to Sarah O. Luce. Born in Tisbury in 1857, she married Edwin Mulliken and had three children, all born in Boston. After her divorce, Cordelia and the children took her maiden name and moved back to the Island, living with her widowed mother. She was 38 when she joined the Club. She had her own income and lived to be over 100 years old, dying in 1957. This made two members who were divorced.

Mrs. Anstice Fairbrother, age 40, had grown up at her family's summer

home in Cottage City, and in Fitchburg, where she married a man whose dream was to set up a temperance Baptist mission for the Maori in New Zealand. In 1883, the couple hired a medical missionary from London, Rev. Alfred Fairbrother, to direct the mission. Anstice's first husband died a year later, and two years after that Anstice went back to New Zealand and married Fairbrother. Not many years later, in 1886, the mission was destroyed by a volcanic catastrophe which killed most of the Maori it had served, and the couple returned to America.¹⁵ They had a baby son who died young and a daughter, also named Anstice, who grew up to marry Leland Renear in Vineyard Haven. Reverend Fairbrother became the minister at the Baptist churches in Oak Bluffs and later in Vineyard Haven in 1894. The couple lived on Spring Street, Vineyard Haven, near the then-new church built to replace the one lost in the fire of 1883. She died in 1936, survived by her husband and a grandson.

The next two women invited to join were daughters of members. Florence Woods, age 36 and a trustee of the Vineyard Haven Library, owned the Crocker House Inn. The daughter of Mrs. Anne Woods, she died in 1946. Mary J. Luce was also in her 30s, the wife of Stephen Carey Luce and daughter of Mrs. Sarah Buckley.

Miss Lucy Cleveland Hicks had Island ancestors, though she was born in Hartford, Connecticut—the daughter of John A. Hicks and Lucy Cleveland. Miss Lucy was forty when she joined, having come to the Island after sometime after 1885 with her widowed mother, who did not live long. Lucy herself died suddenly on 22 May 1897. Stephen Carey Luce accompanied her brother, with the casket, to New Jersey for burial with her parents. The *Gazette* noted the many lovely flower tributes on display at her funeral, including especially “the W.T.K. Club’s cut bouquet of nineteen roses.”¹⁶

Loretta Lambert Daggett was 43 when she joined, daughter of Capt. Franklin Daggett and cousin to Capt. Grafton Daggett. The youngest of several children, Loretta was born—and lived all her life—in the house built by her grandfather Capt. Thomas Manter on the harbor side of Main Street. It stood on the third lot north of the stone bank, now the site of a newer structure—set father back from the street than nearby homes—built in 1935.

Loretta was only 3 when her father died. She lived with her mother and her aunt, never marrying, and made her living as dressmaker. By 1900 she owned the house on Main Street, and the next year the will of an older man—unmarried minister Davis Smith—left The Great House (where Thankful Smith had grown up) to his “friend Miss Loretta Daggett.”

15 R. F. Keam, *Dissolving Dream: The Improbable Story of the first Baptist Maori Mission* (Auckland, NZ: Privately Published, 2004).

16 *Vineyard Gazette*, 27 May 1897



The Vineyard Haven Public Library, then located opposite its current site, likely served as a resource for Club members. [MV Museum, Postcard Collection (RU 359), Box 4, Institutions section]

Smith's married sisters challenged the gift, but the will held and the Great House passed to Loretta, who (having a house of her own) sold it to the Tilton brothers, who operated a lumber company on the other side of Water Street. The Tiltons sold the Great House, in 1922, to new owners who moved it to the lot on West Chop where it stands today. Loretta died of pneumonia in the new Martha's Vineyard Hospital early in February 1931; she was 78. Her obituary stated she had suffered for twenty years since a stroke though she did not have a live-in caregiver even in 1930.

The last member listed in these early minutes is Abbie L Cummings, wife of architect Alfred F. Cummings, who lived briefly at Crocker Terrace and perhaps on West Chop. I have found no other information and no land records for her or her husband.

In May 1895 the Club had twenty members—the number specified in its revised by-laws—and held a public guest night which was reported in the news. Later in 1895 Sydna Eldridge was elected the second president, soon after her family returned to the Island. She later presented a cherished wooden gavel to the Club. The minutes conclude: "Such is the report of the Club [through] ... the season of 1895 and 1896." It would not be the last report, or the last season of meetings. The names and faces have changed, but members of the Club have continued—through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first—to gather by the shores of Vineyard Haven Harbor in order to explore, and discuss, the wider world.

Sources of Biographical and Genealogical Data

- Baer, Chris. "Records of Vineyard People." <http://history.vineyard.net/lists>
- Hough, Dorris S., and Rebecca A. Renear. *Old Houses in Vineyard Haven 1712-1830*. Vineyard Haven, MA: Tisbury Tercentenary Committee, 1971.
- Norris, [Mrs.] Howes. *Sketches of Old Homes in Our Village*. Boston: George H. Dean, 1921.
- Norton, James H. K. *Walking in Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts*. Edgartown: Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, 2000.
- . *A Walking Tour of William Street*. Vineyard Haven: Self-Published, 1985.
- Resident and Business Directory of Nantucket, Edgartown, Cottage City, Vineyard Haven, Tisbury, West Tisbury and Chilmark*. South Braintree, MA: Kyte Directory Company, 1897.
- Sanborn, Constance Fuller. *The Magic Sea Glass of West Chop*. Vineyard Haven: Self-Published, 1985.
- Stewart, Katharine B. *History of the Baptist Church of Vineyard Haven Massachusetts, founded in 1780*. manuscript at MV Museum.
- Tisbury 1871-1971*. Vineyard Haven, MA: Tisbury Tercentenary Committee, 1971.
- Vital Records of the Town of Tisbury, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society.



