

MVMUSEUM

Quarterly

Martha's Vineyard Museum's Journal of Island History

Formerly
The Dukes County
Intelligencer

MAY
2018

VOLUME 59
NO. 2

MVMUSEUM.ORG

Special Edgartown Issue



Cooke Street
and the Origins of Edgartown

Mary Marchant's 1862

Voices from Edgartown's Past



MVMUSEUM

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Student\$25

Individual\$55

(Does not include spouse)

Family.....\$75

Sustaining\$125

Patron.....\$250

Benefactor.....\$500

President's Circle.....\$1,000

Memberships are tax deductible.

*For more information on membership
levels and benefits, please visit*

www.mvmuseum.org

EDGARTOWN

The Martha's Vineyard Museum and its journal were both founded—under other names—in Edgartown: one in 1922, the other in 1959. This issue of the *MVM Quarterly* is a celebration of the town that gave them birth.

Tom Dunlop's lead article, "Edgartown Rising," uses Cooke Street as a window on the interplay of tensions between religion and commerce—and the sometimes violent struggles between rival sects—that shaped the town's growth. A pair of articles by Elizabeth Trotter dive deep into Edgartown during the tumultuous 1860s, through the private diary of 24-year-old Mary Marchant and the very public editorials in which James Cooms, the fiery young editor of the *Gazette*, called for eradication of slavery and equal rights for African Americans. Linsey Lee's oral histories offer a glimpse of the era between 1900 and 1940, when a rough-edged seaport became a genteel resort, and Portuguese fishermen rubbed shoulders with Yankee farmers and the new "summer people." The issue closes with a look at *Chappaquiddick*, a 2017 film about the 1969 event that—for better or worse—brought Edgartown to the attention of the world.

As this issue goes to press, the Museum is preparing move to a new facility in Vineyard Haven . . . but not to leave Edgartown. Its eighty-year stewardship of the 1740 Thomas Cooke House will continue, and—as Executive Director Phil Wallis explains in the note that closes the issue—the land around that venerable structure will be transformed in ways that highlight the town's rich and varied history.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM QUARTERLY

VOL. 59, No. 2

© 2018

MAY 2018

Edgartown Rising: Commerce, Christianity and the Hidden History of Cooke Street by TOM DUNLOP.....	3
The View from Summer Street: Mary Marchant's 1862 by ELIZABETH W. TROTTER.....	15
Liberty Proclaimed: James Cooms, the <i>Vineyard Gazette</i> , and the 14th Amendment, 1863-1868 by ELIZABETH W. TROTTER.....	30
Vineyard Voices: Edgartown Before World War II Interviews by LINSEY LEE	37
'Based on Actual Events': Chappaquiddick and History on Film by A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER.....	51
A Note from Phil Wallis, Executive Director.....	59

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, Robert Blacklow, Jeb Blatt

Skip Finley, David R. Foster, Deirdre Frank

Peter Gearhart, David LeBreton, David Lewis, Phoebe Lewis

Calvin Linnemann, Mark Alan Lovewell, June Manning

John E. McDonald, Jr., Christopher Morse, Chris Murphy

Phil Regan, Juliana Rogers, Paul Schneider

Richard Walker, Cathy Weiss, Lana Woods, Denys Wortman

Staff

Phil Wallis, *Executive Director*

Anna Barber, *Exhibitions Curator*

Ann DuCharme, *Education Director*

Katy Fuller, *Operations Director*

Teresa Kruszewski, *Development and*

Administrative Coordinator

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, *Development Director*

Bonnie Stacy, *Chief Curator*

A. Bowdoin Van Riper, *Research Librarian &*

Editor, MVM Quarterly

* Volunteer

Edgartown Rising

Commerce, Christianity and the Hidden History Of Cooke Street

by TOM DUNLOP

Written for oral presentation, the following text was originally delivered at the Federated Church of Edgartown on July 24, 2017, under the title “The First Church of Martha’s Vineyard: Turning Its Back on Main Street.” Images have been added, and a few sentences specific to the event itself deleted, but otherwise the talk is reprinted here at its original length and in its original form.

TWELVE YEARS AGO, for a story I was writing for *Martha’s Vineyard Magazine*, I began to research the history of my family home, which stands just across South Summer Street. That winter I made the first of many visits to the library of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum, where Dana Costanza Street, librarian at the time, showed me a map of early Edgartown.

At first glance, the grid of old streets and lanes here on the south side of Main looked quite familiar to me. But then I was thrown. Some of the street names did not. Davis Lane was only penciled in, and it was unnamed. What I knew to be School Street was called Maple. And most confusing of all, Cooke Street, whose name I had long associated with the old Thomas Cooke residence and the custom house he kept on the second floor—it’s set back over there on the museum campus—was actually called . . . Commercial Street.

Now, I found my house on this map, as well as Claire Bennett’s next door, and of course the site of this tall and vastly beautiful old meeting house. But my eye kept going back to the lane behind it. Commercial Street? This narrow little road, sentried with family homes, running from Collins Beach out to the cemetery and offering no obvious evidence that a business had ever been run on it or near it: *Commercial Street*?

Tom Dunlop is a staff writer for *Martha’s Vineyard Magazine* and co-director of the Historic Films of Martha’s Vineyard Project. He is the author of three books on Vineyard history and culture: *Morning Glory Farm* (2009), *Schooner* (2010), and *The Chappy Ferry Book* (2012).

How could this be? What sort of name-annihilating neutron bomb had to have gone off to eradicate virtually all evidence of commercialism from *Commercial Street*? And how long ago did this happen? Heck, this fifth Congregational Meeting House had gone up in 1828, and even way back *then* it had had the good sense to turn its back on *Commercial Street* in order to present its handsome façade to the distant *Main Street* we all know today.

Well, to me, these were weirdly magnetizing questions, the sort that a journalist must often set aside as he works on the story of the present hour, meaning back then the story of my family home. But I could not get the improbability of “Commercial Street” out of my head. The whole business of how a shaded, quiet village lane could gain, lose and then all but forget such an ambitious and yet oxymoronic name so very long ago irritated the ganglia in a rear quadrant of my brain until just a few months back.

That’s when I returned to the subject and in my research began to perceive how the crisscrossing waves of Island history had produced, at one point, a Commercial Street, and at another, the largest and most attractive building the Vineyard had erected up to that time. And most importantly for our purposes tonight: why, at a pivotal moment in Island history, had the builders of this meeting house taken a hard look at the future of both church and town . . . and decided to build it facing the other way.



Let’s begin with the Edgartown settlement as laid out by the founding proprietor, Thomas Mayhew Sr., and the twenty or twenty-five colonists who ventured out to join him here in the period between 1642 and 1646.

Mayhew, of course, was an Englishman who with his family had sailed to the Massachusetts Bay Colony about 1631 to oversee the business interests of Matthew Craddock, a venture capitalist back in England. Mayhew Sr. was himself an entrepreneur who would eventually move on to Watertown, where he would build his own mill and toll bridge and serve in town and colonial government.

But rustic and wild and self-reliant as it must have been, mainland colonial life still denied Mayhew the independence and self-determination he so deeply craved. And so in 1641 he purchased the right to settle on Martha’s Vineyard from two members of the aristocracy back in England, who held what appeared to be conflicting royal grants not just to the Vineyard, but to the Elizabeth Islands and Nantucket as well. For forty pounds, Mayhew bought the right to call them all his very own.

Here, with a knot of two dozen other adventurers, Mayhew and his family founded what we now call Edgartown, and here, through his English grants and his force of will, he became head of a prototypical town government, chief magistrate of the court, collector of taxes, eventually governor for life, and even lord of the manor of Tisbury, a feudal title practically



The Old Mayhew House on South Water Street, near Cooke Street, once the center of municipal affairs in Edgartown [Shute Glass Plate Negative Collection].

unknown in the rest of the colonies, and the sort of ancient, inherited privilege that many settlers thought they had left behind when they set sail for the American frontier. And because in these first years of settlement the Vineyard lay ungoverned and even unclaimed by any mainland colony, Mayhew's rule could fairly be called an autocracy—one he enjoyed for something like the final thirty years of his life.

According to M.J. Carpenter, an estimable historian of the town and a parishioner of this church, the first twenty-five house lots of the Edgartown settlement streaked inland from the harbor in roughly parallel lines, beginning at Starbuck's Neck and wrapping around the shoreline to Tower Hill. There was of course no town at first, so each pioneering family was largely obliged to provide for itself, and thus well behind a given house lot lay the private planting fields and then woodlots that would sustain each home. The lanes and streets that would eventually run inward from the harbor—known to us today as Morse and Winter, Davis and Cooke—delineate the some of those original property lines today.

At the heart of it all lay Mayhew Sr.'s homestead, which stood on the land where the Mayhew Parsonage lies today. The breadth of his original lot was, naturally enough, enormous, running roughly from Pent Lane down to High Street. Given the roles he had claimed for himself as chief executive, chief judge and chief tax collector, it is entirely fair to imagine

that in a settlement otherwise lacking in businesses or town offices, his home lot would have been the most visited of all.

Roads and wharves? Well, according to Charles Edward Banks, Pease's Point and Planting Field Way ringed the town, forming something like an early western border. Of the original piers I have found no record, but we may confidently guess that a commercial wharf of some sort must have lain off the Mayhew property about where the Reading Room stands today, because in 1768, the Mayhew family deeded a lane, one rod wide, from roughly there back to the cemetery, where a new Congregational meeting house arose, the fourth in town history. This lane, the present-day Cooke Street, was first called Meeting House Way.

And its rival for commerce, for traffic, for the right to be called the first Main Street of Edgartown? It was laid down a full century earlier, in 1654, only ten or twelve years after settlement. But to begin with it was given a telling name—not the Main Street we know of today, but the Road or Highway to Holmes Hole, known today as the port of Vineyard Haven, which even then was showing signs of establishing itself as a harbor to rival Edgartown's. It was also developing into the commercial center of Tisbury, the second town on the Island.

And so if Main Street was trying to set itself up as the spine of this growing first settlement on Martha's Vineyard, it had to reckon with the fact that its main purpose, as suggested by its own name, was actually to send people out of this town and off to the next one! Meeting House Way on the other hand—our future Cooke Street—could from the very beginning fairly call itself the central nervous system of the village:

It was deeded to the town by the founding English family. It bisected the very heart of the original settlement. Along it stood the Thomas Cooke custom house and behind it, for twenty-five years, the county courthouse. And it began and ended within the town itself, the one end a gateway to business and trade on the harbor, the other a gateway to heaven at the cemetery and meeting house.



And so we come now to that fourth meetinghouse and to the faith that the Mayhews and the Mayhew settlers brought with them, first from England to the colonies and then from the mainland to the Vineyard. Theirs was the Congregational or Calvinist or Puritan faith—and right from the very start, it was the only faith in town.

Regrettably, a narrative of Thomas Mayhew Jr. and his missionary work among the Wampanoags of this Island falls outside the scope of my talk tonight. But it is a complicated and fateful story for the tribes that lived, and still live, here, and if of interest, I would urge you to look into the work of Arthur R. Railton, editor for many years of the *Dukes County*

Intelligencer, the quarterly journal of the Martha's Vineyard Museum, and especially *Faith and Boundaries*, a definitive book on the subject by David J. Silverman, a professor of history at George Washington University and a summer resident of the Island.

For the Wampanoags and the English settlers, there was no rival church, and practically speaking, there was no separation of church and town. In time, village taxes would pay the salary of the Congregational pastor as well as for the construction and upkeep of the meeting houses. Initially payment of this tax was compulsory, whether a given villager attended services or not. Tonight we pay close attention to this official relationship between church and town. Why? Because if any attack ever came against the founding, official theological faith, it would necessarily also attack the social and civic cohesion of the village as a whole.

Well, those attacks came.

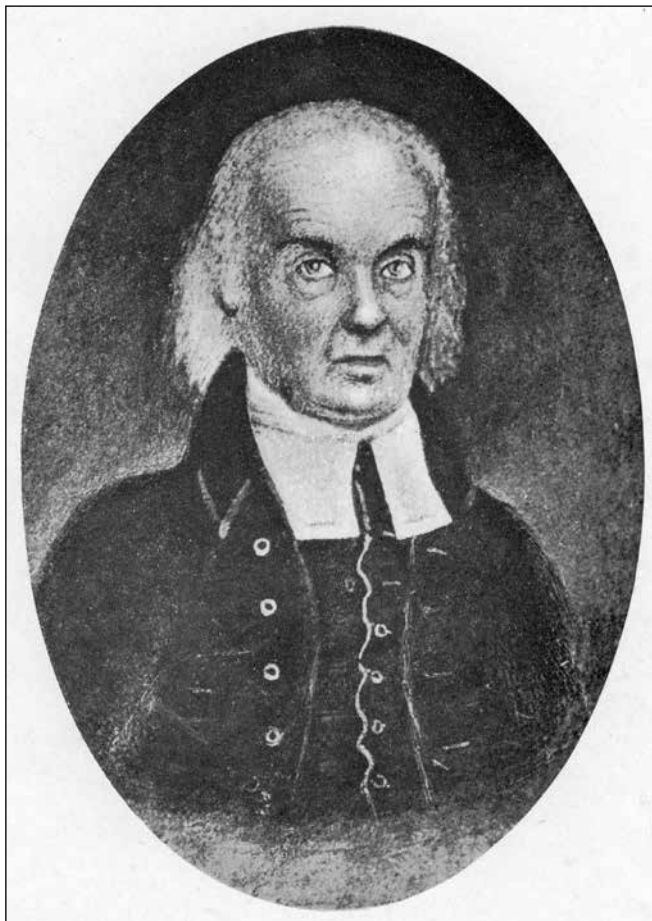
They came at the turn of the nineteenth century, about a hundred and fifty years after English settlement, and they sundered both church and town and altered the vectors of Island history. They came from within the church and they came from without.

First, an internal schism caused most of the parishioners to begin to doubt what the church really stood for, weakening it as an organization and as a spiritual center of Island life. Then, from the mainland, charismatic religions appeared with attractive new theologies, and they siphoned off disaffected Congregationalists by the score. Looking back on these internal and external crises today, it is a wonder that the founding Calvinist faith survives here in any form.

To comprehend what happened to the established Vineyard church in this period, and to the town with which it had been indivisibly linked right from the very beginning, it's necessary to look—first of all—to a principal tenet flowing from the theology of John Calvin: This was the emphatically discouraging idea of “double predestination.”

Before Calvin, Martin Luther had offered up the notion that our original sin was so grievous, so depraved, we descendants of Adam and Eve could do nothing to earn our way into heaven. We could only enter it through a decision by God to let us in. Calvin went further: Some people, he said—the elect—were predestined for salvation before birth, and the rest were predestined for hell. Self-determination and free will? No. Repenting your evil ways and earning your way in? No. Living an upright life from start to finish? Well, this could be a *sign* of possible election—but no, not the cause. Only God knew who was going where, and man could do absolutely nothing about it.

