

MVMUSEUM Quarterly

Martha's Vineyard Museum's Journal of Island History

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Special Marine Hospital Issue

The Archaeology of the
Museum Campus

The View from the Bluff:
A 300-Year History

Two Sailors and a
Scallop Shack



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HOME

The Martha's Vineyard Museum—thanks to the combined efforts of dozens of staff members, scores of contractors, hundreds of workers, and thousands of supporters—now operates from a new home: the historic 1895 US Marine Hospital in Vineyard Haven.

The building is old, but the human presence on the land beneath it is older by far. The Wampanoag and their ancestors occupied the site for five thousand years or more, and the seven themes that structure the Museum's new permanent exhibit "One Island, Many Stories"—fishing, creating, belonging and the rest—shaped life on Noepe long before the tall ships came and the first generation of washashores waded onto the sand. The heritage of what we call "old Island families" is now 12 generations long, the heritage of those who greeted them stretches back 160 or more.

The articles in this issue of the Quarterly, the first produced in the Museum's new home, offer three diverse perspectives on this history-rich corner of the Island. The first surveys the five-thousand-year history of the site, as revealed by the painstaking archaeological work that preceded, and accompanied, the transformation of Marine Hospital into Museum. The second chronicles the changing contours of the land and water visible from the bluff, and what Vineyarders have done there over the last 300 years. The third uses oral histories to create a "patchwork history" of the Marine Hospital, and two disabled sailors to whom it became a second home. They are three of the many stories that could be told about this extraordinary site; in the years to come, we hope to tell many more.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

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Five Thousand Years on the Bluff: The Archaeology of the New Museum Campus

by HOLLY HERBSTER

FOR THE PAST SIX years, The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL) has been assisting the Martha's Vineyard Museum with archaeological studies at the new campus in Vineyard Haven. While the former Marine Hospital building is a highly visible artifact of the property's nineteenth-century history, the high bluff overlooking Lagoon Pond and the harbor beyond has been the site of human activity for thousands of years. All the archaeological investigations have been conducted under a permit issued by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). The Museum is consulting with the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head/Aquinnah Tribal Historic Preservation Office (WTGH/A THPO) who have been involved in all aspects of the archaeological study, including fieldwork, interpretations of the findings, and the development of avoidance and protective measures to preserve many of the ancient cultural features. PAL has worked closely with the THPO and with Museum planners and staff, architectural and engineering partners, and construction personnel.

Archaeological studies in the area date back to 1964, when New York State Archaeologist William Ritchie excavated at what became known as the Pratt Site (named for the landowner).¹ Memorial University of Newfoundland archaeologist and island resident Dr. James A. Tuck knew of the site—located on a swampy glacial kettle hole with a spring-fed pond, less than a quarter-mile southeast of the Museum's new location—and brought it to Ritchie's attention. From the spear and arrow projectile points, clay pottery pieces (sherds), and charcoal from the remains of several hearths (places where fires were built), Ritchie interpreted the site as a camp first used about 2,300 years ago. He also found a wide variety of

1 William A. Ritchie, *The Archaeology of Martha's Vineyard* (Natural History Press, 1969), 59-87.

Holly Herbster is Senior Archaeologist at The Public Archaeology Laboratory in Pawtucket, R.I., and directed the archaeological work on the Marine Hospital site.

animal bones and shellfish that indicated the location had been occupied on a seasonal basis (late fall to early spring).