Thankful B. Smith is pictured at age 10 in this portrait in the Museum collection.

Carnegie's Architect

Frank Alden and His Edgartown Connections

by MARY JANE CARPENTER

SOMETIMES IT IS HARD to figure out what makes someone's life remembered. Edgartown celebrates its architecture; yet for the most part does not remember one of its sons whose career as an architect reflects Edgartown's influence on his later work. A few of his works remain extant here, yet his name is not as well known in Edgartown as it should be. The Vineyard Trust has just finished renewing his Carnegie Library building, but his name has not been mentioned in any ceremonies or press releases as its architect. The very fact of its existence probably relates to his professional relationship with Andrew Carnegie.

Frank Ellis Alden was born in Edgartown on December 4, 1858. He was the son of Francis Alden of Dedham and Caroline Mayhew Smith Alden of Edgartown. His grandfather was Josiah Smith, the Register of Deeds for Dukes County, and one of the owners of Pohogonot Farm on the Edgartown Great Pond. His grandmother was Isabella Mayhew Smith, the daughter of William Mayhew of Chilmark. He perhaps was born in their home on Upper Main Street, now owned by the Ewing family.

Josiah Smith, as Register of Deeds, kept his office at home in Pohogonot until the new courthouse was built in 1858. After that Josiah probably moved his residence to town. By the time Frank Alden was one year old, the little family had moved to Boston, where Frank spent his childhood, but they returned often to Edgartown as visitors. His father first was a clerk and then found employment in Boston as a flour broker. Frank attended Boston Latin School and then entered a new department for the study of architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His first job, after graduating with high honors in 1879, was as a draftsman for Henry Hobson Richardson, at whose firm he remained until Richardson's death in 1886.

Richardson was celebrated for his embrace of the Romanesque style, as well as for his studio teaching of the next generation of architects, whose names also include Charles F. McKim and Louis Sullivan, as well as Frank

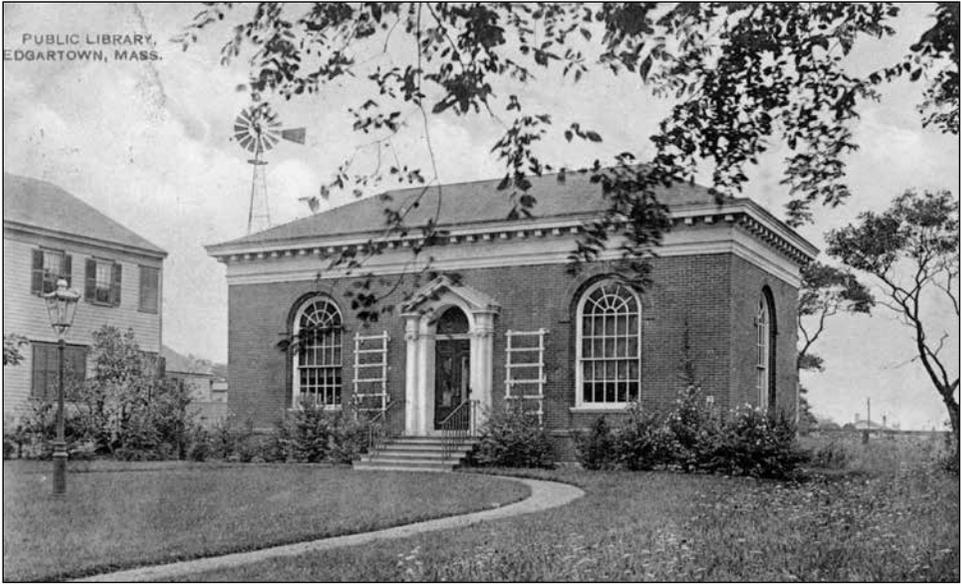
A retired title examiner for the law firm of Reynolds, Rappaport, Kaplan and Hackney, Mary Jane Carpenter is an expert on the history and architecture of Edgartown's historic houses. This is her second article for this journal.

Alden and Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow, Alden's initial business partner. This first job would have been a great opportunity for Alden, as Richardson was extremely successful, very influential and a brilliant teacher. In Boston his best-known work is Trinity Church on Copley Square.

Alden became Richardson's chief draftsman and at the young age of 26 was sent to Pittsburgh as the supervising architect for what Richardson regarded as his masterwork, the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail. Richardson did not live to see the completion of this work, and his office was left in disarray by his untimely death in 1886. He was only 46 years old. At this time, Alden was still supervising the work at the Allegheny County Courthouse. It was finished in 1888. In 1887 he had married Jessie C. Wemple, whom he met while also supervising the construction of the Albany, New York city hall.

By this time, Alden had formed a professional friendship with Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow and Alfred Harlow, alumni of the Richardson atelier who had started their own firm. By the late 1880s, the three formed the firm Longfellow, Alden and Harlow, with offices in Pittsburgh and Boston. Although Alden appears to be best known in Pittsburgh, the list of the firm's known works in Boston and Cambridge is long and impressive, including the Edwin H. Abbot House (now the Longy School of Music), Cambridge City Hall, Cambridge Social House (now the Brattle Theater), the First Parish House of West Roxbury, the Henry H. Hornblower house in Arlington, and the Hunnewell Building at the Arnold Arboretum. At the same time, they received even more commissions in Pittsburgh. As early as 1887 they had designed the West End Methodist Church, the Emmanuel Episcopal Church Parish House (where Alden had devised a way to shore up the walls of the actual church, the famous "Bake House" with round walls designed by Richardson, by using the parish house as a buttress), the Duquesne Club, as well as many houses for the newly rich merchants and manufacturers of Pittsburgh. In 1891, they received their most famous commission, the Carnegie Library and Hall, known as the Carnegie Institute on Forbes Avenue in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh. It remains their masterwork and was completed (but enlarged later by Alden and Harlow) in 1895. It was larger than the US Capitol, and opened the Carnegie coffers to them as Alden and Harlow later designed many of the Carnegie libraries, including the one at Edgartown in 1904.