To the pioneering Islander, the inflexibility of this Calvinist theology must have lined right up with the world as he saw it and knew it. In its



Reverend Joseph Thaxter, pastor of the Congregational Church of Edgartown for half-a-century, as painted by Vineyard native Frederick Mayhew [Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, facing p. 160]

offshore isolation, the Vineyard was a place where disaster could come at him from any point on the compass, and where—in most instances—free will wouldn't have been worth a threepenny bit. It was a hard life, and if at the end of it a given Vineyarder learned that right from the very start he had been traveling along an irreversible highway to hell—well, that figured and tough luck.

It would be upon this fundamental precept in the Calvinist faith that the roistering, evangelizing, circuit-riding Baptist and Methodist preachers would concentrate their attack when they blazed their way onto Island soil during the Second Great Awaken-

ing of the early 1800s. These itinerant bible-thumpers declared that the Calvinist principle of double predestination was wrong, all wrong. That only through acceptance of Christ as savior could man gain entrance into heaven, that man could therefore *choose* what his fate would be—indeed he would *have* to choose—and given all the vagaries of Island living, damnation still awaited if he chose too late.



In the face of this philosophical and ecclesiastical challenge, things might have gone better for the hometown church had it not already been badly weakened by an internal dispute, with its pastor standing on one side of a vital theological question and most of his congregants standing immovably on the other.

It must be said here that the Reverend Joseph Thaxter was a deeply loved man on Martha's Vineyard. Born in Hingham, he served as chaplain and surgeon at the battle of Concord Bridge and with Washington at White Plains and Princeton. He came to the Island in 1780 and preached the whole of his career in the fourth meeting house at the cemetery; today his home is commemorated by a plaque set in stone directly across the street at the corner of Cooke and Pease's Point Way. In addition to his ministry, the longest in Island history, he worked as a surveyor and bone-setter, and he advocated tirelessly for the politically and culturally beleaguered Wampanoags of Martha's Vineyard, especially those on Chappaquiddick.

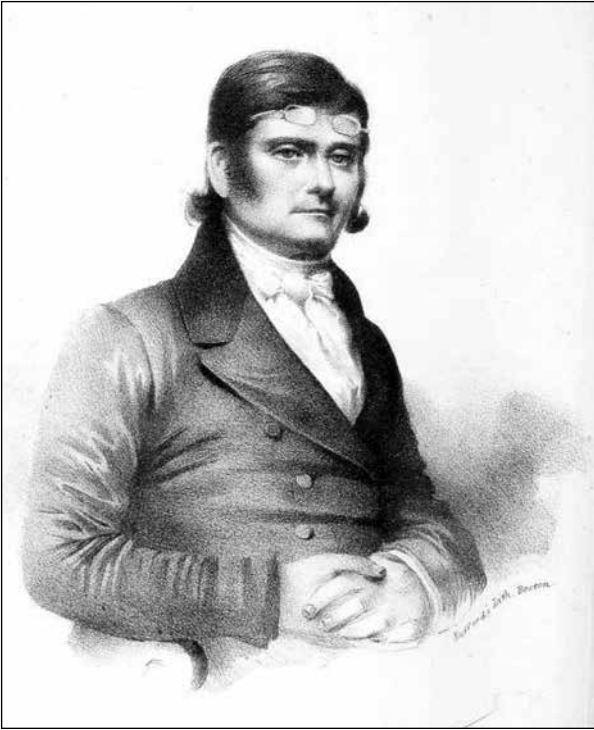
But he was also the first Congregational pastor to embrace Unitarian beliefs, which meant that though he saw Christ as a prophet and even as a savior, he did not believe in Him as the actual son of God and divine in His own right. Unitarianism, a new line of thinking in this country, went against the orthodox doctrines of Calvin and the old Congregational faith, for it also rejected the ideas of original sin, predestination, the inerrant truth of the Bible, as well as the concept of God in three persons—the trinity of father, son and holy spirit.

Vineyard parishioners of the early nineteenth century were, in the main, traditionally minded. No pastor had ever challenged the rigid but reliably clear creeds of the Puritan faith. Now Thaxter was doing precisely that, introducing a new and unwelcome realm of contradictions and uncertainty into their already precarious lives. Shaken, many fell away from his teachings and his church. So it is one of those novelistic wonders of Island history that, at this very moment of spiritual upheaval, a new type of preacher should suddenly appear, bringing with him with a faith that once again embraced the primacy of scripture as well as the divinity of Jesus Christ.

These newcomers were the circuit-riding evangelists of the Baptist and Methodist faiths, fiery-eyed mainlanders who walked right up to you on the street without so much as a by-your-leave and declared, "Your church is built upon sand! Don't you know that God wants you to get religion?" In other words, exactly the sort of person who, on sight, you tacked as far away from as possible, except. . . .

Except if you listened long enough, you would hear him reaffirm the old idea that Christ was indeed divine, that scripture was infallible after all, and—perhaps most crucially—that in a world where so much lay beyond your control, salvation was not in fact determined before birth, but was something you chose for yourself by calling God into your life and living by His commandments until the day you died.

For Vineyard Congregationalists, this message was both doctrinaire and revolutionary. It reconfirmed the reassuring old Calvinist ideas about



"Reformation" John Adams, the ferocious Methodist circuit-rider who challenged the Congregationalists' dominance over the Island [Adams, *The Life of "Reformation" John Adams . . . written by Himself* (1853), frontispiece]

a Trinitarian God and the irrefutability of the Bible. But it also emphatically denied the concept of predestination: Salvation was a choice, a matter of surrendering oneself to God's love and direction and securing forgiveness for any and all manner of sins.

But there was a catch—there was no time. On the Vineyard proper, or on the seas around it, the end could come at any moment. The question for every Islander was, would they choose salvation before it was too late?

The most famous of these evangelists was the Methodist John Adams, known to history as "Reformation John." He organized meetings in the homes of early converts and—Lord—did he put on a show. He cried out

for the conversion of those attendees who were holding out against salvation. He laid hands upon them, he called down spiritual balls of fire to purify their souls, he spoke in tongues, fell into trances, suffered seizures, and he seems to have been especially determined to see that resistant young women and girls surrender their haughty spirits to him and the God he had called to face them down.

The Reverend Joseph Thaxter was appalled.

This was a full-fronted assault upon his own beliefs and a poaching of what remained of his diminished and doubting flock. He kept a misanthropic journal of what was happening: "Great outcries" were heard coming from these houses, he wrote, also "groaning, screaming, falling down etc. These were called the powerful operation of the spirit of God and expressed in such blasphemous language as is not fit to be repeated." At the conclusion of one midnight meeting, he wrote, a number of converts "passed the streets, singing and clapping their hands and awakened people out of their sleep. They threw stones at my house."

For Thaxter and the as yet unpersuaded, it was exactly as though a plague of cults had invaded the old shire town, sucking in tradesmen and captains, farmers and businessmen, housewives and even children. To defend what was left of the old order—both religious and civic—the unconverted went to war against the evangelists and those Island neighbors who had decided to follow them into glory.

And I mean this literally: there was fighting in the streets.

Meetings were raided and broken up, and mud and dead cats—I say again, *dead cats*—were thrown into parlors where conversions were going on. For a time, the crusaders and their converts had to retreat to the farthest reaches of the town—Katama, the Great Plain, Chappaquiddick—so that they could hold their spiritual gatherings in safety and relative secrecy.

But back in the town, the converted soon outnumbered the unconverted, and the Baptists and Methodists were able to build their own churches, among them what is now town hall (the Methodists), as well as the deconsecrated Greek Revival building on School Street (the Baptists), and most majestically among them, what is now called the Old Whaling Church (the Methodists again)—all designed and built in a fervid twenty-year period by Frederick Baylies, an architect of the town.



By the time Joseph Thaxter's ministry ended in June 1827, his congregation, which had included more than two hundred and fifty families and individuals at its start nearly fifty years before, officially now numbered twenty-two—among them seventeen women, eleven of them widows. It looked like the end for the old Calvinist faith on Martha's Vineyard. But at that do-or-die moment, a small collection of officers and parishioners got together and decided that the founding Christian church on the Island, the church of the Mayhews and of their own ancestors, was yet worth saving.

A vital first step would be to hire a Trinitarian of the old school to succeed Squire Thaxter. And with Thaxter's death on July 18, 1827, this successor, the Reverend Job H. Martyn, and those who were trying to salvage this first church on the Vineyard, saw that the only way to expunge the last traces of Unitarianism would be to abandon Thaxter's fourth meeting house at the cemetery and build a fifth one somewhere else along the busy lane that would still lead from the commerce of the harbor to the sanctuary of a church.

A lot belonging to Captain Obed Fisher—owner of Claire Bennett's house across the street—was found and purchased for one hundred dollars here at the corner of South Summer Street, which in 1828 ended here at Meeting House Way. Beyond this line, any evidence of a village wavered off into a wilderness of fields and meadows. Frederick Baylies would again be the architect and builder.



The Federated Church, seen from South Summer Street in the 1870s, its long view toward Main Street still largely unobstructed [Shute Glass Plate Negative Collection].

By this point in history, two different Main Streets effectively ran inland from the harbor in Edgartown—Meeting House Way still the central nervous system, but Main the strengthening spine. *Which one would the new church face?*

Knowing what we know now, a good bet might actually have been placed on it facing Cooke. From 1799 to 1830 anyone with meaningful trade to record at the custom house would have walked down this lane to the home of collector Thomas Cooke and later his son Thomas Jr. As this meeting house went up, the Great Days of Whaling were advancing on the town. To accommodate whaling vessels and commercial schooners, Grafton Norton would soon build the imposing stone wharf where the Reading Room stands today. Whole cargos of whale oil often passed up this road to the storehouse that Dr. Daniel Fisher had built on Upper Main. Businesses arose and flourished all along way. Today a plaque commemorates the whaling agency and home of Benjamin Worth, which stood at the intersection of Meeting House and South Water.

But with the old church now fated to be dismantled at the far end of the lane, the name Meeting House Way no longer made much sense. The new name, Commercial Street, certainly did. Yet the builders of this new church could see in 1828 that most of the economic and social signs were already

pointing to a rival Main Street, which was beginning to take that name.

For instance, the courthouse had long since moved to Main, and the Methodists were building their first church there. But it was the contours of the harbor itself, deep and sheltered, that determined where commerce would thrive as time rolled along—and which way the new meeting house ought to face.

The first great commercial wharf had gone up at the foot of Main Street in 1818. Lying closer to the harbor entrance and reaching out over deeper water, this wharf would have drawn larger ships than Grafton Norton's at the Reading Room. Today this wharf is the home of the Edgartown Yacht Club. Dr. Fisher himself built a wharf even closer to the harbor entrance, directly across from his oil and candle factory on Dock Street. Today it's Memorial Wharf. And in 1835, Captain John Morse built a wharf that stood closer to the entrance than any other—today it's North Wharf, the home of Edgartown Marine.

And so it went: the rigging shops and barrel makers, the blacksmiths and tailors, the grocers and the hardtack bakers, the tavern keepers and the pool hall owners—each would follow the establishment of these wharves, setting up shop all along the waterfront and up and down Main, which could now be considered the spine *and* central nervous system of the town. From Main all the significant intersecting streets gradually lengthened themselves north and south, rounding out the map of Edgartown as we know it today.

But if we're honest, one feature beyond any other probably proved decisive. As South Summer crept this way from Main in the middle 1820s, several houses rose on the far side of the street—the homes that we mostly see there now. But on this side of Summer no building stood. What a prospect parishioners must have seen as they threw open the front doors after the dedication ceremony of this new meeting house on Christmas Eve, 1828—a front lawn that reached from here, almost endlessly, up to Main Street.



Well, there we are.

The distance between the fourth and fifth meeting houses measures just eight hundred and seventy-five feet. But on Martha's Vineyard, I wonder whether any other length of road that short can claim a history so packed with drama: Tonight I hope I've given you a plausible outline as to why this little section of the old Commercial Street might just take the prize for most consequential road, at least within this founding settlement. But I would be sorry if you thought that this was only a story about the past.

For me, it's the tale that this quiet, residential old lane still tells us today—a tale that reaches from settlement to commerce, from orthodoxy to schism, from one church to many, from a Calvinist village to the Method-

ist camp meeting, from faith to tourism, from industry to resorthood: In short, this little length of Cooke Street leads from what we once were to what we are now.

It is, I confess, a great responsibility to lay upon one old village roadway, but Bow Van Riper, the new research librarian over at the Martha's Vineyard Museum, recently showed me a map where, after all these profound and wholesale changes, the name Commercial Street could still be found, eons after the last bit of commerce was transacted anywhere on or near it.

On that map, the lane was called Cooke Street from the harbor up to the cemetery. But there, where the marker commemorates Squire Thaxter and his home at the corner of Pease's Point Way, something strange happened. With no other break to mark it but an intersection, Cooke suddenly went back to being called Commercial Street again—ironically enough, right along the graveyard itself. The date on that last map where the old name appears is 1952.

Which just goes to show you that on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, some things change hugely and irretrievably over time, while small but equally important things are often reluctant to change at all.

The View from Summer Street: Mary Marchant's 1862

by ELIZABETH W. TROTTER

HARDWARE—HARDWARE.
FISH HOOKS of all kinds. Files, Sail Needles, Sand
Paper, Pocket Knives, Sheath Knives, Hunt's Axes
and Hatchets, Claw Hammers, Carpet Tacks, Copper
Tacks, Iron and Brass Screws, Cast Steel Shovels, Coal
Shovels, Padlocks, Garden and Field Hoes, etc., on
and at june28 MARCHANT'S.

New Year DeLaines,
JUST received by S. OSBORN, JR. Call and pronounce
whether they are pretty. Also, Cotton Flannel.
jan3

DIARIES,
FOR 1862, just received. Also, a good assortment of
Stationery. dec13 W. S. LEWIS.

Three elements of Mary Marchant's world converge in a block of advertisements from a January 1862 *Gazette*: Her father's hardware store, "DeLaine" style dresses, and diaries like the one in which she chronicled her days.

A SMALL ITEM from the past can sometimes open up a large view from a window into a world gone by. While sorting through a box of archival documents at the Museum library I had the pleasure of running across a "line-a-day" diary from the year 1862, written by 24-year old Edgartown resident, Mary Abba Marchant. Popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries, line-a-day diaries were advertised as a means of recording, in simple quick notes, a synopsis of one's day, and often included records of meetings attended, callers entertained, or daily trials and tribulations. Deliberately small—either 2-by-3 or 4-by-6 inches, with several dates per page—the diaries were meant to accommodate no more than a paragraph in each day's space, and often just consisted of one sentence or "line" per day. Every life is different, and even a diary as rich as Mary Marchant's cannot speak for all the young women of Edgartown (let alone Martha's Vineyard) in 1862. Mary's diary is, however, a remarkable window on a corner of Vine-

Elizabeth W. Trotter, of Vineyard Haven, is a volunteer at the Martha's Vineyard Museum Library and a frequent contributor to the *Quarterly*.

yard history we know comparatively little about: the day-to-day life of an independent adult woman—young by modern standards—in what was, in 1862, the Island’s most prosperous and vibrant town.