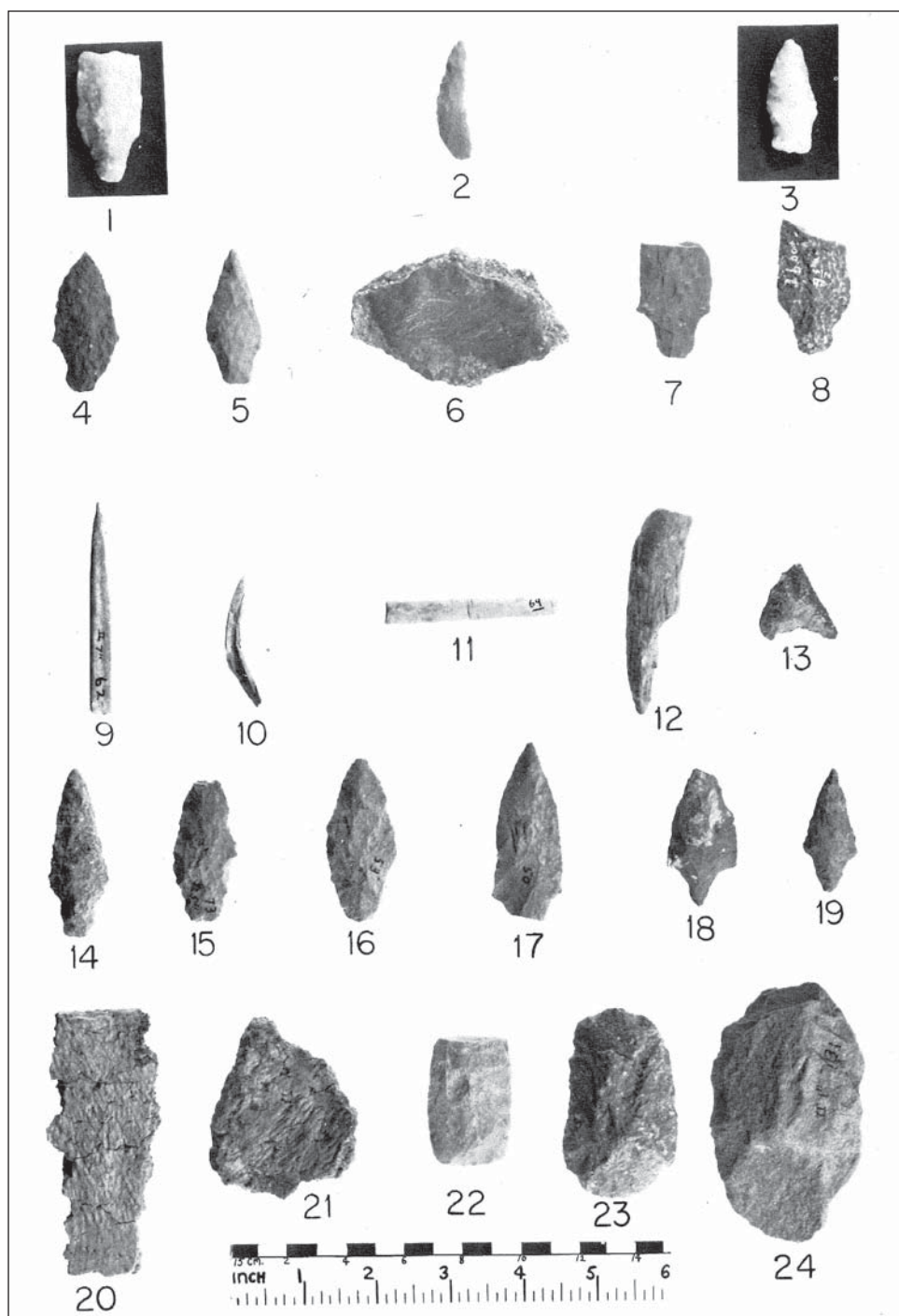
The Cerusa Meadow Site, a 40-acre area overlapping the Pratt Site, was documented as part of an island-wide archaeological study funded by the MHC in 1982 and conducted by the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and what was then the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society (MVHS).² During the study, MVHS Curator Jill Bouck, Carnegie Museum and University of Pittsburgh archaeologist Dr. James B. Richardson III, and avocational archaeologist Richard L. Burt examined and cataloged more than 10,000 artifacts from local collectors and from the Cerusa Meadow Site. The site contained pottery sherds and chipped- and ground-stone tools dating from about 5,000 to 1,000 years ago.

In 2012, PAL began working with the Museum as redevelopment plans for the property were considered. The MHC reviewed project information and noted that several ancient Native American sites were known to be nearby, including the Pratt and Cerusa Meadows sites. Because of the potential for the property to contain ancient cultural deposits as well as artifacts, remains of previous structures, and features associated with the Marine Hospital, the MHC recommended that an archaeological survey be conducted before any construction work began that would disturb the ground.

PAL's initial survey at the new 4-acre Museum site included the excavation of sixty small (2-foot square) shovel test pits at regular intervals. The survey was designed to locate and identify any archaeological sites on the property through the careful removal of soil to observe the natural stratigraphic levels (layers). Soils naturally develop from decomposing leaves and other organic matter on the ground surface and create the dark topsoil that forms the upper soil layer. Over time, the minerals and other nutrients in the topsoil leach out, which makes it less organic and a lighter color. The process of soil formation results in distinctive layers of soil with darker, richer soils at and near the surface and lighter, sandier soils below.