It was difficult to work in two places. All three were New Englanders, but Longfellow, of course, had the most contacts and name recognition, so he remained in Boston, while Alden and Harlow concentrated on Pittsburgh. Alden by this time had a huge assortment of wealthy clients to take care of in Pittsburgh, and his extant buildings today are Pittsburgh landmarks. He designed the first Pittsburgh skyscraper, the Carnegie Building;



The Carnegie Library building, home of the Edgartown Public Library from 1904 to 2016, and now operated as a visitor center by the Vineyard Trust [MV Museum, Photo Collection]

the Joseph Horne Company department store; the Homestead Carnegie Library and many other Carnegie branch libraries; the Fort Pitt Hotel; The Farmers Deposit National Bank; as well as homes for William Larimer Mellon, William N. Frew, B. F. Jones, Richard Beatty Mellon, William Walker, J. B. Vandergrift, and others.

Alden was the front man and apparently what today we would call the rainmaker, and Harlow ran the office. They had many proteges who later went on to their own firms, both in Pittsburgh and elsewhere. All the records of the firm have apparently been lost or destroyed, but even now new attributions are being made. Recently, the old WQED building at the corner of 5th Avenue and Bellefield Avenue in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh has been attributed to them. This building was the original studio for the *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* TV show. It was designed by Alden and Harlow for the minister of the Bellefield Presbyterian Church (now gone).

Even as Frank Alden was making a name for himself, however, he remained connected to his family and his native town. The little house on Upper Main Street owned by Josiah Smith was inherited by Frank's mother and his uncles John and Ivory Smith after the death of their father. They named the house "Blow Out Villa" and Frank, his wife Jessie, and his little daughter Constance—who was born in Boston while the firm was working on the plans for the Carnegie Institution in 1890—came to visit each summer. Their peregrinations were chronicled in the *Vineyard Gazette's* Edgartown column.

Frank had many friends and relatives on the Island. In 1892 his father

purchased the Faustina Wimpenny house (later known as Mary Wake-man's house) on North Water Street. In 1905, the year of his great success enlarging the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh, Frank sold this house which he had inherited from his father, and purchased 67 North Water Street, then known as the Darrow House, from the heirs of Ira Darrow, its first owner. He renovated it and envisioned it as a year-round home for his widowed mother... and as a vacation home for himself, his wife and his daughter.¹

What we think of as the Vose boathouse, off South Water Street, was Alden's work, as was the Sol Smith Russell house on Tower Hill, which Julien Vose acquired (along with the boathouse) in the early years of the 20th century. The main house burned down in 1908, while Vose owned it, but the boathouse remains—one of the Edgartown waterfront's most distinctive landmarks.

Francis Alden—Frank's father—evidently died intestate, which left Frank's mother Caroline with only dower rights. Frank was his sole heir. Caroline Alden had been living full-time in the Wimpenny house, as it was called at the time, and took in boarders including her niece Jessie Smith, who was working at the new Harbor View Hotel and met her future husband, Charles Shurtleff, there. The descendants of Charles and Jessie Smith Shurtleff are still Edgartown residents. Francis and Caroline are buried in Westside Cemetery, and memorialized by stained-glass windows in St. Andrew's Episcopal Church on North Summer Street.

Frank and his family were frequent subjects of the Edgartown column of the *Gazette*. It noted when they came and when they left, as well as when the family, including Frank's mother, went abroad, prior to their annual visit to the Vineyard. The *Gazette* recorded the Aldens' visit to Durham Cathedral, a Romanesque masterpiece in the north of England; it noted that Constance, the Aldens' only child, named their new residence on North Water Street "Killcare;" and it reported with pride the completion of the Carnegie Institution and Frank's role in it. His funeral in Edgartown was also the subject of a glowing and pride-filled obituary. Many influential men of the Island were his pallbearers.

The trajectory of Alden's work reflects not only his association with Henry H. Richardson, but also his New England heritage. His early work was much more indicative of the Richardsonian influence. His first experiences as a draftsman and supervising architect in both Albany and Pittsburgh solidified his engineering expertise. His social relationships with the new people who were experiencing incredible success in Pittsburgh gave him a solid client base and success built upon success. Andrew Carnegie especially liked his ability to stay within budget (a skill absent in

¹ For more on Ira Darrow's role in Vineyard history, see "The Captains of Cottage City," elsewhere in this issue.



The Alden-designed Sol Smith Russell house on Tower Hill, destroyed by fire in 1908. [MV Museum, Photo Collection]

many architects) as well as his beautiful drawings. Alden would always try to present his drawings to client himself.

His extant buildings are now all over 100 years old, and all are still structurally sound. Those that are gone were the result of the grandiose overreaching of some of his clients. They were for the most part torn down (sometimes with great difficulty) by their owners when they became too expensive or too ornate to operate in a time when household servants were fading from the scene. Alden's institutional buildings have survived with adaptive modifications, of which the Homestead Library is a case in point. Richardson's own experience with libraries in the Boston area helped Alden, as well as his partners, when dealing with the Carnegie library portfolio. They were very innovative in designing buildings meant for community use, and not solely for academic pursuits.