A Day in the Life

After carefully reading through Mary’s diary and researching the context of the times, I find myself quietly imagining a typical day for Mary. The weather is, of course, perfect in this fantasy—one of those early spring days that takes your breath away, the bright blue cloudless sky overhead making the inshore waters gleam like jade. The air carries a hint of the warmth to come, now that winter is finally departing. She wakes early as the good weather means the wind is just right for the departure of the packet sloop that will carry her father to New Bedford, where he will board a train to Boston. He carries with him some of her hand-sewn clothes, adorned with ribbon and meticulously executed crochet edging, to sell to shopkeepers in the city, and will return with goods for the family, and city-made items he will sell to Islanders by advertising in the *Gazette*. After seeing him off at the harbor, she walks the two blocks back to the family house that she shares with her parents and five sisters. She stands at the window holding little Myra—the youngest, just shy of a year—and watching a funeral procession pass by on its way to the new cemetery off Pease’s Point Way. The tiny coffin holds Lucy Chadwick’s baby. She looks into her sister’s wide eyes with love and says a silent prayer, asking God to keep Myra healthy.

After taking inventory of her sewing needs Mary leaves the house to walk the few blocks to James Barrows’ tailor shop, on North Water Street just north of Main. She is outfitted in her new “De Laine” dress, perhaps the green one; “De Laine” refers to the wool fabric that makes up the dress, popular in the day. Since she will walk right by her good friend Eunice Coffin’s home, she stops in to visit with the family and invite Eunice to walk with her. When they reach the shop, they find that James Barrows is not in yet but his son David is working the counter and asks after Cynthia, Mary’s sister. Cynthia, now 22, is the precocious one in the house and David has been trying hard to woo her. While she makes her purchases, Mary promises to pass along his regards, and, when David mentions that the shop has had some requests for “baby sacks,” volunteers to fill the order. Smiling, he says that he will gladly come to the Marchant house and pick them up when they are ready. Mary returns the smile, acknowledging that the errand is a pretext for calling on Cynthia.

Eunice and Mary leave the shop and decide to continue the few steps to Main Street; it is, after all, a beautiful Vineyard day. Passing Gothic Hall, with its distinctive pointed windows, they notice a sign proclaiming that E. C. Cornell’s photography studio is open for business. Mary tells

Eunice that she plans to bring baby Myra to have her ambrotype made, as Cornell has begun advertising in the *Gazette* for taking infant pictures. She will wait for another day like this one, she muses, since the process depends on natural light, and Cornell's advertisement specifies "preferably on sunny days." Strolling up Main Street toward the imposing new courthouse—the second brick building in town, after the bank, and only four years old—they encounter Ichabod Norton Kidder, who teaches at the North School. He is leaving Town Hall after completing his application for

school committee secretary. Mary congratulates him and, noticing that he has a flyer in his hand for the upcoming glee club performance to be held in early May, mentions that her good friend Sarah Linton will play the piano for the group, known as the "Social Harmoneans."

Ichabod then asks if she and Eunice will be attending that night's "Division" meeting at the Methodist church. "Of course!" she replies, anticipating an event that is a central part of both her social and religious life. Ichabod offers to walk her home afterwards, then quickens his pace toward Mill Street and the school, where he will be administering examinations to his young scholars that afternoon. Mary and Eunice continue their walk past the Whaling Church, the dedication of which is one of their oldest memories, and discuss the Civil War, now entering its second year. Mary's good friend William Mayhew has joined the Union army, and she is concerned for him. She mentions that she is continuing to correspond with him and enjoys getting his letters. He is sending an ambrotype of himself to his family, she tells Eunice, and she is looking forward to visiting with them and getting a look at his likeness. They turn onto Pease's Point Way and head for home, as it is getting late in the day. Mary wants to

Programme

OF THE

SOCIAL HARMONEANS,

Monday Evening, May 5th, 1862.

1st. Hail Smiling Morn.	First Soprano,	Miss A. M. Pease.	Full Chorus
2d. Gay and Happy.	Second "	Mrs. J. B. Ellis.	
	Tenor,	Mr. W. C. Nevin.	
	Bass,	Mr. J. B. Ellis.	
	Piano,	Miss S. E. Linton.	
3d. Go Where the Mitts are Sleeping.	First Soprano,	Mrs. Lucy P. Smith.	
	Tenor,	Mr. W. C. Nevin.	
	Piano,	Miss A. M. Pease.	
4th. Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still.	Solo,	Mrs. V. P. Fisher.	
	Piano,	Miss E. C. Fisher.	
5th. Robert! Robert!	Soprano,	Miss E. C. Fisher.	
	Piano,	Miss A. M. Pease.	
6th. Counting in Connecticut.		Mr. J. B. Ellis.	
		Miss A. M. Pease.	
		Mr. W. C. Nevin.	
	Piano,	Miss S. E. Linton.	
7th. Our Starry Flag.	First Soprano,	Mrs. Lucy P. Smith.	
	" "	Mrs. James Smith.	
	Second "	Mrs. Joseph M. Mayhew.	
	" "	Mrs. John B. Ellis.	
	Tenor,	Mr. David Nevin.	
	" "	Mr. W. C. Nevin.	
	Bass,	Mr. James Smith.	
	" "	Mr. John B. Ellis.	
8th. Bonnet-du-Barbier-de-Seville.		Miss A. M. Pease.	
		Miss E. C. Fisher.	
9th. Hannah's at the window binding shoes.		Mrs. Jos. M. Mayhew.	
	Piano,	Miss S. E. Linton.	
10th. The Rocky Mountain Boys.	First Tenor,	W. C. Nevin.	
	Second "	David Nevin.	
	" "	John B. Ellis.	
	" "	James Smith.	
11th. O! Ye Tears, O! Ye Tears.		Miss A. M. Pease.	Piano—Miss E. C. Fisher.

INTERMISSION.

Program from the Social Harmoneans' concert of May 5, 1862 (RU 543, Box 1, Folder 15).

stop and have tea with her grandmother, “Ma Raymond,” who she is very fond of, but the visit will have to be quick as it is her turn to prepare supper. The five elder daughters of the Marchant family have taken to rotating chores among themselves, not only to help their mother, who is busy with baby Myra, but to perfect their domestic skills for the day when they will have their own households to manage. Eunice and Mary part ways at the corner of Pease’s Point Way and Morse Street, but not before making plans to meet up again that evening and walk together to “Division.”



Mary Marchant's Edgartown neighborhood in 1858. Her family home on North Summer Street (labeled C. B. Merchant) is at the top center, the Methodist church at the center of the left side, and the steamer wharf where she greeted the Monohansett at the bottom right [detail from the Walling Map of Dukes County].

A Life in Context

The preceding vision is imaginary, but it reflects the details that—recurring week after week and month after month—define the fabric of Mary’s life. Twenty-four years old at the beginning of 1862, Mary was the eldest of six girls born to Betsey Kidder Raymond and Cornelius Beetle Marchant. Her uncle Edgar Marchant—her father’s older brother—had founded the *Vineyard Gazette* in May 1846 and was, in early 1862, completing his 16th year as editor. Cornelius was a businessman, and in her entry for April 7 Mary notes that he has been chosen as selectman, the same day her good friend Ichabod was chosen for the school committee. Cornelius would later be appointed Customs Collector by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1870, and serve 11 years with the Internal Revenue. Mary’s family home

was on North Summer Street between Pierce Avenue and Morse Street, two blocks from Main Street and two blocks from what was then called North Wharf—now the site of the Edgartown Marine pier.

Not yet married, Mary contributed to the family economy by working as a seamstress, making clothes to order for family, friends, and other customers. Her diary contains numerous notes charting her progress on one project or another—baby clothes, hats, shirts, or a “sack” (a short cape that covers the shoulders)—and columns of figures in the back pages keep careful track of outlays for fabric and ribbon. James Barrows, a local tailor who advertised frequently in the *Gazette*, was one of her regular suppliers, and his son David was a frequent visitor to the Marchant home. Mary frequently notes the time that he spends with her sister Cynthia, who he was evidently courting and later married.

Domestic duties—doing her part to help keep the household running—were also a significant part of Mary’s days, often mentioned in the line or two she wrote each day. There was more to her life, however, than work. The Glee Club concert mentioned in my conjured fantasy did take place on May 5, 1862, and Mary mentions attending it. A copy of the evening’s “programme” is in the Museum archives. Mary’s diary entries from September 10th to 25th record an extended stay at Cape Pogue, where her uncle George R. Marchant was serving as lighthouse keeper. Cape Pogue was considered a hardship posting, notorious for its loneliness, but Mary’s entries make her time there seem idyllic. She writes of picnics, reading, sewing clothes for her baby sister, playing dominoes, and enjoying a steak dinner as well as fresh peaches and pears. On a walking excursion she records seeing porpoises. Her return is delayed a day due to unfavorable winds and you get the sense she does not mind.

Mary’s social world centered, however, around the Methodist Church. She participated in the Methodist “Mite Society,” a charitable organization that collected items for those in need, and attended the Camp Meeting meeting at Wesleyan Grove in August. Her favorite church-sponsored activities were the regular meetings of the Temperance Division. Her diary entries suggest that she rarely missed a meeting, and often mention papers read by other attendees, and newspapers shared at these meetings. She frequently mentions that Ichabod Norton Kidder was her escort to and from Division meetings suggesting, that their appeal was social, as well as spiritual. Mary’s very first entry of 1862, made on January 1st, is, fittingly, about the group: “In evening attended the Temperance Division. The officers were installed by the Holmes Hole officers. This Division is called the Agamonta branch of the Ocean Isle.”¹

1 Officially, it was the “Agramont Division #118”

Temperance was a major social issue of the mid-nineteenth century—alcohol, reformers believed, led to violence, impoverishment, broken families, and moral degradation—and the Methodist Church took up the cause with the fervor of a religious crusade. The Sons of Temperance, a secret fraternal order dedicated to the cause, began in New York in 1842 and expanded rapidly in the years around 1850, drawing strength from reports of the “raucous behavior of insobriety” observed during the California Gold Rush of 1848-49. Membership in “divisions” of the Sons was initially limited to men, but the bylaws were changed in 1854 to allow women over the age of sixteen to be admitted to local divisions as non-voting “guest” members.² Both men and women were present when, as the *Gazette* reported, “Mrs. F. B. Norris of New York” had delivered “a fine and able address” on temperance at the Methodist church vestry on the Monday before Christmas, 1857. Addressing herself to the assembled “sons and daughters of Temperance,” she urged them to be to bold and unwavering in the face of the intemperance that was “prevalent all over the land; eating, like a cancer, the intellectual powers of man, dethroning his reason, rendering him worse than useless as a beneficiary to society . . .”³

The ongoing war against intemperance was intertwined, in the minds of many who attended division meetings, with the emerging war against the Confederacy. Many of the young men with whom Mary attended meetings would go on to enlist in the Union army, believing that they could do much to keep intemperance from taking hold among the troops. Division meetings stirred up, and reinforced, a fervent belief in the righteousness of their shared cause and the undeniable presence of God on their side: sentiments that echoed those motivating the young men of the day to volunteer to defend the Union and oppose the spread of slavery.⁴ Mary’s entry for Wednesday, February 19th, reads: “Went up to the Coffin girls. T.A. Fisher & Nancy K. Pease was there we made aprons in honor of the victory to wear to Division I. N. Kidder came home with me.” The *Gazette*, reporting on a division meeting on August 27, noted: “Members and Lady visitors were present in large numbers because of unusual interest being felt in consequence of the enlistment of so many of the members since their last meeting. Halls were thrown open to the public.” Indeed half of the August recruits were members of the division, among them Richard Shute, whose father Charles

2 Samuel Fenton Cary, *Historical Sketch of the Order of the Sons of Temperance* (Sons of Temperance, 1884), 11-12. The decision to offer women limited membership came, the year that Mary turned 16; they were granted full membership in 1865, shortly after she died.

3 *Vineyard Gazette*, 25 December 1857; reproduced at <http://mvlandandsea.com/resources/excerpts-vineyard-gazette>

4 James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 17-19.

spoke eloquently in praise of the young men and their dedication.⁵ “They will make noble soldiers,” the *Gazette* report concluded, “and do much by their influence to prevent intemperance in regiments which they join.”

Camp Meeting of 1862

The annual camp meeting at Wesleyan Grove was a high point of the year for devout Methodists. It was in its twenty-seventh summer when Mary attended it in August of 1862. Her journal notes that she made cookies in preparation for the event, and planned to stay in a tent with her Aunt Mary. She left for the Campground at 8:00 on the morning of Saturday, August 9th, beginning a journey that—though it was only 10 miles long and ended in what was still part of Edgartown—must have seemed like a great adventure.⁶ She stayed two full days and part of two more, returning home in the early afternoon of Tuesday, August 12th.

The Camp Meeting was hosted by Reverend Hebron Vincent, who had helped to organize the first one in 1835. Like many Methodists of his era Vincent worked tirelessly for causes designed to reform and improve the secular world. He worked diligently to improve the Vineyard’s schools, and was a passionate abolitionist at a time (the early 1840s) when such a position was far from popular. His 1890 obituary in the *Gazette* noted:

He was one of some twenty-five delegates who met in Boston in 1843, and took the mammoth petition of 62,791 names headed by George Latimer (who was arrested as a fugitive slave, and whose freedom had been purchased by the citizens of Boston) and marched with the petition to the State House...the result was the passage of the Personal Liberty Bill of 1843.

It was the Camp Meeting, however, which was Vincent’s most visible legacy. What had begun in 1835 as a cluster of tents around an open-air preacher’s stand in William Bradley’s sheep pasture was, by the early 1860s, a semi-permanent summer settlement. “This religious encampment has become an Institution,” the *Gazette* noted in a February 1859 article noting that the Campground’s first permanent structure—a three-story building containing offices, storage space, and meeting rooms—had been erected, and a 40-foot-wide avenue would soon encircle the outermost ring of tents.⁷ The first wooden cottages would appear within a few years.

5 Richard survived the war, returned to Edgartown, and established—in partnership with his father—one of the Island’s first photographic studios. See: Peter Jones, “Long Exposures, in Stereo: Early Years of Photography on the Vineyard,” *Dukes County Intelligencer* 51, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 32-42.

6 Oak Bluffs separated from Edgartown in 1880, incorporating itself under the name Cottage City.

7 “Martha’s Vineyard Wesleyan Grove Campground,” *Vineyard Gazette*, 25 February 1859, <https://vineyardgazette.com/news/1859/02/25/marthas-vineyard-wesleyan-grove-camp-ground>



The preacher's stand at Wesleyan Grove, erected in 1859 and used until 1879, from which Gov. John Andrew denounced slavery at the Camp Meeting of 1862 [MVM Photo Collection]

Hebron Vincent's book-length history of the Wesleyan Grove Camp Meeting describes one of the highlights of the 1862 gathering. Approximately 10,000 people were in the grove for the event that year, he estimates, and during a speech by Governor John Albion Andrew, who came from Boston for the occasion, it was estimated that 8,000 were within earshot. Andrew, whose term in office (1861-1866) encompassed the entire Civil War, spoke for an hour and fifteen minutes, taking as his theme the present state of the country. His particular focus was slavery, which he saw as the cause of the war and the unrest preceding it. "He believed," Vincent wrote, that "it was God's design to destroy before giving us peace and urged it as a religious duty to hasten to the rescue." He urged more young men to volunteer for the Union cause, and expressed the hope that "the Old Bay State" would never have to resort to conscription to fill out the ranks of its regiments. Clapping was frowned upon in the Methodist tradition, but a chorus of Amens "resounded through the grove." Mary was present in the audience that Sunday, and her voice was doubtless among the chorus.