Soils, and any artifacts found within them, help archaeologists determine the age and integrity (degree to which cultural deposits are intact) of a site. Typically, artifacts found farthest from the surface are older than those above them. Artifacts found in naturally developed, undisturbed soils help with interpreting and dating a site. Artifacts found in soils that have been heavily disturbed (e.g., plowed) or redeposited (e.g., filled areas) provide less information about when and how a site was created and how people used the landscape over time.

2 Jill Bouck, Richard L. Burt, and James B. Richardson III, *Prehistoric Cultural Resources and Site Locations, Martha's Vineyard: Report to the Massachusetts Historical Commission* (1983), MVM Vertical Files Collection, VREF0001.030.



Wampanoag artifacts recovered at the Pratt Site, near the Marine Hospital, in 1964.

The survey documented an ancient site (designated the Lagoon Pond Bluffs Site) that covered much of the former Marine Hospital property. Artifacts were collected from 54 of the 60 test pits and the assemblage includes more than 1,000 chipped-stone flakes (the result of stone toolmaking), 20 chipped-stone tools, 12 clay pottery sherds, 600 pieces of shell, more than two dozen animal bone fragments, along with charcoal and burned nut shells. In addition, features (evidence of non-portable activity) including dense shell middens (shell piles), post holes (holes dug to insert a post), and a hearth were identified.

PAL also recovered post-contact materials (those made and used after approximately AD 1660 when the first Europeans arrived on the shores of what is now called Vineyard Haven Harbor) around the existing Marine Hospital building and in the areas of former buildings. The artifacts consisted of building rubble material (nails, mortar, window glass, tiles, and brick) along with bottle glass, ceramic wares, clay smoking pipes, and other domestic objects from the mid-nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries.

Although the wooded perimeter and much of the grassy front lawn on the property contained natural, undisturbed soils, the 2012 investigations indicated the area to the rear of the Marine Hospital's brick addition contains deep filled and disturbed soils.³ The density and diversity of the artifacts at the Lagoon Pond Bluffs Site indicated that various activities related to habitation occurred there for possibly thousands of years. The presence of intact pits used for storage and refuse, and of hearths, means that the previous use of the property did not completely alter the ancient landscape. In addition, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century artifacts recovered from the site were studied together with plans and photographs of the former Marine Hospital complex to help determine the locations of former buildings and activities.

The survey results indicated the presence of a potentially significant archaeological site that could provide important information about the history of land use on the bluff overlooking the harbor. After the survey results were reviewed by the MHC and THPO, additional archaeological studies were planned only behind the former hospital buildings and around the driveway and new parking area, because the ground in those locations would be disturbed by construction. In many places behind the buildings, the fill soils were too deep to fully excavate by hand. The Museum plans called for underground utilities and new building foundations to be placed in this area, so PAL recommended shovel and machine-assisted excavation (using a flat-bladed excavator bucket) as the best way to identify any deeply buried portions of the Lagoon Pond Bluffs Site.

3 The brick addition, built in 1938 and located in what is now the Museum courtyard, was removed as part of the renovation process.



A bottle from the Marine Hospital era, collected during PAL's archaeological survey of the Museum site. Courtesy of the Public Archaeology Laboratory.

The additional investigations began in 2016 with the excavation of gridded test pits placed closer together than during the 2012 testing and larger hand-excavated units in areas of dense artifact concentration and/or features followed by machine-assisted topsoil removal. This phase of work was designed to learn more about the horizontal and vertical boundaries of the Lagoon Pond Bluffs Site within the Museum's construction area, the ways the site was used over time, and what portions of the site remained undisturbed.

The machine-assisted work involved carefully removing topsoil and fill in thin layers. PAL archaeologists and THPO monitors directed the excavator and carefully observed changes in soil color and texture so that the machine work stopped as soon as natural, undisturbed surfaces were exposed. The distinct circular or irregular soil stains visible against the natural glacial subsoil were identified as features such as pits and post holes.

The work confirmed that today's level ground surface across the Museum property is the result of filling and possibly grading likely done in the mid-nineteenth century when the Marine Hospital was established. Although the intact pre-contact archaeological deposits on the bluff side of the site were found close to the current ground surface, some features in the rear of the property were beneath more than 4½ feet of fill. This indicated that a gentle slope and depression ran through the property

when it was occupied by Wampanoag people. Because PAL's study area was limited to the Museum project area, we do not know if the depression extended beyond the property or if it was a landscape feature associated with the wetland at the nearby Pratt Site. Soils dug out to build the hospital building cellar were used to fill the depression and create a ground surface behind the building that was level with the front.