The jewel in the portfolio of Alden and Harlow is the Carnegie Institution of Pittsburgh, which combines a library, and museum and a concert hall, all of which are still in use today. This complex is the epicenter of Pittsburgh's cultural life, and led to the Oakland section of Pittsburgh becoming the cultural and social center of the city. The two most famous universities in Pittsburgh—the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon—were located there after the completion of the Institute complex. The libraries, as a result of Carnegie's patronage, were a huge part of Alden and Harlow's business, the other being the houses built for the newly rich. Alden and Harlow's commercial buildings were also innovative and groundbreaking in concept and design, making use of the technological advances in the steel industry and other metallurgical and industrial tech-



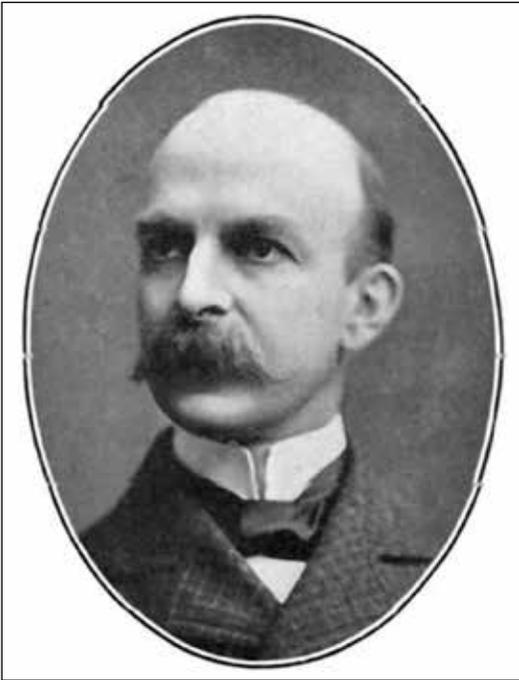
The Alden-designed Vose Boathouse, one of Edgartown's most distinctive structures. [MV Museum, Photo Collection]

niques. The Carnegie office building was the first to be built in Pittsburgh with steel framing and, as a result, the city's first skyscraper. Thirteen stories high, it broke the barrier of traditional framing, which limited buildings to four stories. The invention of the electric elevator also facilitated the design of taller and taller buildings, by rendering the upper floors as accessible as (and, eventually, even more desirable than) the lower ones. Fittingly, Alden's house on North Water street has an elevator, too.

Unfortunately, the Carnegie Building did not survive; it became obsolete, just as the heavy castle-like structures he had built for the new millionaires of the city did, as new technology allowed for even higher buildings. (It also was hurt by the falling out between Henry Clay Frick and Andrew Carnegie. Frick built the Union Trust building next door so it cut off the light for the Carnegie building.) What does survive are the smaller, truly livable houses that Alden designed and built for what we now call the upper middle class. These and the libraries, supposed to be free and open to all, are alive and well. Several large houses on the North Side of Pittsburgh, then known as the City of Allegheny, are now a part of the Community College of Allegheny County.

It is interesting to examine Alden's later houses that survive in Sewickley, the small town along the Ohio River which was first a summer retreat for his clients and then a suburban retreat for them when the smoke of the city made life on the North Side unpleasant. Initially the houses he built there were also large and imposing, but like the others in the city, most are gone now. But the smaller houses, three of which he built for himself with the rest built as investments or commissions, are still among the most desirable and

livable in the town. They are not at all like his early works and do not reflect the Richardsonian influence as much as they do Alden's New England heritage. They are large, for Sewickley is an affluent town, but not over the top. They are dignified and restrained. They reflect, I think, the houses that the Vineyard most prizes: somewhat austere, but beautiful in their simplic-



Frank Alden in his early forties, at the height of his creative powers.

ity, the houses of the Edgartown of Alden's short life. He was born at the height of Edgartown's economic life as a whaling port, and died in 1908 as it was becoming a summer resort. In many ways he was both a son of old Edgartown and an exemplar of the Edgartown summer resident. His recognition of and renovation of the Darrow house was both aesthetic and necessary. The *Gazette* recognized its transformation from a run-down home of a widow into what is recognized now as one of the jewels of Water Street.

Alden's relationship with his Edgartown neighbors shows up in his business life, too. The Regal Shoe Company on Market Street in Pittsburgh was a relatively small commission garnered from E. Jared Bliss, the president of that shoe

company, and owner of his family's home on North Water Street. The Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation is currently restoring this building for renewed commercial purposes.

Like his early mentor Richardson, Alden died at a young age, at the height of his career. The cause of his death is hard to determine from his death certificate, which is on record at the Town Hall. It states he died from "systemic poisoning." The physician in charge was Dr. Charles Lane of Vineyard Haven, who attended him throughout his last illness.² This death was not unexpected, but we still do not know the cause. He wrote his will in October of 1907 and took a voyage to England in the late spring of 1908 before returning to Edgartown in July. He died on September 15, 1908 at his home on North Water Street. He was 49 years old.

2 Dr. Lane was responsible for creating one of the Island's earliest telephone systems, and for building "Lane's Block," which still occupies the northeast corner of Main and Union Streets in Vineyard Haven after the Great Fire of 1883.

First Person Vineyard:

I Remember Lucy Vincent

Part II

by DAVID SEWARD

Editor's Note: *In February 1968, David Seward of Chilmark, twenty-one, took a job as driver and personal assistant to retired Chilmark librarian Lucinda Poole Mosher Vincent, then eighty-five. Over time, he became her caretaker and her friend. The first half of his reminiscence ran in the February 2018 issue of the Quarterly.*

I BELIEVE IT WAS August of 1968 when Lucy told me one day that she was planning a dinner for her late husband's relatives who were on the Island for their summer trip. She told me that Burton Vincent's widow, Natalie and her two sons, Bob and Bill would be coming to the house for a lobster dinner in a few days and would I be willing to help out. I said of course since she gave me enough notice. For Lucy this was a big production. Local lobsterman Eric Cottle would bring the lobsters and Ozzie Fischer would bring over corn from his fields. Edna was on hand to do the cooking and set the table. Everything had to be just so. My job was the easiest since she wanted me to just be there in case I was needed. I always felt she wanted me around because we had developed a bond and she relied on me as her eyes and ears. Lucy had an elegance to her, a very simple New England style of elegance. She was the kind of person we will never see again. I believe that dinner was the last time Lucy entertained in her home.