Marching Off to War

The drumbeat of war had been pounding through Mary's days for months before Governor Andrew delivered his exhortation in Wesleyan Grove. When she opened the cover of her new journal on January 1st, only eight months had passed since Rebel forces in South Carolina had opened fire on Ft. Sumter. A month into 1862, the dull light of February was brightened by the news of Union victories over Fort Henry, on the Tennessee River, on February 6th and Fort Donelson, on the Cumberland, on February 10th. The surrender of the two Rebel outposts opened the way for Union forces to move into western Tennessee and secure the border state of Kentucky, as well as opening the two key rivers to Union naval forces. The decisive victories also helped to establish the reputation of the Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the Union ground forces, earning him the nickname "Unconditional Surrender" Grant. The *Gazette*, in its February 21st issue, noted that Abraham Osborn had, at his own expense, staged a "National Salute" of 34 guns the previous Wednesday, "in honor of the recent Federal victories, and especially of the gallant capture of Ft. Donelson. The cannon used belonged to one of his whale ships now lying at his wharf."⁸

The cover of the February 1862 *Atlantic Monthly*, which Mary might have glimpsed on a parlor table in her own home or that of a friend, featured a poem by Boston abolitionist Julia Ward Howe. She penned the lines while ensconced in the Willard Hotel during a trip to Washington with her husband and, coincidentally, Governor Andrew of Massachusetts. Its stanzas displayed the same fervent belief in the righteousness of the Union cause that animated discussions of the war at Division meetings, and Andrew's speech at Wesleyan Grove, and shot through with religious imagery equating the Union soldiers with Christ and the Confederacy with Satan.⁹ Within two years the popular lines would be set to the tune of the abolitionist anthem "John Brown's Body" and performed before audiences in Washington, including President Abraham Lincoln, as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

By June, with the bloody Battle of Shiloh still fresh in Vineyarders' minds, there was a question of whether Independence Day celebrations should be subdued—as the citizens of New Bedford had chosen to do—in

8 Once a whaling captain, Abraham Osborn was, by 1862, an owner of multiple whaling ships, including the *Europa* and *Ocmulgee*, as well as Osborn's Wharf at the foot of Main Street. His son, Abraham Jr., was in command of the *Ocmulgee* when she was captured and burned by the Confederate raider *Alabama* in September.

9 Elaine Showalter, *The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe* (Simon & Schuster, 2017), 161-167; Garry Wills, *Under God* (Simon & Schuster, 1991), 209-211.

honor of those suffering as a result of the war. Mary mentions on June 18th, that though she missed that night's Division meeting, "a proposition to celebrate 4th of July was voted upon." Reports in the *Gazette* suggests that the Vineyard followed its mainland neighbor in adopting a subdued celebration, but patriotic fervor was still strong. Mary's friend and frequent chaperone Ichabod Norton Kidder penned a verse, featured in the July 4 issue of the *Gazette*:

*Oh! Say does our Washington live
In the hearts of Americans now!
Then a tribute to memory give,
Bind new wreaths around liberty's brow.*

By late August, perhaps stirred by Governor Andrew's speech at Wesleyan Grove, support for the war and those fighting it was building. Ten days after Mary's return from Camp Meeting the her diary includes the following entries—a record of a town committing itself to war:

August 22: "War meeting"
August 23: "Quite a number volunteered at the war meeting"
August 26: "Went to Hall to attend war meeting"
August 27: "Went to Division doors open to the public speeches made to volunteers"
August 29: "Went down to see the volunteers off...Father went off with volunteers"

Among those late-August volunteers was Charles Macreading Vincent, the son of Hebron Vincent's brother Samuel—a fellow Methodist minister and co-founder of the Wesleyan Grove Camp Meeting. "Charlie Mac," as the family knew him, would go on to become editor of the *Gazette* after the war, and his skill with words is evident in his diary entry from August 29th, which gives a list of fellow Edgartown recruits and captures the emotional sendoff they received:

To-day we, the volunteers from Edgartown . . . started from the goodly town of our abode, on our way to the defense of the glorious Union and the cause of civil and religious liberty. There was a large concourse of friends and relatives at the wharf from which we embarked in the Schooner *L. Snow*. Captain A. L. Cleaveland, for New Bedford. We received the most cheering evidence of the love and kindly feeling with which we were regarded; a circumstance which in a great degree removed the bitter sting of parting from the dear ones at home, perhaps, never more to meet again. But we were in fine spirits, feeling a consciousness of having done right, we were determined to prove true to the cause we had espoused.¹⁰

10 Charles M. Vincent, *Your Affectionate Son, Charlie Mac*, ed. Marian R. Halperin (Martha's Vineyard Museum, 2008), 1. The other volunteers were John M. R. Ellis, Benjamin Smith, Richard G. Shute, Alonzo Ripley, Elihu M. Bunker, Francis Pease, Jr., and W. H. Harrington.



Enoch Coffin Cornell's photo studio occupies the building at far left in this view of Main Street, Edgartown in the mid-1870s Gothic Hall, its home in 862, is the two-story building to the right. [MVM Photo Collection]

Cornelius Marchant, Mary's father, escorted the volunteers to New Bedford, a gesture acknowledged in the August 29th *Gazette* with a "Card" signed by six of the eight that expressed their desire to return the "sincere and heartfelt thanks for the kindness shown us in the active exertions and interest manifest in our behalf . . . [and to] publicly acknowledge our indebtedness to Cornelius B. Marchant, Esq., our worthy selectman and Allen S. Weeks, Esq. of Boston. We assure them that such kindness will never be forgotten but will ever be kept in grateful remembrance by us."

Ambrotypes and Myriopticons

Photography was burgeoning in the mid-19th century, spurred by technological developments that made photographs easier to produce and cheaper to obtain. Soldiers on their way to war often paused to have photographic portraits taken, and arranged for them to be sent home to loved ones. Mary's friend William Mayhew, who enlisted in the 40th Massachusetts Infantry and was assigned to an engineering unit building pontoon bridges, was among them; in a March entry, she writes of seeing his picture when it arrives at the Mayhew home.

Ambrotypes, made using glass plates coated with a light-sensitive chemical, first appeared in 1853. They were faster and cheaper to make than Daguerreotypes, and had all but replaced them on the market by the time Mary began her diary in 1862.¹¹ In Edgartown, Enoch Coffin

¹¹ Stanley Murphy, "Little Windows Into our Past: Daguerreotypes and Ambrotypes," *Dukes County Intelligencer* 28, no. 3 (Feb 1987): 107-120.

Cornell offered ambrotype portraits in his studio on the second floor of “Gothic Hall,” a Main Street building whose large, peaked second-floor windows admitted large amounts of natural light to work with.¹² Cornell’s exuberant advertisement in the *Gazette* suggests just how important that light was:

Pictures of any size or style, can be procured by calling at CORNELL’S AMBROTYPE ROOMS, over Vinson’s store, North of the Post Office just one door. Price will suit, and quality inferior to none. Let it be understood we only require sunshiny weather for infants, for which one dollar is charged. Others from 25 cents to 25 dollars. Morning light is always preferable.

It was likely at Cornell’s studio that the portrait of Mary’s father, Cornelius B. Marchant, was taken, and to his studio that Mary went when, on May 16th, she “carried the baby to have her ambrotype taken.”

The wonders created by the intersection of new technology and art did not stop, however, with still images like ambrotypes. Decades before Thomas Edison and the Lumiere brothers used still photographs, recorded split seconds apart on flexible strips of film, to create the impression of “moving pictures,” ambitious artists created pictures that literally moved. Invented in the 1790s and popular throughout the nineteenth century, moving panoramas were immense linear paintings executed on strips of canvas hundreds of feet long. Attached to two tall vertical spools concealed from the audience by a proscenium arch, the canvas was slowly wound from one to the other—mimicking the view of the scenery from the window of a passing train or ship—as music played in the background and an onstage narrator called the audience’s attention to points of interest. Capable of being exhibited in any modest-sized hall, moving panoramas (sometimes called “myriopticons” were popular with itinerant showmen who staged a few performances in each town on their circuit before moving on to the next.¹³

A “Panorama of the Rebellion” was exhibited in the upstairs auditorium of the Edgartown Town Hall on July 11, but Mary evidently did not attend. She was in the audience, however, when a “Panorama of New York” was shown on the night of August 19, a week after her return from the Camp Meeting. Popular in its day, it captured the emerging urban sprawl of America’s largest city—already more than four times the size of Boston—as it edged toward a population of 1 million people.

12 Cornell was the grandson of Beriah Norton, profiled in the February 2018 issue of the *Quarterly*, who pressed the British for reparations after Gray’s Raid. Gothic Hall still looms over Main Street, housing shops on the first floor and apartments on the second.

13 See Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (MIT Press, 2013).



The steamer *Martha's Vineyard*, a near-sister of the *Monohansett*, docked at Steamboat (now Memorial) Wharf in the 1880s [Shute Glass Plate Negative Collection]

The New Steamer

The new paddle-wheel steamer *Monohansett* had been built for the New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket Steamship Company to replace the *Eagle's Wing*, which had burned in 1861. Designed by Captain Benjamin Cromwell of Holmes Hole, who also served as its first captain, it was built in five months by a New York shipyard and fitted with the engine salvaged from the *Eagle's Wing*. The *Monohansett* made its inaugural trip to the Vineyard on May 31, steaming past the Edgartown Harbor Light on its offshore stone island and docking at Fisher's Wharf at the intersection of Dock and Daggett Streets. Mary noted the initial arrival in her diary and older members of the Marchant family probably breathed a sigh of relief. Steamer service Edgartown had come and gone, according to the availability to boats and the whims of the companies that operated them, for years. The new *Monohansett* promised stability and easy access to the mainland.

Within a few months, however, the federal government had chartered the steamer for wartime service, first as a mail boat, then as a floating headquarters, and finally as a dispatch boat for General Grant's army, all the while under the command Captain Hiram Crowell and first mate Charles C. Smith. General Grant was a passenger on her for several occasions and was noted to be very fond of this ship, preferring her to others. After the war, General Grant visited Martha's Vineyard in August 1874

and it was, coincidentally, the *Monohansett* that carried him to and from the Island. President Lincoln and his wife were passengers on the steamer during the war years as well. Her war service included carrying troops to Newbern, North Carolina and Hilton Head, South Carolina, and it was during that service that a surprised Charlie Mac Vincent encountered her at Folly Island, South Carolina in 1863. His diary entry for November 6, 1863, reflects his surprise and delight at the sight of the familiar ship—out of place and hundreds of miles from home, just as he was: “Much to my joy, found the good steamer, *Monohansett*, lying in the stream. I lined her for the wharf and soon hove in sight of the big Captain Crowell, who loomed up ‘like a herring in a strap tub.’”¹⁴

He goes on to mention how he was invited aboard for dinner and visited with friends from home, including first mate Smith, who presented him with canned blueberries and fresh oranges acquired in St. Augustine, Florida. The wonderful feeling of faces from home made for a happy reunion of Islanders in the middle of war weary years for each of them. Smith, like Vincent, would return to the Vineyard at war’s end. He assumed command of the *Monohansett* in 1867 and stayed with her, and the line, for twenty-three years—retiring when she was taken out of service in 1890.¹⁵

The Circle of Life

Diarists of the era routinely noted births, marriages and deaths—not just of family and close friends, but of members of the community—and Mary’s was no exception. Her entries, with their startling matter-of-fact tone, are a stark reminder that, even in peacetime, death was an ever-present reality on the mid-nineteenth century Vineyard to a degree unimaginable today:

January 26: Two men have just gone by with the coffins with Lucy Chadwick’s baby.

March 4: Mellville Nevin died this morning at 6 o’clock.

March 6: Attend the funeral of Mr. Nevin.

August 3: The funeral services of Mr. Isiah Pease was delivered.

October 18: Intelligence of Dr. Bracketts Death died of diphtheria sick 9 days. Nancy H. Pease a son today.

October 21: The corpse of Dr. Bracketts brought to day—saw the procession from Ma Raymond’s.

October 30: Mrs. Milton died suddenly in a fit

November 20: The corpse of Susan Vinson brought to day

November 25: Father watched with Capt. Milton he died in the night

Notices of weddings have a similar matter-of-fact quality, making a startling contrast to the elaborate preparation and planning that go into today’s weddings:

14 Vincent, *Your Affectionate Son, Charlie Mac*, 91.

15 Charles C. Smith, “The *Monohansett* and the Hard Winter of 1885,” *Dukes County Intelligencer* 8, no. 4 (May 1967): 74-82, on p. 74.

April 12: Received invitation to see Addie married

April 13: Addie was married at 7 o'clock by Rev. M. Nason, splendid evening.

Six months later, there is notice of an even more restrained set of nuptials:

October 12: Lizzie Marchant married this evening by Rev. F. A.

Crafts no one witnessed the ceremony but her father.

Lizzie, aged 20, was Mary's cousin: the daughter of her uncle Edgar, the editor and publisher of the *Gazette*. The groom was Francis B. Osborn, whose own father—whaling magnate Abraham, Sr.—had celebrated the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson in February, and whose older brother was the luckless captain of the *Ocmulgee*. Francis also went into the family business, but died on November 12, 1875, of injuries inflicted by a whale in Bristol Bay, Alaska. He was survived by his namesake son Francis E. Osborn, born in Salem seven-and-a-half months after the wedding and doubtless the reason why the ceremony itself was, even by nineteenth century standards, restrained.

Mary's dreams of her own wedding, whatever they may have been, were destined to remain dreams. She died late the following year—December 17, 1863—aged 25 years and five months. Town records list the cause of her death simply as “jaundice,” but her 1862 diary records a litany of illnesses and accidents, suggesting that the jaundice may have been a sign of deeper medical problems: perhaps cancer of the liver, gall bladder maladies that resulted in sepsis, or tick-borne diseases like babesiosis or Lyme disease.¹⁶ Mary's own death was, doubtless, duly recorded in the pages of other diaries kept by other residents of Edgartown, as they recorded the day-to-day rhythms of their own lives. Even by the standards of her own, less-certain age, Mary's life ended far too soon, but her journal entries for 1862, individually sparse but collectively rich, reveal with startling clarity what it was like to be a young, independent woman in a seaport village buffeted by the winds of social change and a distant war. She makes me quietly wonder what future historians will make of the blogs, Facebook pages, and handwritten journals that survive to offer future audiences a window on our own era.

¹⁶ Gerry Yukevich, MD, personal communication.

Liberty Proclaimed

James Cooms, the Vineyard Gazette,
And the 14th Amendment, 1863-1868

by ELIZABETH W. TROTTER

On the afternoon of Monday, April 10, 1865, Thomas Hinckley's son hopped into a rowboat at Woods Hole and hefted the oars as he prepared to row, with determined strokes, across Vineyard Sound. In his pocket was a telegram with momentous news: Gen. Robert E. Lee had surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at an obscure Virginia crossroads called Appomattox. A few hours later, newspapers confirming the details would arrive on the afternoon steamer. Church bells, ringing throughout the day in each Island town, heralded the news to Vineyard residents: the war was over, and their loved ones would be coming home.¹

The joy that swept over the Island was eclipsed, by week's end, by other, sadder news: President Lincoln had been shot. By May 9 a military commission would be seated to hear evidence about the conspiratorial plot, of which John Wilkes Booth was only the most visible member, that lay behind it. John A. Bingham, the acting Judge Advocate in charge of the commission, would later insist that the assassination was a Confederate intelligence operation, that reached as high as CSA president Jefferson Davis. The aim of the conspirators, Bingham believed, was to "perpetuate the devilish slavocracy."