Once all the Museum construction areas had been exposed to the level of the ancient ground surface, PAL prepared scaled plan drawings and took photographs of each feature; recorded a description of the materials visible in or around each feature; and formed preliminary interpretations about the possible function of the features. The Museum's engineering team collected data for each feature, including its horizontal dimensions and elevation to create a map showing the exact location of all features relative to the proposed areas of ground disturbance and to assist with ongoing consultation among the Museum, the MHC, and the THPO.

After this phase of work was completed, PAL and the THPO met with Museum staff to discuss how construction could be carried out while avoiding and protecting as much as possible of the Lagoon Pond Bluff Site. The archaeological work indicated that the Lagoon Pond Bluff Site had been created more than 5,000 years ago and had been occupied repeatedly. While some of the artifacts and features were associated with habitation, including toolmaking and maintenance and food processing and disposal, the site also represented an important ceremonial activity area. Potential impacts to the site from construction and any additional archaeological excavation were carefully considered, and the Museum worked closely with the THPO to redesign or relocate some of the construction project's belowground elements. Once these plans were finalized, the Museum's architectural, engineering, and construction team worked with the THPO and PAL to develop short- and long-term work protocols and protective measures to ensure that the portions of the site outside the work zones would not be inadvertently disturbed.

Not all impacts to the Lagoon Bluffs Site could be avoided, so after consulting with the THPO and the MHC, PAL completed a third phase of archaeological fieldwork (known as data recovery) in the work zones, overseen by THPO representatives. Because data recovery results in the complete removal of archaeological materials from their original location, it is only undertaken as a last resort and when no other feasible avoidance and protection options are available. The process at the Lagoon Bluffs Site involved excavating (on hands and knees, using the edge of a mason's trowel) any features or cultural deposits in those areas, additional data recording and photography, and collecting soil and other organic samples.

During the archaeological data recovery, which was conducted in several phases as plans were finalized, 66 of the 248 identified archaeological features were excavated. Although most of these features dated to the Pre-Contact Period, at least 15 of the total, and 9 excavated during that data recovery, were related to the Marine Hospital or twentieth-century use of the property. The excavated pre-contact features consisted of large and small storage and refuse pits; individual and clustered post holes that may have indicated the locations of structures and wooden platforms for drying or smoking fish and meat; hearths and fire-reddened stone pits; and activity areas representing toolmaking and food processing. The excavated post-contact features were foundation remains and refuse pits.

After the fieldwork was completed, PAL cleaned and cataloged each piece of collected cultural material in its laboratory in Rhode Island. Soil samples from the site were passed through a water screening system to collect any tiny fragments of bone, seed, and wood. All the work was done without marking or destroying any of the material, except for several small wood charcoal samples that were submitted to another laboratory for radiocarbon dating. The dating process destroys the sample, so each sample came from a cooking or heating-related feature that contained additional charcoal. The laboratory analyses also included sorting and categorizing the collected artifacts by style, type, material, and function and producing spatial maps to show any patterns in the locations and densities of different types of artifacts and features.

The combined field and laboratory results were used to help understand how and when the Lagoon Pond Bluff Site was created and used by the ancestors of the Island's Wampanoag population, and what happened at the site during its use as the Marine Hospital in the more recent past.

The largest category of collected artifacts were stone, which in general is the most typical indicator of an ancient archaeological site and also the type of material that preserves best in the region's soils. More than twenty types and dozens of varieties of stone were used to make chipped-stone tools like spear and arrow points, hide scrapers, knives, drills, and tools used to perforate hides, wood, and shell. The stone types found at the Lagoon Pond Bluff Site are typical for a location close to the shoreline, where beach cobbles were collected and used to make tools on-site. The style and shape of certain projectiles help to generally date a site; those from the Lagoon Pond Bluff Site indicate an occupation from at least 5,000 years before the present (5000 BP) up to, and possibly after, the arrival of the first permanent European settlers on the Island in the 1640s.