In December of 1968 Lucy started to think about Christmas. One day she asked me to go upstairs and find a box of plastic candle lights. I was to put one in each of the windows facing South Road. I did as she asked and made sure all the bulbs were good. Though she lived alone she still loved the holidays. I would plug the candle lamps in before I left in the afternoon and unplug them the next morning.

On Christmas Eve of that year I arrived at the house to do my routine chores. I brought a gift for her that my wife had baked. In a tin she had ar-

A native Chilmarker, born and raised in Menemsha, David Seward is the creator (with his twin brother Douglas) of award-winning historical exhibits displayed at the Agricultural Fair. The first portion of this reminiscence appeared in the February 2018 edition of this journal.

ranged some brightly decorated Christmas cookies. When I was finished with my work I was getting ready to leave after setting up her talking book record player. I could tell Lucy wanted something so I asked if there was anything she needed before I went home to my young family and our Christmas Eve. She said "Would you mind having some dinner with me?" I was a bit taken aback by her request, but said that I guessed I could stay a little longer. Edna had prepared some turkey and fixings and Lucy did not want to eat alone. So, we had our Christmas dinner. She was beaming.

After we ate she asked if I could stay a bit longer to help her open her presents. Of course, I agreed. We went into the center bedroom and she sat on the bed while I pulled up a chair. She only had four gifts including mine. A sweater from Alice Schwartz, writing paper from Natalie Vincent, which I used to write the thank you notes, and another gift I don't recall. After I wrote the thank you notes it was time for me to get home to my family. I was already two hours late. I set up her record player and made my usual walk around to make sure she was safe for the night. As I was saying good night she handed me an envelope and told me not to open it until morning. She also said that I should take time with my family on Christmas morning, and to come over when I was ready. I left her home feeling happy that I was able to make her happy on Christmas Eve, but also with some sadness knowing she was alone in that big old house at Christmas.

Christmas morning brought with it the usual excitement of opening gifts and watching my eighteen-month-old son, Will, have more fun with the wrappings than the toys. The last gift I opened was Lucy's envelope. In it I found a cashier's check for \$25.00 with a note obviously dictated to Leslie Flanders. It said something to the effect that she was grateful for my help and she knew she couldn't stay in her home without it. I was moved by it. A few weeks later Leslie told me that to his knowledge she had never given anyone that much money as a gift. Her generosity was a heartfelt acknowledgement of my importance in her life.

After the new year the routine of winter set in. Lucy was pretty much house-bound except when we went to Vineyard Haven on Thursdays. Lucy's home was heated with two kerosene stoves, a Florence burner in the back room by her bedroom and the kitchen stove. In winter it was important for me to check the stoves often and make sure the wicks were "trimmed" for efficient heating. I had discussed with Lucy the fact that since she could not see well and asked her not to touch them or try to adjust them. She said she would leave that to me.

One night around 11:30 Lucy called me. She was almost hysterical. She said the house was full of smoke and she didn't know what to do. I told her to get down on the floor and stay there, that there would be cleaner air there.



Lucy Vincent's home on South Road in Chilmark, looking north. All images in this article are courtesy of the author.

She dropped the phone. I flew out of the house and into my car for the short trip to her home. I never once thought of calling the fire department. I was too focused on getting over there. When I arrived, I found the house filled with black acrid smoke. I did not see any flames. I found Lucy by the phone table in the dining room and asked if she could breathe. She responded to my voice. I told her to stay put as I trimmed both stoves which were running red hot. After I cleared the house of smoke which took some time, I assisted her into a chair. She was very shaken by the experience, as was I. After awhile she calmed down and admitted she had been fooling with the stoves. It felt cold in the house and she thought she could adjust the heat a little higher. What she had done was turn the wicks full open.

I was quite upset with her because we had talked about the stoves and her inability to see what she was doing. At that moment I saw Lucy as a confused and frightened little girl, not the strong, self-reliant woman she had been for so long. I said to her: "Lucy, we talked about the stoves and you agreed not to touch them. Now here we are. If you do that again you will have to find someone else to tend to your chores. I refuse to come over here to find you as a pile of burned-up ashes, the memory of which I would have to endure the rest of my life! You have to promise me you will never touch the stoves again!" She immediately agreed to my demand and apologized for being stubborn and foolhardy.

Lucy had many visitors while I watched over her. Her relative Fay Neumann Gilmore, mother of Jane Slater, would come see her often, as did Alice Schwartz, her relative on her mother's side, my mother Barbara Seward, my

grandmother Molly Flanders and others. She enjoyed them all and was able to keep up on the events in town and what was happening around the Island. She was always asking me to read her the front-page stories in the *Gazette* and of course the obituaries and the bird column. She was well-rounded and continued to engage her friends with interesting anecdotes and opinions about world events. I admired her for her continuing interest in what was happening in the world, and she kept up without the ability to read. For the most part she was a happy individual despite her physical limitations. This was very evident when she would parade me through the rest homes. She took a special pride in having this young man escort her everywhere.

During that summer Lucy asked me to phone Grover Ryan, a Wampanoag Indian living in Gay Head. Grover and his sister Eva lived together since neither of them ever married. Grover was a painter and had done all of her interior painting work over the years. He was only ten years younger than Lucy so they had known each other a very long time. Grover approached his painting business with a keen eye for detail and a frugal mindset. His paint brushes often had only one or two inches of bristle left on them since he took good care of them and never threw them out until they were worn down so much they became unusable. He also had a mild gruffness to his personality which made him an interesting Island character.