Lincoln's signature of the Emancipation Proclamation, a little less than two years earlier, had left no doubt about his intentions toward what the Southern states called their "peculiar institution." In its wake "186,000 blacks entered the army and by the war's end one active duty soldier in four was black."² Black men literally fought for their freedom, and as the war drew to a close Lincoln used his political skills to maneuver the Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery in the United States, through Congress. Full ratification finally came in December 1865. The war had ended, slavery had ended, but the work of reconstruction and making pro-

1 Arthur R. Railton, *The History of Martha's Vineyard* (Commonwealth Editions, 2006), 235; *Vineyard Gazette*, April 14, 1865

2 Garrett Epps, *Democracy Reborn: The Fourteenth Amendment and the Fight for Equal Rights in Post-Civil War America* (Henry Holt, 2006), 154

visions for newly freed African Americans had just begun. Definitions of “freedom” took many forms as the nation’s leaders began the work on the Fourteenth Amendment. James Madison Cooms was acting editor of the *Vineyard Gazette* during this eventful period, having taken over at age 22 from his former employer, founding editor Edgar Marchant, in July 1863.³ Arthur Railton argues, in his *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, that Cooms was “ahead of his time” with respect to the treatment of African Americans: “They should be allowed to vote, he argued: ‘As they helped with the bayonet so too . . . with the help of the ballot they will help to reconstruct, recuperate and help to carry out in [the South] the establishment of peace and equity where, even now, anarchy and misrule hold sway.’”⁴ I would, however, debate Railton on this point. Reading between the lines of Cooms’ editorials suggests that he was an educated young man very much attuned to the pulse of the time (and place) in which he wrote.

James Cooms was, after all, a resident of a state that had declared, in its 1780 constitution, that “all men are free and equal.” Citing that clause, Elizabeth Freeman and Quok Walker appealed to the state’s Supreme Judicial Court for their freedom—and won. When the first national census was taken in 1790, no slaves were recorded in the state.⁵ Massachusetts had been a hotbed of abolitionism before the Civil War: the home of abolitionist minister Henry Ward Beecher—who raised money to buy the freedom of enslaved individuals, and sent rifles (nicknamed “Beecher’s Bibles”) to abolitionist guerrillas

Vineyard Gazette.

EDGARTOWN:

FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 1865

Hang out your Banners
upon the outer wall.



Victory ! Victory !

Since our last issue many stirring events have transpired. The flight of Lee and his army, of Jeff Davis and his cabinet ; the story of the occupation of Petersburg and Richmond ; the matchless energy and daring enterprise of Sheridan, who has won new laurels as an infantry commander, by his masterly strategy in masking his movements so effectually as to delude his enemies into the belief that they were to win a victory, when he was quietly encircling them in his toils ; his wonderful success in taking thousands of prisoners. All these have given place to the welcome intelligence, from official sources, that **GEN. LEE HAS SURRENDERED THE ARMY OF NORTH-**

In an editorial penned by James Cooms for the April 14, 1865 edition, the *Vineyard Gazette* celebrates the end of the Civil War.

3 Born in Edgartown on September 5, 1841, Cooms married Charlotte Marchant—niece of his former boss, and younger sister of seamstress and diarist Mary Marchant, profiled elsewhere in this issue—in 1865. He died on April 30, 1909, at the age of 68.

4 Railton, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, 235.

5 See Christopher Cameron, *To Plead Our Own Cause: African Americans in Massachusetts and the Making of the Antislavery Movement* (Kent State University Press, 2014), 78.

in Kansas and Nebraska—and of his sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* awakened millions to the horrors of slavery. William Lloyd Garrison, along with Isaac Knapp, founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society and a weekly anti-slavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, there in 1831. When the society morphed into the American Anti-Slavery

Society a few years later, Garrison formed a new state auxiliary, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, in 1835.

The Edgartown Anti-Slavery Society was formed late in the following year. The articles establishing it, a copy of which is in the Museum archives, were signed on December 31, 1836.⁶ The society was active enough to send petitions to Congress. One expresses anger at Congress's May 25, 1836 adoption of a "gag rule" forbidding discussion of any anti-slavery petitions brought to the floor: a response, by pro-slavery forces, to the growth of societies like that in Edgartown—1,350 across the North, comprising a quarter-million members—and to their ability to flood Congress with such petitions. Two such petitions signed and forwarded by the Edgartown Anti-Slavery Society are also part of the Museum archives. One specifically calls for

Signatures and partial text of an undated petition submitted to Congress by the Edgartown Anti-Slavery Society, urging that slavery be outlawed nationwide [RU 340 (African Americans on Martha's Vineyard), Box 1, Folder 15].

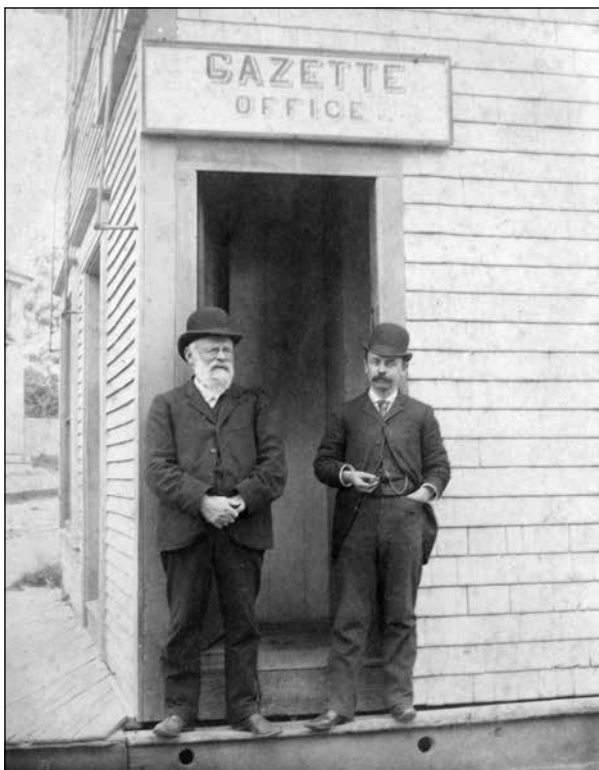
a halt to the "domestic slave trade" and the other addresses the annexation of Texas and the society's position that slavery should be prohibited in any "new states" admitted to the Union.

James Cooms' ideas, then, would have seemed neither new nor controversial nor "ahead of his time" to a substantial segment of Edgartown residents, but rather reflective of the ideas and thoughts swirling in the time he lived in.

Senator Charles Sumner—a prominent abolitionist before the war and a

6 RU 340 (African Americans on Martha's Vineyard), Box 1, Folder 11

leader of the “Radical” wing of the Republican Party during and after it—was laying out the next steps in the crusade on the floor of the Senate as the ink of Cooms’ editorials was drying on the pages of the *Gazette*. As Cooms advocated in Edgartown for the equality of African Americans under the foundations of what would become the Fourteenth Amendment—designed to guarantee such equality—began to take shape in Washington. The crux of the debate centered on voting and citizenship rights, and Cooms’ editorials reflected the Northern (and more particularly Radical Republican) position of the day. The Cooms editorials from March 1865 through April 1866 are filled with language echoing that used in Washington, D.C., by Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, and other leading Republicans.



Founding editor Edgar Marchant (left) poses with his successor in the doorway of the *Gazette*’s 1 N. Water Street office during his second (and final) retirement in 1888. Marchant had declared the paper to be “neutral in politics,” but Cooms, picked to succeed him upon his first retirement, had other ideas [MVM Photo Collection].

As might be expected from a man prominent in the local Temperance Society (of which he served as secretary in 1865), Cooms’ writings are sometimes peppered with religious fervor, and shaped by a theology in which God acts as the avenger and liberator of the oppressed:

No Christian can believe that the change that has taken place in the condition of the Negro was the result of mere chance, but must arrive at the conclusion that a superintending Providence controlled the whole proceeding, from the opening to the close of the rebellion; and the justice to the downtrodden of the human race was the Omniscient design, in permitting the great waste of blood and life that was sacrificed to obtain the overthrow of that institution which was a reproach to this nation and a strain on civilization.⁷

These very sentiments had been prevalent in New England anti-slavery societies since their founding. As early as 1774, freed slave Ceasar Sarter

⁷ *Vineyard Gazette*, January 5, 1866.

penned an essay on the connection between the slave and the story of the Israelites being led to freedom by Moses. That God was on the front lines of the fight against slavery, dispensing justice to those who engaged in the evil practice, was abundantly clear to James Cooms, as it was to other New England abolitionists.⁸

Cooms called for black suffrage, but went beyond that to take the more general position that “liberty is an ‘inalienable right’ and should be universal.”⁹ Outside the ranks of the Radical Republican, members of Congress were not so sure. Many opposed the right of freed slaves to citizenship out of fear that it would lead to voting rights and, ultimately, to political representation. Andrew Rogers, a pro-Southern Democrat from New Jersey, stated at the opening of one debate that: “This amendment would make all citizens eligible [to be elected president], negroes as well as whites.”¹⁰ The idea of blacks holding office was anathema to the South, with its large black population, and, for that matter, to many in the North.

Two months after the end of the war, contemplating a new world, Cooms’ editorial observed: “Perhaps the real secret of the matter is that the master has not yet fully realized the change that has taken place in his relation to those who were lately his slaves.” It went on to note that will take time for the former master to learn to mend his ways, and to caution that “many seem unable to divest themselves of the belief that they have the right to control the action of the employed when he is off duty, in some cases, to control his suffrage at the polls, but of such acts we can never be brought to approve.”¹¹

When the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified in December 1865, Cooms—whose supporters might have expected him to be elated—struck a note of warning instead:

Slavery, although literally dead, is virtually alive.” The old ‘machine’ is being set going again, to be sure, but too many of those that stand at the helm retain their old habits and prejudices, and there is great danger, unless the government continues to hold a restraining power upon them, that these States will get back into the old paths that would lead to an established oligarchy.

It rests with Congress now to see that the guidance of these States is in the right direction; to see that they shall be ‘reconstructed’ upon the (bread?) basis that shall give permanent and universal liberty. There is work to accomplish that never before devolved upon such a body, and as they settle this question of reconstruction, so will rest the future welfare of the country.¹²

8 Julia Ward Howe’s *Battle Hymn of the Republic* is built around this sentiment.

9 *Vineyard Gazette*, April 13, 1866.

10 Epps, *Democracy Reborn*, 171.

11 *Vineyard Gazette*, June 25, 1865.

12 *Vineyard Gazette*, December 8, 1865



Beneficiaries of the 14th Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection under the law:" African Americans at the Wesleyan Grove Campground, 1870s [MVM Photo Collection].

He took a similar position early the following year: "There are among us, however, those who still fear this obsolete power, who believe that the advocates of slavery will yet accomplish by strategy and intrigue that which they failed to obtain by open force."¹³ With the benefit of hindsight, aware of Jim Crow laws and so much more that came after, we are likely to see this as prescient, but Coombs was not alone in thinking it. Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens both had similar concerns, and about the greatest threat to African Americans' new freedom, and Frederick Douglass famously stated: "Peace between races is not to be secured by degrading one race and withholding it from another; but by

¹³ *Vineyard Gazette*, January 6, 1866.

maintaining a state of equal justice between the classes.”

In Cooms’ eyes, “equal justice” was key, and as the Fourteenth Amendment was being readied for presentation to President Andrew Johnson he allowed himself to celebrate at last:

A great future opens now for America, Slavery, that foul blot that has so long stained her escutcheon, has been washed out by the blood of a hundred thousand patriots. Liberty has been proclaimed—not only to the four millions of the black race, but to as many more of the whites. The one central idea of our political system, equality, is being inaugurated in the southern mind so long blinded by ignorance and prejudice. Thus the principles of truth and justice are being ordained, and with the growth of these principles will grow the prosperity of our whole, united country. Hereafter America shall be her name, and she shall read a new evangel of liberty, and justice, and prosperity, to all the world, and shall rise in dignity and strength until she shall become stronger and more enduring...¹⁴

Equality became the hinge on which many more doors were to be opened in years to come. The concept is imbedded in the text of the amendment:

No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

On those words, in whole or in part, the Supreme Court’s landmark decisions on racial segregation (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954), right to counsel (*Gideon v. Wainright*, 1963), privacy (*Griswold v. Connecticut*, 1965), interracial marriage (*Loving v. Virginia*, 1967), and LGBT rights (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2014). On them, too, rests the Fifteenth Amendment, passed in February 1869 and ratified just under a year later, which prohibited the abridgment of voting rights on grounds of “race, creed, or prior condition of servitude.”

The Fourteenth Amendment was ratified on July 28, 1868—150 years ago this summer—but there was no *Gazette* editorial from James Madison Cooms to celebrate it. He had resigned the editorship of the *Gazette* thirteen months before, and (like many Vineyarders of the era) moved to the mainland in search of a better life. He found it in Middleboro, where he purchased the local weekly: the *Middleboro Gazette and Old Colony Advertiser*. Expanding the paper and shortening its name (to simply the *Middleboro Gazette*), he continued as owner-editor for the next twenty-five years.¹⁵ It would be a tumultuous quarter century—the heart of what Mark Twain dubbed the “Gilded Age”—and Cooms, no doubt, had much to say about it.

14 *Vineyard Gazette*, February 23, 1866

15 Thomas Weston, *History of the Town of Middleboro, Massachusetts*, vol. 1 (Riverside Press, 1906), 267.

Edgartown Before WWII

Alice Cleveland, Maxi Mello, Teresa Baptiste

Interviewed by LINSEY LEE

Over the first decades of the twentieth century—from 1900 to 1940—Edgartown slowly transformed itself from a whaling and fishing port that welcomed modest numbers of summer visitors to a bustling resort where visiting yachts shared the harbor with fishing schooners and “summer people” transformed whaling-era mansions into vacation homes. The women whose recollections make up this article witnessed that transformation from three very different vantage points. The passages below—excerpts from much longer interviews in the MVM Oral History Collection—reflect their experiences, and their memories, of Edgartown as it once was.



Alice Cleveland (1893-1989)

The 1900s: Bravos, Baptists, and the Red Lion

Alice Cleveland grew up on the family dairy farm on Clevelandtown Road, and graduated from the Edgartown high school in 1909. After studying nursing at the Homeopathic Hospital in Providence, she returned to the Vineyard helped her mother run the family farm until her father's death in 1922. She then began a long nursing career, working for the Red Cross Health Center in Vineyard Haven, as a private duty nurse, and as the school nurse to all towns except Oak Bluffs. She was active in her church and participated in many social organizations including the Women's Relief Corps Auxiliary, the DAR and the Grange.