I called Grover and he made a date to come to the house to see what Lucy wanted him to do. The day he came I was there since Lucy wanted me to talk to him about her wallpaper plan if Grover became argumentative. I thought that was odd but agreed to help if needed. Grover arrived and Lucy took him into her bedroom. She told him that she wanted new wallpaper and for him to also paint the ceiling. I could tell that Grover was not very enthusiastic about it. Then he replied, "Lucy, why do you want new wallpaper? You can't even see it!" This began the arguing that Lucy alluded to earlier. She said firmly, "Grover, do not argue with me! I want new wallpaper and that is that!" Grover stood there shaking his head back and forth with a pained look on his craggy face. "But you can't see it! You are the only one in this room, the only one in this big old house!" She shot back, "Grover, we are not going to argue about it anymore! This is what I want!" I decided to go into the sitting room and leave them to their spirited conversation.

Finally, Grover appeared in the sitting room. He was still shaking his head, and as he went by me to the door he declared that he had lost the battle again. Lucy was going to get exactly what she wanted. Grover told me a few years later that every visit to Lucy's home concerning painting work went like that. And he never won an argument.

A couple of weeks later Gordon Perry, also from Gay Head, showed up at the house. Gordon did all the exterior house painting. He was there to



Grover Ryan of Aquinnah, longtime house painter for Lucy Vincent.

discuss the price for painting the house. Lucy had gotten into a maintenance groove and was determined to get the house cleaned up and looking nice. Gordon came into the sitting room and he and I chatted for a little bit waiting for Lucy to come in. When she did she got right down to business. “Gordon, how much are you going to charge me this time for painting the house?” Gordon hesitated a bit then said, “Twelve hundred dollars should do it, Lucy.” She didn’t linger long in her reply, “Gordon, I have a thousand dollars, so you can do it for that?” He thought about that for a little bit and replied, “OK Lucy, you win! I’ll start in a few days.”

Lucy could be tough when it came to the expenditure of money. She was a saver, no doubt partly forged from her experience during the Great Depression. But with her New England heritage, her frugality was basically in her DNA. She could be tough, but she was always fair. Most of the people who worked for her she had known their entire lives, myself included.

As the summer of 1969 wore on I could see and sense changes in Lucy. They were not positive ones. On several occasions she decided not to go into Vineyard Haven on Thursday.

She sent me alone to do the shopping and other errands. On those occasions I would stop by the rest homes to visit with Agnes and Alice to tell them Lucy was fine, but needed to rest that day. Their disappointment was obvious, but they both understood the increasing infirmities associated with aging.

When I arrived in the morning I began to notice that some of her spark was gone. Her usual happy, smiling demeanor had been replaced with a

more quiet, reserved manner. I would ask her if she was feeling well and she always said yes. I knew she was not being totally honest with me, but I let it pass. Perhaps I didn't want to entertain the thought that she might be failing quickly. Occasionally her energy level would rise a bit and the Lucy I first started working for returned. But it never lasted long.

It was just before Thanksgiving in 1969. I arrived at the house early that morning, around 7:00 AM. Through the window I did not see Lucy at the kitchen counter having her breakfast. She never gave me a key to the house. Not because she didn't trust me, but because it never came up as a necessity. Instead of asking her for one I decided to leave a window unlocked so I could get in if need be. Well, this particular morning I needed to use that window. I climbed through while calling her name. I heard nothing in response. I remember thinking to myself as my heart pounded, that this is the morning I will find Lucy dead. I hurried to her bedroom and opened the door. There she was lying on the floor in her nightgown barely moving. She had fallen out of bed sometime during the night. I called her name and she responded with the wave of her hand. She gasped and said "David! I am so glad you are here!" Her breathing was labored and she could barely talk. She needed to get to the bathroom so, once again, I crawled with her to the bathroom door. I got her inside and dosed the door. I was worried that she was too weak stay on her feet. I called to her through the door and asked if she was ok. She whispered yes. It was then that I realized I needed help.

I immediately called Edna Robinson. I told her how I had found Lucy and she said she would be right over. It seemed like an eternity but Edna finally arrived. It was such a relief to see her. Edna went right into the bathroom to help Lucy. After awhile Edna came into the sitting room to inform me that Lucy wanted to get dressed. Edna told me that she really needed to go to the hospital which I agreed with immediately. She went on to say that Lucy would not hear of it. That she would be fine once she got dressed. I went back to her bedroom to find her sitting on the edge of the bed gasping for air. I suspected she might have pneumonia and told her she needed to go to the hospital to get checked out. She refused vehemently. I told her we couldn't take care of her properly in the house. She refused to entertain the thought of leaving her home.

I decided to call Leslie Flanders to enlist his aid in getting her to go to the hospital. He came over within an hour and the three of us finally persuaded her to go. I told Lucy that it wouldn't be fair to any of us if she refused to get help with her breathing problem. I believe that is what changed her mind. Though she didn't speak it, she must have been afraid that she would end up in the rest home like her friends. The ability to stay in her home was of prime importance to her. I was well aware of her strong feelings about it.

Leslie left to go back to the bank and Edna packed a suitcase for Lucy to

take with her. I had already backed the car to the kitchen door. Edna said goodbye to her and said she would see her soon. Lucy was sitting in her wicker chair by the kitchen entrance dressed with her matching hat and was ready to go. Or at least I thought she was ready to go. When I told her the car was ready, she hesitated. It was obvious to me she was preoccupied about her situation. I finally said "Lucy, it's time to go." She lifted her arm, the one I always supported her by. I gently got her on her feet and slowly we headed for the kitchen door. As we were about to step out of the house she hesitated again. Her head was bowed and I could see the tears streaming down her aged face. I never forgot what she said: "I will never see my home again!" By this time tears were welling up in my eyes too. I knew she was probably right about that, but I couldn't help but say, "Well, let's just think that you will come home again soon." She shook her head and quietly said "No." The drive to the hospital was emotional for both of us. Not a word was spoken during the trip to Oak Bluffs.

Lucy did have pneumonia and was immediately admitted. After she was in bed and things had calmed down I sat next to her and told her I would visit and bring the mail and the *Gazette*. She smiled and squeezed my hand. I sensed a feeling of relief in her that she would now be well cared for. For the next three months my visits to Lucy's hospital room became farther and farther apart as her physical condition deteriorated. The month of February 1970 saw me visiting every ten days or so. She was responsive to me but all I could do was read her letters and the *Gazette*. Whether she paid any attention was debatable.

Around March 1st I called the hospital nurses's station to ask about Lucy's condition. Almeida Reed was the nurse who took my call. Almeida's father Carl had built the Menemsha store and post office. My parents had purchased the property from him in 1948, so I knew Almeida. She told me that visiting Lucy would probably be a waste of time since she hadn't responded to anyone the past few days. Almeida felt Lucy's death was imminent and she could not respond. I asked my twin brother Doug to accompany me. We have always supported each other in difficult situations and I felt this was one of those.

I brought the latest *Gazette* with me. As we were walking past the nurse's station Almeida once again told me not to expect anything. I nodded and headed for Lucy's room. As we entered I was saddened by the way she looked. She was lying on her back and her mouth was wide open. Her eyes were closed. If I hadn't seen the slight movement of the sheet over her chest I would have thought she had passed away. I called out, "Lucy!" expecting nothing in return. All of a sudden, she raised her right arm just a bit and opened her eyes. I quickly went to her bedside and said hello and that I was there. She could not speak, but she definitely knew who I was. Later on I

realized why she responded to me and no one else. It was because of the bond we had created over two short years. I had been her eyes, her ears and even her confidant at times. I was her connection to life in her home and now she was showing me just how strong that bond was.

Almeida came in to check on Lucy and was dumbfounded that she had responded to my voice. She shook her head in disbelief as she adjusted Lucy's bed linens and freshened her pillows. All the while Lucy was grasping my hand as if she would never let go. I read to her from the *Gazette*, especially the bird column and told her everything was fine at the house and that I had continued to feed the birds *every* day. Before I left I kissed her on her forehead and suggested she sleep for awhile. I left with a warm feeling in my heart that she had known who I was and acknowledged it. Three days later, on March 4th, 1970, Lucy passed away. She was 87 years old.

Leslie called me to ask if I would continue to feed the birds until all the food was gone and to check the house regularly. Of course, I agreed to do whatever needed to be done. Then he asked me for one more thing. Would I serve as one of Lucy's pall bearers at her funeral? I told him I would be honored.

Two months before, the chairman of the Chilmark Cemetery Commission had called to ask if I would be interested in taking over the superintendent's position at Abel's Hill Cemetery. I had accepted, since any extra money was welcome in those days. It turned out that Lucy's burial was to be my first as superintendent. Since I was a pall bearer I decided to enlist the aid of the West Tisbury crew to actually open and close her gravesite. I found it fitting that I was to oversee her burial as well as participate as a pall bearer.

I only remember Eric Cottle as a fellow bearer, though there were four others. I had a wreath of flowers delivered to the cemetery that was adorned with a sash that read "From David and Edna." As Lucy's casket was lowered I began to weep realizing a very special person in my life was gone. The relief of knowing my daily chores were over did not come close to the sadness I felt on the day of her burial. Our connection had been strong and I realized that perhaps I needed Lucy as much as she had needed me. My feelings were so personal that I could not adequately express them to anyone, even my wife. I was grieving the loss of my close friend.

Lucy Vincent was the kind of rugged individualist I will not know again. She came from an era that spanned from seventeen years after the Civil War, through the Industrial Revolution, through World War I, the Great Depression of the 1930's, World War II, Korea and Vietnam. She lived long enough to experience the excitement of an American placing his footprint on the surface of the Moon. Her life encompassed the terms of seventeen Presidents, from Chester A. Arthur to Richard M. Nixon. Lucy watched Martha's Vineyard evolve from an insular, rural place of farming and fishing to the beginnings of its place as a world-class vacation resort. A portion of her

extensive beachfront property would become one of the Island's best known assets. Her life and times shaped her into a woman, who in my opinion, was a bit ahead of her time, and who in today's world would be considered a well-rounded career woman, perfectly capable of taking care of herself.

Though she had no children of her own, she loved them. My second child Mark was born on July 16, 1969, the day Apollo 11 left for the moon landing. Lucy was almost as excited as I was about our new arrival. Her long career as Chilmark librarian positioned her to meet and interact with every child in town, including myself. I am so grateful I said yes to her appeal for help on that February night in 1968. Little did I know how those two short years would impact the rest of my life. Lucy taught me something about helping your fellow traveler on this earth. About listening to the wisdom that can only be earned through many years of living. And maybe, most of all, to realize that love comes in many different packages, and often reveals itself in simple human interaction. Pruning roses with Lucy on a beautiful spring day was just one of many she and I shared. I also learned it was a wonderful feeling to be needed.

To most people Lucy Vincent is the name of a beautiful beach in Chilmark. But to me she was a respected elder and cherished friend who helped shape me as a young man. She taught me something about compassion, the natural world, loyalty, heritage, fearless determination and respect for my fellow travelers. Our time together is an indelible part of my past. Now that I have entered my senior years those memories give me special insight into the challenges Lucy faced, and as a young man, could not possibly have fully understood. Lucy Vincent showed me that not all teachers are in a classroom. I will never forget her.