LL: So, Edgartown has really changed a lot?

AC: Oh, it has changed a lot. I can remember when the town had kerosene lamps and the lamplighter came every afternoon to polish the chimneys and to fill the lamps to get ready to light 'em at night. There were no tarred roads; they were sand. And in the winter the sidewalks were cleaned with a form that was shaped like that, with a point, and a horse

Linsey Lee, the MVM Oral History Curator, has been collecting the stories of Vineyarders in their own words for more than thirty years. She is currently at work on the third volume in her *Vineyard Voices* series of oral history collections.

out here. And the horse dragged this on the sidewalk. And that's the way your sidewalks were cleaned.

There were no tarred roads anywhere. That came later on. I don't know when they put the first tarred roads in. The Town water was put in in 1906 and it comes down the Clevelandtown Road and they had Bravas work to dig the pipeline and my brother (my brother died when he was 12) and I, we used to stop in and write their letters for them.¹ They could neither read nor write and we were just kids going to school and we would write their letters home for them. The town people thought it was terrible that my mother didn't stop my going into that Bravo house to write their letters. It was an unheard of thing that I should be allowed to go there. My father said, well as long as they treated me alright I could go, but if they didn't to let him know. So I went as long as they required me. I don't know whether it was till the end of putting in the water or what it was. But I went for a long time.

LL: *There was quite a division between the Islanders and the Portuguese?*

AC: Oh, yes. Well the Portuguese people came here working on the whaling ships. And more than half of the Portuguese that came never used their own name. They took the last name of the captain who was captain of the boat they came on. There are families here in town now that use the name of the captain of the boats that their grandfathers, that I know, came over on. And there are people in this town—brothers who had two different names. Now, one Captain Marshall went under the name of Marshall, but his brother was a Norton. But they had different captains that they came under and so they took the name of the captain.

LL: *Did any Portuguese come over on your grandfather's ship?*²

AC: I don't know. I never heard him say and I never heard any account made. The Portuguese people came green – no English – and they stayed to work on farms or the women to work in houses. They were servants.

LL: *And so that's really changed over the years?*

AC: Oh, yes, it's changed during the years. And of course there was intermarrying between the Portuguese and the white people.

LL: *When you went to school—did you go to school with Portuguese children?*

AC: Oh, yes, in the same grade—no difference was made. But we didn't have colored people here in Edgartown. They had colored people in Oak Bluffs in the same years, but they were not in Edgartown. My grandfather Vincent wouldn't go to Oak Bluffs to eat at his wife's people because they had colored help and he wouldn't eat anything that colored hands

1 "Bravos," as used here, was most likely a generic term for Cape Verdeans as many came to the Vineyard from the Cape Verde island of Brava.

2 Captain Hiram J. Cleveland was master of a series of whaling vessels in the 1860s and 1870s, including the bark *Awashonks* and the brig *Eunice H. Adams*.



The students of Edgartown High School in 1908; Alice Cleveland is student #31. [MVM Photo Collection, 1972.014.005]

handled. So, although he would go up and see the family, he wouldn't eat with them. See that was Civil War days.

LL: *What was the school like? Where was it, the school that you went to when you were young?*

AC: I went to two! To what's known as the Carroll Apartments and that housed the first 3 grades downstairs, the next 3 grades upstairs. And that was known as the North School. Then I came over here to this building that is down here on School Street and that was the South School and that had the high school.³ But when I was ready to go into the sixth grade they made a change so that the sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade downstairs here and then high school upstairs. And the same woman that taught my mother, taught me in the first 3 grades. Her name was Abby D. Pease and in the next three grades it was Fannie A. Deane—Fannie Deane was a relative of the Vincent family. She left money for a scholarship which has been increased during the years and is manipulated by the DAR and is known as the Fannie Deane Scholarship. And she lived in a big house opposite where the Baptist Church was on School Street. And her father's name was Hyman Vincent and he had a place in Oak Bluffs. And I have a little clipping from the Gazette where Fannie A. Deane had gone to Oak Bluffs to her father's house to take French lessons.

³ The North and South Schools were closed in 1926, when the new consolidated school opened on Robinson Road. The South School building, which later housed the Edgartown Boys and Girls Club, was demolished to make way for a private home; the North School, which still stands, is part of Edgartown Commons.

LL: *They didn't teach things like French in the school?*

AC: They did at my time. You could take both French and Latin and Algebra.

LL: *Until what time did school go?*

AC: Oh, yes. Two sessions—nine to twelve, and then you were out to go home for lunch from twelve to one, and then you had school until three-thirty in the afternoon.

LL: *And what did you do after school?*

AC: Well, the kids got together and they used to have a place where they played basketball down here. It's all fenced in now. But at that time we could go and play basketball afterschool. But, you were all tied up with church work. The church had things on certain days of the week that you would go to.

LL: *Like what types of things?*

AC: I went to the Baptist church and I had to go to practice for choir rehearsal and things like that. And then they had a club for girls—I don't know about boys, but they had a club for girls. And two of the older women of the church—one taught the sewing and one took care of the Sunday school work. And all of the Bible I ever learned, I learned there. But Saturdays was our own and I always had a girl come up from town and we had a lunch put up—whatever we wanted. I remember I had sardines and my grandfather thought it was a terrible thing. "Eating sardines when you turn down good food at the table." We would take sardines and go out for lunch in the woods. We'd go off in the woods, just two of us, and any road we had never been on—that's the road we took to find out where it went. And that's what we did Saturdays.

Sunday was all taken care of. My mother played the church organ so we went to church ten o'clock in the morning. I pumped the organ till the regular blower came. We stayed for the morning service. My brother was three years and a half younger and he used to lean on me—go to sleep during the church service. Then the kids stayed for Sunday School.

My mother went home to lay out dinner and we had to walk home after Sunday School. Then Epworth League or Christian Endeavor was first in the evening—six o'clock or six-thirty. And then after that was the evening church service and you went to that. So, all day you spent church going. And then Wednesday night there was prayer meeting and you always had to go to that.

LL: *And most of your friends were there too?*

AC: Oh, sure. We all—that wasn't just me and my family—everybody did the same thing. That is, there were different denominations—the Method-



Fishermen load their catch at Mattakeset Creek in the 1920s [MVM Photo Collection]

ist Church and the Baptist Church and the Congregational Church.⁴ Each church had their own meetings but according the church you belonged to, that was where you went.

LL: *And in the summer would you go to the beach a lot and have picnics?*

AC: No, not really. I used to walk down to town and the friend I was most intimate with lived down Cooke Street, and we went from Cooke Street down to Collins Beach to go in swimming. Nobody ever went with us; we just went alone. And there was an inn on Cooke Street that was called the Red Lion. It's not there now. It was torn down and a house was put in its place. But we were warned about the Red Lion. We must never go in there—no matter if anyone came out and talked to us—we must never talk to them. We must pass right by and go down to the beach. Which we did.

I don't know—I grew up with the most awful feeling about that house. Oh! You kept your eyes straight ahead. You never even looked that way when you passed by. Because that was the Red Lion and it was very notorious. You weren't to be connected to it in any way, shape, or form.



LL: *Was the harbor quite busy when you were young? Where there lots of fishing boats coming in?*

⁴ The Baptist and Congregational Churches of Edgartown merged, in 1925, to form the Federated Church, but maintained separate buildings until after World War II, when the Baptist Church was deconsecrated and sold. It is now a private home.

AC: Well, there used to be big boats that came in and the men here used to cart herring down to the wharf for bait in the big boats. And my father with his truck wagon used to go down to the beach and they used to seine for the herring.

LL: *Down at the Mattakeset Herring Creek?*

AC: Yes, and then the truck wagons—horse and wagon—would go down there and they would load up the herring and they would cart them down and dump them aboard these boats that were down by the wharf. They were called “smacks”—the boats were. And they came in for bait; they used the herring for bait. I know that it was a regular business.



LL: *So the whole Great Plains was totally different back then?*

AC: Oh, yes. Going down this way there were no trees at all except where you see the tall pine trees. There was a grove of pines and they were known as Prada’s pines. Beyond that toward the South Beach there was nothing. It was just open field and at this time of year you would look out across the grass and it would be all blue where the violets were blooming and they were called cowsfoot violets. They were very large, a blue violet. In my days there were several houses way over here next to the Edgartown Great Pond that the Vincents had. A Vincent in every house.

And out there was the hotel—Mattakeset Hotel.⁵ And that was quite a thing! And the train used to run from the wharf in Oak Bluffs and the track varied as it came down—it came along the shore and then it turned in a came across what is now part of the cemetery and came down back of where this barn is. Thirty feet beyond this barn is the old railroad track and it went down here and turned off and went to the beach, went to the hotel. The hotel was...well, there were two parts that came to the ground and in between it was concrete and you could drive under it and drive down onto the wharf. So that boats coming down the harbor could come to the hotel.

I can remember playing in the hotel that my mother and father went to see the people who had the care of the hotel and their daughter and I played in the rooms upstairs. I must have been about 12 years old. Every room had a toilet set—all flowered and filigreed up. And every bureau was painted different color. And they were all just common ordinary pine bureaux, but they were all painted different colors.

And eventually they cut off the two parts that went to the ground. Those two long parts were moved down here to the Harborview as annexes and the middle part was moved up on the road out of town, Main Street, as a

5 Opened in 1873 on the shore of Katama Bay, the Mattakeset Lodge was Edgartown’s attempt to compete with the resort hotels of Cottage City (now Oak Bluffs). Never economically stable, it closed for the last time in 1905.



Mattakeset Lodge as seen from Katama Bay, showing the archway that led from the railroad stop in front of the hotel to the pier behind [Shute Glass Plate Negative Collection]

dwelling house and it's still there. And those buildings are still being used down to the Harborview.



LL: *Do you remember when the first car came to Edgartown?*

AC: Yeah, my father had the first milk truck that came to the Island. And he had it for a year before it was ever driven. And I learned to drive a car in 1920. And I have driven ever since. And I drove that milk truck, and everyone thought it was a wonderful thing—because here was a girl driving a truck. So that was about the time when cars came to the Island.

LL: *And did they have problems on the sandy roads?*

AC: Oh yes! We always got stuck on the sandy roads. We always got out and pushed. Everyone in the car got out and pushed so as to get it started again. And it was a sand road from here to Vineyard Haven. No tarred road. And I can remember, vaguely, when the tarred road was made to Oak Bluffs., And that it was a long time before the one was made to Vineyard Haven and the one was made to West Tisbury. My father, when going to the Fair, wouldn't go over the sandy road to West Tisbury. He would take the Dr. Fisher Road and go across country and come out by North Tisbury. That saved all the hills that the horse might have to pull the wagon up.

LL: *Which is the Dr. Fisher Road?*

AC: Well it's not used now. It starts out by where you turn off to go into

MacKenty's.⁶ And it goes cross country and across the Reservation—the State Forest—and comes out near by the dump in North Tisbury. And that was how we used to go to the Fair. Because it saved the horse. You had to be careful of your horse those days, you know.

Maximena Mello (1900-1991) The 1920s: Meeting Seven Manuels

Maximena "Maxi" Borges Gracia was raised in a large Portuguese family in New Bedford. She married Manuel Mello (1884-1975), a widowed Edgartown fisherman with three young sons, in 1926. Settling in Edgartown, she became deeply involved in town politics, served on the Edgartown Finance Committee and became the first Portuguese member of the Edgartown Women's Club. She was known Island-wide for her skills at chair caning and baking.

When I came to the Vineyard, I came October the Seventh, 1926. With this background of working in my family's bakery and at a wholesale grocer in New Bedford I didn't know anything about boats, but I just loved boats . . . Well, soon as we landed here in Edgartown, he had to go down and see his *Miramar*. That was the first thing he did. And I had never been in the house I was going to live in.

So first we went to the house, and he had three little boys. So the boys were there waiting, and I said, "Now, boys, I'm going to go down with your father." And they said, "The women [don't] go down there on the waterfront."

And I said "Well, that's odd, but I think I'd like to go down to the boat." I said, "Daddy, I'm going to go down." And he said "No, Maxi, I have to go, my boat is out on a stake. It's not up near the shanties."

Well, that was all new to me. But I went down with him anyhow: the first time I've got to get my way in somehow, because he was born on the other side, you know, in the old country, and he had a lot of his old country ideas. You can't get rid of them, no more than I can get rid of my American-born ones. So we went down to the waterfront.

And you know where all those little piers are, between the Yacht Club and that restaurant?⁷ Well, it was a row of shanties in through there. About eight little boathouses, and they used to tie their boats all up in through there. It was the prettiest sight! And we got down there, it was about five o'clock in the evening in October. The sun was setting. You could see Chappaquiddick, with all the golden lights, you know. It was the most

6 Off the Edgartown-West Tisbury Road, just west of the intersection with Meetinghouse Way

7 "That restaurant," the Seafood Shanty, stands on what was once known as Chadwick's Wharf. In 1926, the wharf was the site of a large coal warehouse and an overhead conveyer belt used to unload schooners.



The Edgartown waterfront, looking south toward Tower Hill, in the 1890s. When Maxi Mello first saw it in 1926, it would have looked much the same: crowded with small craft moored to stakes. [Shute Glass Plate Negative Collection]

beautiful thing I'd ever seen! Water, I love the water!

And he said "You can't go with me, I have to go in the rowboat." I said "I don't care for the rowboat, I'll wait here for you." And he says "That's an awful thing for you, you don't know, I don't like this." I says "Well, I'm having fun!"

So he gets into his rowboat, and he had to go up his stake, which was way up between Cronkite's and Tower Hill. That's where he anchored his boat. There was no room down in the front there. Everybody had a stake, what they called a "stake." I had to learn that it was not a "steak;" it's a *stake*: S...T..A...K...E. An anchor, where they anchored their boats. So he went off to see the *Miramar*, and I stood there. And within one hour, I met five Manuels down there. The same night that I first came here.

Mr. Terra came onto the pier. Mr. Terra was an old captain. He had the deepest blue, blue eyes, big white mustache, and his skin was all, all tan from the water. He looked like a typical seaman, you know. Mr. Terra, I knew, Captain Manuel Terra. He had come to our wedding.

So he came over and he stayed talking to me. And then along came another Manuel. And honest, he looked just like a Frenchman that comes in the movies. Red, red, red cheeks, piercing black eyes and a little moustache – very different from Mr. Terra or my husband. The other Manuel came and says "Hi, Manuel!" And Mr. Terra says "Hi, Littleneck!" That was his nickname. I said, "Is that his name, Littleneck?" "No, everybody calls him Littleneck. He's Manuel...I can't even think of his last name," Mr. Terra said. "We all call him Littleneck."

Well, I said, "That's fine." Well, there were two Manuels, with mine was three. And pretty soon, another one comes slouching around from Water St. onto this little pier there in front of all of their shanties. He was a little roly-poly man and he came around and he said, "Hi, Manuel." That was to

Mr. Terra – they never nicknamed him. And then, “Hi Littleneck.”

He saw me there. It was quite surprising. “Is that Manuel’s wife?” “Yes, it’s the new bride.” He came over, took his hat off like that, very dapper. “I’m Manuel Perry. They call me the Rebon, but my name is Manuel Perry.” I said, “How many Manuels are there in this town?” He says, “Bunch of them. That’s why they nickname us.”

He was sort of the comic of the whole bunch of men, and he looked at me and said, “Gee, I’m glad to know you.” And he puts his hand out, and makes one of those twirls like the Irish do—a jig! He was really the clown of the fishermen. He was very, very funny, this man.

And so we were talking and I said, “Are you from Saint Michael?” He says, “I worked all my life in Saint Michael around the dock because that’s where the ships come in. I says, “So you were a little ship chandler, huh?” “Yup,” he says, “I used to buy all the little piglets and chickens from the people around the villages and come and sell them to the ocean liners that stopped there at the breakwater. They all stopped at Saint Michael in the Azores. That was what he did. He was not a farmer like some of the rest of the men. That was four – was that four? I guess that was four or five.

But there were so many Manuels. Everybody had a nickname. And they all came over, and shook hands; it was my first day, that I was here in Edgartown.

Well, when my husband came, there was his new bride surrounded with four men. That was funny, wasn’t it? Rebon says, “Manuel you are a lucky son of a gun, you got yourself a nice wife!” And he says, “I think so.” And he looks and says, “Well we’ll have to be going now” so they all scattered.

And then, after we parted, Manuel said “Satisfied?” I said, “Oh, I’ve had a lovely time. I’ve met so many Manuels! So, when we have our first child, it’s going to be Manuel.” [And my husband said] “Over my dead body! There’s not going to be another Manuel in this town! Every other person is Manuel! That’s enough, enough is enough!”

When we came up to Main St. we got to the corner of the bank, to the little store that used to be a shoe store, out came these two men, they saw my husband coming. “Oh Manuel, we’ve got to meet your new wife.” And so my husband says, “Maxi, this is Mr. DeLoura, Manuel DeLoura.”⁸ That’s another Manuel. He was awfully nice. His partner was Joe King Sylvia and they came over and made themselves known. They were very nice. Manuel said, “When you want a pair of shoes, come and see Joe King.” I said, “Is his name Joe King?” He says, “No, he’s Joe Sylvia but who knows, there’s too many Sylvias so they go by their middle name, he’s Joe King. And I’m Manuel DeLoura.”

8 Born in the Azores, Manuel Chaves DeLoura (1869-1951) came to Edgartown on the whaling bark *Mary Frazier* at the age of 16. His son endowed the Elmer Hobson DeLoura Memorial Scholarship for college-bound high-school graduates from the Island.

I said, “No nickname?” He said, “There’d better not!”

And coming around the corner we met another Manuel, Foster Silva’s father. He says, “Hi, Manuel” and Manuel says “Hi, Manuel” I said, “What Manuel is that?” He said, “That’s Manuel Seamus. He’s Foster Silva’s father.” I said, “How come? Is that his middle name too?” “Yup. Too many Silvas so he’s Manuel Seamus.

I said, “Manuel, for goodness sakes. You are right! Every other person is a Manuel!” But after all, they are Portuguese!

And, also, on our way down street to the boat, our other house on South Summer Street was right in the back of Manuel Roberts—Manuel Swartz we always called him⁹—came out of his house with his hands like this on suspenders, and he says “Hey, Manuel, is this the new woman?” My husband says: “Yeah, this is the new lady.”

And so Manuel says “Wait a minute!” And he hollers to his wife “Louisa, come out and see Manuel’s new wife!” So Louisa came out. He was definitely Portuguese, but Louisa wasn’t. She was, I think of Scotch ancestry. The poor woman came out all shy with an apron around her, she was cleaning her mouth—it was suppertime. And she said: “Oh, I’m so glad to know you!” [And I replied] “Well, I am too! I’m going to be right in your backyard. Do come over and see me, ’cause I don’t know anybody.” [She said] “I’ll do that; I’ll be over tomorrow with a cake!” And she came over the next day. She was the nicest person. We became good friends.



Master boat builder Manuel Swartz Roberts (center) and one of his customers, William Nerney (left), in the 1920s [MVM Photo Collection].

One day, I think I met seven or eight Manuels. That first day! But I had a wonderful sight of the waterfront. So when we got home, he said: “Now you don’t go down there alone. You didn’t see any woman down there, did you?” [But] in that one day, I met all those Manuels and it made a kinship, a friendship, just by meeting them and having them come up and talking, and they were my friends till they all died. Every last one of them is gone.

⁹ Edgartown’s most famous boat-builder, Manuel Swartz Roberts worked in a two-story shop at the foot of Daggett Street (now the Old Sculpin Gallery), turning out small craft for summer visitors and local fishermen like Manuel Mello.

Teresa Baptiste (b. 1930) The 1930s: All in the Family

Teresa Baptiste grew up in Edgartown and moved to Oak Bluffs when she was a teenager. Like many Vineyarders, she worked a variety of jobs—housecleaner, waitress, and cook at the Regional High School—as well as assisting her husband in running Baptiste's Boatyard on Lake Tashmoo. To supplement their income the family fished and dug quahogs and clams.

I was born in '30. My father was George Packish and my mother's maiden name was Amaral. There were eleven kids in the family. Well, one baby only lived a short time and died. So there was ten growing up. I was second in the family, first girl, so I had a lot of responsibility for the kids because my mother worked and worked and worked and worked. She was a waitress. She worked down in Edgartown next to the Yacht Club, when they had the shacks along the waterfront there. There was a diner in the parking lot, Captain's Table. My mother worked there for years. She worked every day. That lady worked till she couldn't work no more. She was well-liked and well-known in Edgartown. My father was a painter in Edgartown. And then he worked for the Edgartown Yacht Club, driving the launch out to the boats when they wanted to come in. I used to ride with him, back and forth.

We lived in Edgartown, just as you go into Clevelandtown Road. The house had three or four bedrooms upstairs. A bedroom downstairs. We were in cramped quarters. There was a coal stove in the dining room in the house, downstairs. And we had to keep throwing coal in there. When you'd have to use the little potties they'd freeze. I remember that. So there wasn't too much heat in that house. But we had to sleep together, you know, so we warmed each other up.

Mr. Norton had a farm there and he had the cows. He'd take the cream off when he did the cows, and that's what he would sell. And he would take the skimmed milk, put it in a big can he kept, and he'd give my mother all the skimmed milk for us to drink. So we had plenty of milk. He'd leave the can right out there on the step outside of his house. From our house we could look up there, and when that big can was there, we'd go over and get it. It was nice, because then we did have milk. And he used to give us vegetables and stuff. He was a nice man.

Growing up in Edgartown, we were all poor. I didn't know of anybody that wasn't. We were all in the same boat. There just was no money. There were summer people. But, see, we didn't mingle with them much, you know? I remember them, and we used to talk to them, and play with them, but then they were gone. And so we never really got too close to any of them.

And then my mother had to take in a boarder. We made room there

somewhere. I can't even remember where he slept. Must have been downstairs, because the kids were all upstairs. And I had to cook for him. I can remember, liver and onions. Somehow liver and onions is my favorite, but I had to cook that for him. He worked and I'd have to make his evening meal.

And we were always over to the farm. Mr. Norton's farm there. And playing in the hay mow and the silo. We'd go up in the silo, when they were putting the corn into the silos and then Mr. Norton would let us walk all around it, packing it down. We'd climb up the ladder and pack it all down.

And the Prada farm.¹⁰ We used to go up there, too. We would run through the cornfields all the time. Play hide-and-go-seek in there, and everything. One time we tried smoking cigarettes and we were in the corn field smoking cigarettes. Oh, my God. You're going to laugh when I tell you this, and it's terrible when I think about it; we'd go along the streets and pick up cigarettes, and then we'd take that Indian tobacco and get a piece of paper, and we'd try to roll that tobacco into cigarettes. That's what we smoked.

We had a washing machine. We were very lucky. You know, a lot of people had those outhouses? Not us, because my uncles, the Amarals, were in the plumbing business. And they made sure that we had a bathroom. And whenever there was anything wrong, they'd come down from Oak Bluffs. They'd come to Edgartown and do all the plumbing and everything. Clement Amaral, the dentist, was my uncle, too. We always got our teeth done from him. We had plumbers, we had the dentist. We had cops. All in the family.

My brother Bob. He's three years older than me. He had infantile paralysis. He got it when it was going around. There was quite a few on the Island that got it.¹¹ There was Violet Rego, and my cousin, Nelson Amaral, he got it on one of his legs. And Mary Nunes, she got it. So it was going around at that time. [Bob] walked on crutches. And then when he got to be a certain age they took him into Canton Hospital School and so he stayed there for years.¹² He learned watch repairing. And then he came out, and he had a little shop in Oak Bluffs. And he did the watch repairing there.

When we'd go to school, my mother would take a day off and take us on the boat to New Bedford. And we'd get some school clothes to start the school year. But a lot of my clothes were hand-me-downs. There was a girl in Vineyard Haven, here. You remember the Ripleys? Well, their daughter,

10 The John Prada farm on Clevelandtown Road, now Bittersweet Farm. Before the Pradas, Alice Cleveland's family owned this farm and Alice grew up there.

11 Also known as polio, the once-common disease was a virtually eradicated by childhood immunization programs after vaccines for it were developed in the mid-1950s.

12 Founded in 1907 to care for children with polio and birth defects, the Massachusetts Hospital School—still in Canton—is now the Pappas Rehabilitation Hospital for Children.



The Edgartown Playhouse in the 1920s; it was destroyed by fire in 1960, and the site is now a small park.

Carolyn, she was the only daughter. Of course she had nice clothes. And my uncle's wife was related somewhere. And they'd bring me boxes of clothes, and oh, God, did I have a good time with those! I had all her cast-me-downs.

Manuel Swartz Roberts. He was my father's uncle; we called him "Uncle Manuel." And I used to go down in that boathouse there, right there on the water. Watch him build the boats, and I'd sweep up the sawdust for him, and like that. He was a nice man. There would always be older people there talking with him.

We didn't have a telephone. We used to have to go next door, to Mr. Thaxter's, and call. You know, he used to work on the police force, Thaxter. He was a nice man.

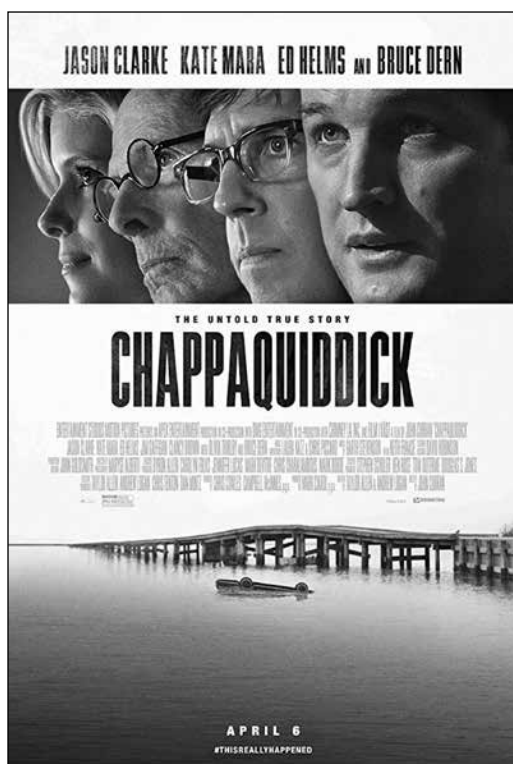
When that war was on, all the soldiers were down to Katama. And when they'd go by in their trucks we'd run down to the end of the street and wave to them. They'd throw us candy bars as they went by. Oh, boy, we loved that, because you know, you didn't ever get candy bars. I still can see that as though it was today.

There used to be movies every Saturday. The theater's not there no more. It's that empty space there on Main Street. Sometimes we could go to the matinee. Five cents, ten cents, something like that. It was cheap. Then we'd go to Pete's Drugstore. But you know, we didn't have much money, so you couldn't do much of that stuff. Missed out on a lot, I guess. But, you know, it was a different type of a life.

‘Based on Actual Events’

Chappaquiddick (2017) and History on Film

by A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER



IN THE TEN-THOUSAND-YEAR history of Martha's Vineyard, only one event of indisputably national significance has taken place there. *Chappaquiddick* (2017) is a feature-length dramatic film about that event: the 1969 single-vehicle accident that cost Mary Jo Kopechne her life and Senator Edward Kennedy his chance at the presidency. Its advertising campaign declares it “the untold true story,” and an opening title card

A. Bowdoin Van Riper, MVM Research Librarian and editor of the *Quarterly*, is a historian whose research interests include depictions of historical events on film. He is the author or editor of sixteen books, including the recently published *Edgartown* (2018).

reassures audiences that it is “based on actual events.” That highly elastic claim typically elicits (with good reason) raised eyebrows from viewers familiar with the “actual events” in question. When filmmakers confront a choice between historical fidelity and heightened drama, the former typically loses. *Chappaquiddick* is a rare exception that not only remains faithful to the historical record, but—when given the opportunity to improvise, because sequence of the “actual events” is unknown, or unknowable—does so in a way that stakes out a distinct, and carefully developed, position on how historical events unfold.

The consensus view of the “Chappaquiddick Incident,” as it has come to be known, was established within a week of the event itself. On the night of July 18, 1969, Kennedy and Kopechne attended a party at a rented house on Chappaquiddick. They left the party in a black 1967 Oldsmobile sedan registered to Kennedy which, around 12:45 AM, plunged off the south edge of Dyke Bridge and came to rest, upside down, in the waters of Poucha Pond. Kennedy, the driver, survived; Kopechne, the passenger, did not. After extricating himself from the wrecked car, Kennedy returned to the rented house and summoned associates Joseph Gargan and Paul Markham, who returned to the crash site with him and attempted, without success, to free Kopechne. He then crossed the channel that separates Chappaquiddick from the rest of Edgartown and returned to his room at the Shiretown Inn.¹ He failed to report the accident, contacting authorities only after the car, with Kopechne’s body still inside, was discovered the next morning. At a hearing held at the Dukes County Courthouse on July 25, Kennedy was found guilty of leaving the scene of an accident causing bodily injury, and given the minimum sentence of two months in jail, which the judge—at the request of Kennedy’s attorney—suspended.² That night Kennedy appealed, in a televised address, for the voters of Massachusetts to register their opinion on whether he should remain in the Senate or resign his seat. Receiving a chorus of support, he went on to a distinguished career in the Senate, but was never a serious contender for the presidency, which had once seemed within his grasp.

The filmmakers use these events as a narrative framework on which to hang the real story they want to tell: how the accident and its aftermath transformed Kennedy (Jason Clarke) from a charming but feckless lightweight overshadowed by his older brothers into a mature and wily politician. Doing so, they implicitly accept the sequence of events established

1 A converted captain’s house located at 44 North Water Street, the Shiretown Inn has since been demolished.

2 At an inquest convened in January 1970, a grand jury—following the recommendation of District Attorney Edmund Dinis—declined to bring further charges against Kennedy

in the July 25 hearing, which constitutes the official record of the event. They also accept, and tailor their narrative to reflect, the near-universal consensus that three key aspects of Kennedy's own account of the incident are self-serving fabrications. First, they show alcohol flowing freely at the party (which Kennedy insisted was sedate, with little drinking). Next, they depict Kennedy deliberately turning down the rough dirt road toward Dike Bridge—a turn he claimed was made in error—after telling Kopechne (Kate Mara) “let’s go to the beach!” Finally, they have Kennedy cross the channel between Chappaquiddick and Edgartown not by swimming, as he claimed, but in a rowboat appropriated by Gargan (Ed Helms) and Markham (Jim Gaffigan).