Lucy Vincent in 1965, three years after her retirement from the Chilmark Library and three years before she hired David Seward.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Honoring This Place, and Its Stories

The history of Martha's Vineyard is the story of six towns and countless smaller communities. This issue of the *Quarterly* features stories from four of those towns—Oak Bluffs (Finley), Tisbury (Mayhew), Edgartown (Carpenter), and Chilmark (Seward)—each town, in the words of Kent Ryden, “as distinctive and unique as the history it has seen, the topography upon which it sits, and the way of life it encloses.”

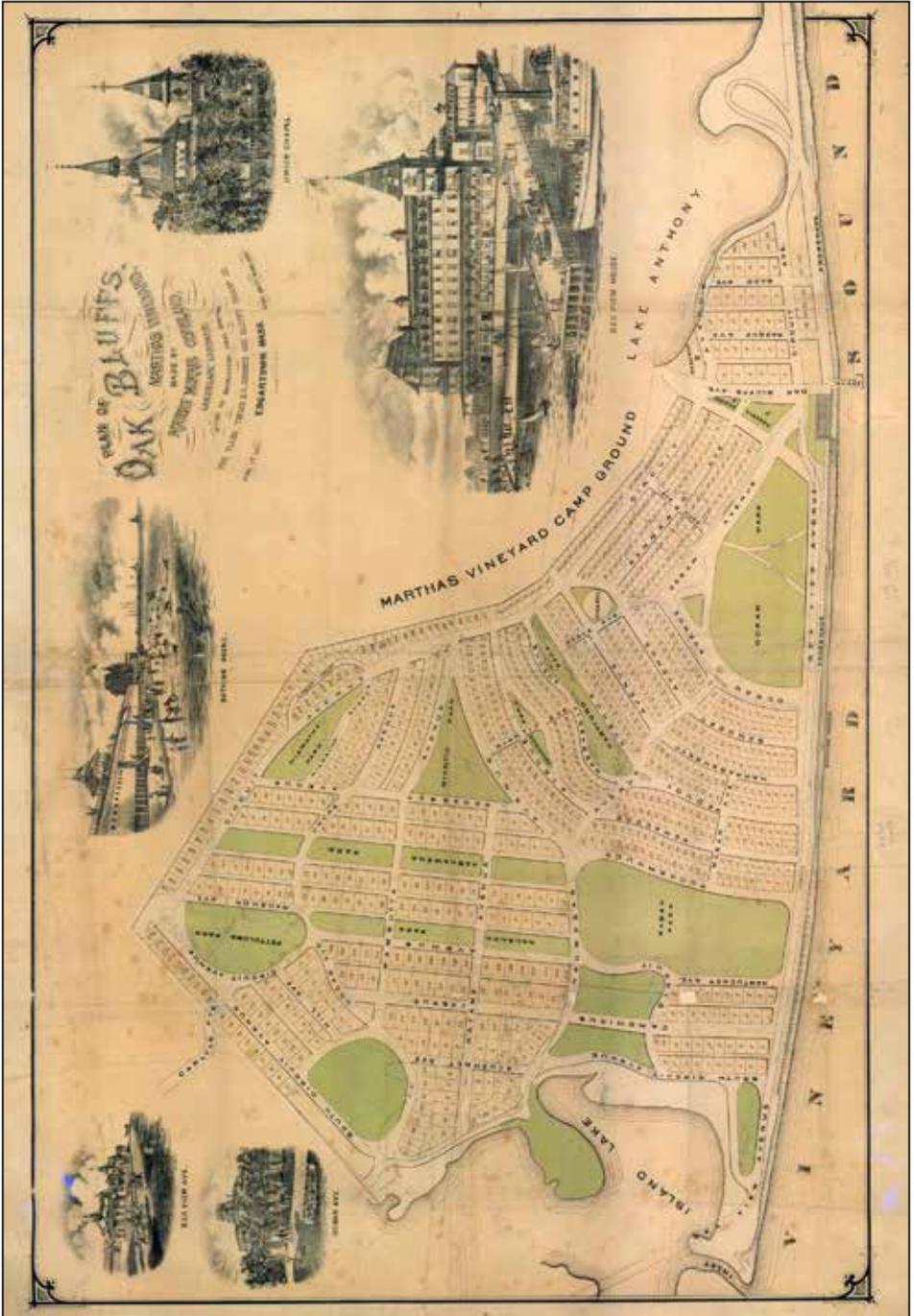
Despite their unique settings, however, all four are also Island stories: part of the larger tapestry that is the history of Martha's Vineyard. All four are imbued with the unique “sense of place” that we associate with the Island as a whole: an amalgam of geography, nature, history, and humanity that make a place feel beloved and special.

For me, and I'm sure for many of you, Martha's Vineyard is defined by “the way of life it encloses,” a way of life passed from one generation to the next through lived example, but also through stories of people and times past. This is as it should be. Having a strong sense of place is not just good for our Island, it makes us better people.

The new museum, opening soon, is designed to embody, and strengthen, that sense of place: Six towns . . . one Island . . . one history . . . together. I hope you have enjoyed each of the articles in this issue—each profound in its own right, but each connected to each other through this Island that we love. And I hope you will come visit your new museum—a museum of, and for the entire Island.



Phil Wallis



Robert Morris Copeland's 1871 plan for the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company included sketches of the bathing pavilion, Union Chapel, the Seaview House, and other landmarks of what was then Cottage City.

59 School Street
Box 1310
Edgartown MA 02539



Promoters of Oak Bluffs



(l to r) Erastus P. Carpenter, Shubael Lyman Norton,
Grafton Norton Collins