Chappaquiddick thus dramatizes, crisply and effectively, what could be called the consensus view of what happened on Chappaquiddick on the night of July 18-19, 1969. It hews closely to what is well-documented in the official record, pointedly avoids speculating on subjects for which there is no documentary evidence—notably Kennedy's escape from the sunken car—and treads carefully on subjects where the documentary evidence is scant. John Farrar (Joe Chase), the Edgartown Fire Department diver who retrieved Kopechne's body from the car on the morning of July 19, appears in two brief scenes to state (as he did in official testimony) that she might have survived if trained rescuers had been summoned quickly enough. The film, however, subtly underlines the counterfactual (and thus uncertain) nature of such testimony by having his estimate of how long the rescue itself would have taken increase from 10 minutes (in the first scene) to 25 minutes (in the second). The film's level of fidelity to the best-established evidence, and its subtlety in dealing with uncertainty in that evidence, more than justify its “based on actual events” title card.

Alternate readings of the available evidence about the Chappaquiddick Incident began to appear as early as 1970, advancing different timelines than the one in the official record and positing the existence of other cars, other drivers, other passengers, and even other accidents.³ *Chappaquiddick* does not, for the most part, acknowledge—let alone engage with—those interpretations. Its principal interest is not in the details of the accident itself, but in the way that Kennedy responded to it and how the experience of the accident and its aftermath changed him. The two exceptions, which *do* bear on that central theme, are the nature of Kennedy's relationship with (and intentions toward) Kopechne and the extent to which

3 For an overview of the principal theories, see A. Bowdoin Van Riper, “Chappaquiddick,” in *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia* (ABC-Clio, 2003), I:162-165. Subsequent books on the incident include Leslie H. Leland and J. B. Shaffer, *Left to Die* (2009); Donald Nelson, *Chappaquiddick Tragedy* (2016); and Bill Pinney, *Chappaquiddick Speaks* (2018).



Ted Kennedy (Jason Clarke) and Mary Jo Kopechne (Kate Mara) share a quiet moment on East Beach, discussing his offer of a job in his 1972 presidential campaign [Film Still].

the official investigation of the accident was thwarted or compromised, in the days immediately afterward, by pressure exerted “from above” by the Kennedy family.

Whether Kennedy turned toward Dike Bridge, and the deserted beach beyond, that night to carry on (or initiate) a sexual relationship with Kopechne has been a subject of continual speculation. “Why else,” the argument has run for forty-nine years, would a middle-aged man want to take a young woman to the beach in the middle of the night? The filmmakers tease that possibility in the scene that introduces Kopechne, setting it *on* East Beach and opening it with her and a female friend, both in bathing suits, discussing an offer—details unspecified—made to Kopechne by the senator. The idea that the “offer” is sexual is dangled just long enough for viewers to embrace it, then squelched when Kennedy’s brief entry into the conversation makes clear that it is professional: an invitation to work for his 1972 presidential campaign, as she did for his brother’s in 1968. The only other extended conversation between Kennedy and Kopechne, clearly an invention of the filmmakers, takes place with the pair seated on the hood of the Oldsmobile on the road leading away from the rented house. Starlit sky above them notwithstanding, it

is emotionally, rather than romantically, intimate. Kennedy—grieving for Bobby, ambivalent about his own presidential bid, and unable to admit either to his family or advisors—opens up to Kopechne, sensing that she will understand. She does, and is similarly open with him, but she is also the one who gently breaks the mood by suggesting that it is time to head for the ferry.

Kennedy's subsequent "let's go to the beach!" declaration plays, in context, as an impulsive attempt to recapture that fleeting moment, and the speed at which he pushes the Oldsmobile down the dirt road to Dike Bridge as giddy anticipation of its continuation. A point-of-view shot establishes both the underlying cause of the wreck—the centerline of the bridge is angled roughly 20 degrees to the left of the centerline of the road—and the fraction of an instant that Kennedy, travelling at his stated speed of 20 mph, would have had to react. A brief turn of the head to smile at her robs him of even that fractional instant, and makes disaster inevitable.

The scene is remarkable precisely because its details are so *unremarkable*. Free to stage the moments before the accident in any way they wanted—the only two eyewitnesses having died without revealing what they knew—the filmmakers use a bare minimum of self-consciously "dramatic" elements. There is no attempted seduction (rebuffed or encouraged), no awkward groping, and no emotional speeches. The elements of the accident—too much alcohol, too much speed, too little attention to the road ahead—are the same ones that have killed thousands of American motorists, year-in and year-out, for decades. There is no Greek tragedy played out on the road to East Beach, only a series of profoundly ordinary lapses in judgment.

Just as the events leading up to the accident are, in *Chappaquiddick*, the antithesis of a carefully plotted seduction designed to end in a steamy late-night tryst, the events after it are the antithesis of a sprawling, Kennedy-orchestrated conspiracy to protect the senator's reputation by interfering with the police and courts. Even as he climbs out of the water and collapses onto the deck of the bridge, Kennedy realizes—in a flash of terrible clarity—that his chance at the White House is probably gone forever. That clarity quickly deserts him, however, and galloping uncertainty takes its place. His subsequent attempts at damage control, assisted first by Gargan and Markham and then by his brother's former speechwriter Ted Sorenson (Taylor Nichols), are improvisational, uncoordinated, and almost comically inept. Gargan sweeps all traces of alcoholic beverages from the Chappaquiddick house, creating an illusion that neither press nor police believe for an instant. Sorenson, literally phoning in a fabricated story for Kennedy to repeat to authorities, casually replaces the truth (Gargan rowed him across the channel) with dramatic-but-implausible details

(Kennedy swam).⁴ Kennedy himself dithers, delays, and dissembles, causing his father to snap at him, over the phone: “You’re the head of the family now—act like it!”

Joseph Kennedy, Sr. (Bruce Dern) played as a stroke-addled but still formidable “lion in winter,” is a jarring presence in a movie filled with low-key characters and noticeably short on self-consciously dramatic speeches. His brief appearance in the story serves a clear purpose, however: suggesting that, while the elder Kennedy may have cultivated a habit of political deference toward the family among state and local officials for the benefit of his children, he was not, as some interpretations of the incident have suggested, a shadowy puppet-master capable of applying back-channel pressure that changed the outcome of the legal proceedings against his only surviving son.

Ted Kennedy emerges from the accident legally unscathed, the film suggests, for two reasons. The first is that the representatives of the law, caught up in a case bigger by orders of magnitude bigger than any they have ever dealt with, are nearly as befuddled and disoriented by the rapidly moving events as Kennedy is. In one pivotal scene, Edgartown police chief Dominick Arena (John Fiore) interrupts his investigation of the accident scene to place a radio call to the station to ask where Kennedy—who has yet to report the accident—is, and order that he “get his ass down” to the bridge. Kennedy, he is informed, is *at* the station, having wandered in and made himself at home in the chief’s office. A long, pause ensues and the chief, giving up, says he’ll be right there. The second reason becomes apparent when the two men meet at the station: the Kennedy family name, and Kennedy’s personal charisma, create—even when Kennedy himself is not aware of it happening or actively attempting to make it happen—a “reality distortion field.”⁵ Under its influence, Chief Arena and other local officials make choices that will, with the passage of time and the benefit of hindsight, seem incomprehensible. They do so, the film suggests, not because they are stupid or corrupt, but because they are human: eager to be seen as helpful and cooperative, and to accommodate a famous and charismatic individual.⁶

4 The channel is 500 yards wide, and swept by strong currents that flow perpendicular to the shortest path between the two shores. The idea that Kennedy—exhausted, in shock, and still in his clothes—could have made the crossing successfully at 1 AM struck has struck most Vineyarders, at the time and since, as wildly implausible.

5 The term was coined by Apple Computer engineer Bud Tribble in 1981, to describe co-founder Steve Jobs; the effect, however, long predates both Jobs and the Kennedys.

6 James E. T. Lange and Katherine DeWitt, Jr., *Chappaquiddick: The Real Story* (St. Martin’s, 1993), makes a similar case that the behavior of the police and the courts was highly unprofessional, but not corrupt.



Dike Bridge's lack of guardrails and angle to the road, shown in this 1969 photo, figure prominently in *Chappaquiddick's* explanation of the accident [Photo by Edith Blake; MVM Photo Collection]

Gargan, a lawyer—and thus an officer of the court—who has more screen time than all the local officials in the film put together, is similarly affected. He forcefully urges Kennedy to report the accident to the police, but then accepts Kennedy's promise to do so "later," rows him across the channel, and returns to the rented house to remove evidence of drinking. In a scene from late in the film, prominently featured in the trailer, Kennedy—on the eve of his televised address, and still contemplating his future in the Senate—muses to Gargan that "everyone has flaws: even Jesus, even Moses." Gargan, having none of it, snaps: "Maybe, but Moses didn't leave a girl to drown on the bottom of the Red Sea!" Seen out of context, as in the trailer, the scene suggests that Gargan is Kennedy's (and the film's) moral conscience, insisting on the right course, rather than the easy one. Seen in context, with nearly the entire film behind it, the scene sends a different message. The audience has, by the time it occurs, seen Gargan abet Kennedy's own failure to report the accident, dive (fruitlessly) on the sunken car and then fail to report the accident *himself*, and conspire to destroy evidence (of drinking at the party) that might shed light on its cause. They have also watched him, during the party himself, do his earnest best to convince a young woman that he is Kennedy's brother, presumably to improve his chances

of sleeping with her.⁷ The filmmakers thus come down, in this instance, firmly on Kennedy's side: Everybody *does* have flaws: even Jesus, even Moses. Even Gargan.

The portrait that *Chappaquiddick* paints of Ted Kennedy is far from attractive: He spends nearly the entire film doing ill-advised, self-destructive things for poorly thought-out reasons, and his dramatic arc climaxes when he learns to lie purposefully, and with specific intent. It is worth noting, though, that *every* major character in the film, and most of the minor ones, behave—at least some of the time—in similar, if less extreme, ways. Nearly a dozen books have been published on the Chappaquiddick Incident, most proposing premeditated, or elaborately orchestrated, plots designed to exonerate or (in some cases) to smear Kennedy. *Chappaquiddick* offers a pointedly different take: There was no premeditation, and no carefully orchestrated plot. What happened on Chappaquiddick on that July night and in the days that followed was the artlessly tangled result of flawed individuals acting in ways that were messily, infuriatingly human.

7 Gargan was Kennedy's cousin, and raised by Kennedy's parents after the death of his own. The brief scene, played as comedy, suggests—through the woman's extreme skepticism of Gargan's claim—the gulf between being “close to” the Kennedys and actually *being* a Kennedy.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Cooke House and Legacy Gardens: Honoring Both History and Nature



The Cooke House in the late 1940s, when it housed the all of the collections, archives, and meetings of the Dukes County Historical Society (now the Martha's Vineyard Museum).

EDGARTOWN'S SINGULAR HISTORY truly begins at the Cooke House, the oldest original structure on its original location on the street widely regarded as the first in all of Edgartown. Constructed in 1740, the Cooke House is situated at the corner of Cooke and School streets on land where Edgartown's founding colonial family, the Mayhews, settled in the 1640s, and later deeded the first commercial and civic street to the town. On that street lay an early Congregational meeting house and courthouse as well as the first customs house. Never moved nor altered by modern technology, the Cooke House stands much as it did in 1740. The Martha's Vineyard Museum has occupied the house

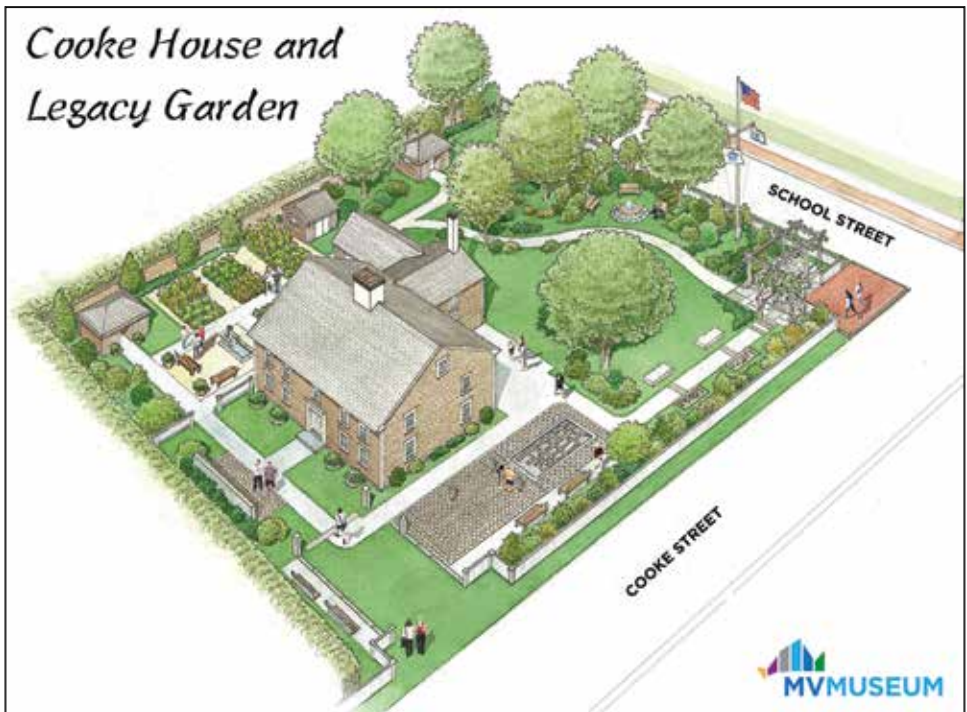
since 1932, and it remains one of the Museum's greatest treasures.

Here is where colonial settlement, the great days of whaling, the commercial advantages of a large deep-water harbor and the contentions between religious faith and religious renewal all converged in a fitful evolution to create one of the most beautiful and best known village resorts on the eastern seaboard. These eras and epochs have all animated the unique history of Edgartown, setting the course for the Edgartown we know and cherish today.

Now comes the chance to establish, in the geographic and historic core of the village, a public space honoring both history and nature. The Cooke House & Legacy Gardens project hopes to create a permanent village green, authentic garden-scape and historic interpretive trail, transforming the property into a mosaic of historic, educational and contemplative spaces. It can become a gateway for families and individuals, Vineyarders and visitors to explore, enjoy and discover the wonders of Edgartown's past, present and future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Wallis', with a stylized, cursive script.

Phil Wallis
Executive Director



Conceptual representation of the Cooke House and Legacy Gardens, drawn by Dana Gaines.

59 School Street
Box 1310
Edgartown MA 02539



Cooke Street Landmarks



(l to r) Cooke Street landmarks: Commercial Wharf, the Old Mayhew Homestead, the Thomas Cooke House, and the Rev. Joseph Thaxter House. The Mayhew and Thaxter houses have been demolished; the Cooke House, owned by the Museum, is open to the public in the summer.