More than fifty fragmentary clay pottery sherds from the Woodland Period (about 3,000–450 BP) were collected at the site. The designs pressed



Artifacts being processed and cataloged at the PAL laboratory. Courtesy of the Public Archaeology Laboratory.

into the interior and exterior of the vessels they represent and the grit, sand, and crushed shell temper (mixed into the clay to bind and keep it from cracking when heated) suggest that most of the objects likely were made during the Late Woodland Period (1000–450 BP). Two radiocarbon dates obtained from charcoal samples indicate that the wood burned at the site was cut at some time between AD 1445 and 1632. The radiocarbon dates are especially significant because very few European-made objects were identified at the site, although at some time the Wampanoag people at the Lagoon Bluffs Site likely interacted with transient European visitors, sailors exploring the coast, or fishermen.

Softshell clam and quahog fragments were the most common shellfish types recovered from the refuse pits, followed by scallop, mussel, and whelk. Almost every refuse pit identified at the site contained at least a few shell fragments, and some pits were filled mostly with shell. This makes sense, because the site is near Lagoon Pond and its rich marine resources that could be harvested all year long. Organic materials such as bone typically are not well-preserved in the area's acidic soils, but at least 50 fish bone fragments were collected from soil samples in addition to small fragments of bird, small and large mammal, and reptile bone.

Much of what was already known about the post-contact land-use history



The Holmes Hole Light, built on the edge of the bluff in the late 1850s, operated for only a few years, but the building remained in use for more than a century. US Lighthouse Establishment Photo.

of the Museum property comes from written records and photographs spanning the mid-nineteenth through twentieth centuries. The earliest documented post-contact activity on the bluff is the 1854 construction of a lighthouse overlooking the harbor. Money had been appropriated for a “Harbor Light” at Holmes Hole (now Vineyard Haven) in 1851, but it took two years to identify a location and receive approval from the state government.⁴ The building was a “two-story house with a small lantern tower” built on the edge of the bluff.⁵ The lighthouse was shut down in 1859, and the building, abandoned in the 1870s, was converted into a Marine Hospital in 1879. When writing his *History of Martha’s Vineyard* in the early 1900s, Dr. Charles Banks wrote: “In recent years a red lantern, suspended nightly from a flag staff of the hospital, acts as a substitute range light for entering the harbor.”⁶

As one of the two busiest ports in the Northeast, the harbor at Holmes Hole was frequently visited by ships carrying sick and injured sailors. They were treated, from 1798-1826, at a Marine Hospital in Eastville authorized by an act of the General Court (state legislature), and then, from 1826-1866, by local physicians under contract to the federal government. In 1866, Dr.

4 Charles E. Banks, *The History of Martha’s Vineyard* (1911. Dukes County Historical Society, 1966), vol. II, *Annals of Tisbury*, 64-66.

5 Banks, *History*, 66, citing *Massachusetts Acts and Resolves*, 1853, 72.

6 Banks, *History*, 66.



The 1895 Marine Hospital building, seen from the rear soon after it opened. The rear wing, originally part of the 1879 facility, housed the kitchen and dining room. It was replaced by a two-story brick wing in 1938.

William Leach opened a general hospital on the Edgartown-Holmes Hole Road, and convalescing sailors were sent there.⁷ The cramped ships that stopped at Holmes Hole also carried, and spread, infectious diseases like smallpox and consumption (tuberculosis). County officials petitioned the General Court to erect a contagious hospital on the island in 1798, and suggested the west side of Holmes Hole as an appropriate location. Over the next fifty years, petitions were filed, funds allocated, and discussion about whether to build a hospital in Edgartown or Holmes Hole ensued, but no structure was built.

In 1879, US Surgeon General John B. Hamilton visited the Vineyard and arranged for the now-abandoned lighthouse on the bluff to be converted for use as a temporary hospital. A “pavilion ward” was added to the west end in May 1885, and a separate one-story frame building that served as a mortuary and storeroom was erected nearby in 1891. Congress had, as early as 1889, authorized funds to purchase four acres surrounding the lighthouse structure for a new facility. The purchase was completed, after “many vexatious delays,” in 1892 and construction on the new hospital began two

7 D.A. Carmichael, “Historical Sketch of the United States Marine-Hospital Service at Vineyard Haven, Mass.” in *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1896* (Government Printing Office, 1896), 281; MVM Vertical Files Collection, VREF0004.003.

years later.⁸ That wooden structure, completed in December 1895, is the Marine Hospital building that anchors the new Museum campus. An 1896 annual report prepared for the Marine Hospital Service provides a detailed description of the property. The author, Dr. D. A. Carmichael, noted that the complex was “in an unfinished condition” with plans for fencing, roadway grading and improvement of the grounds underway. At the time, four buildings were present; “the hospital, old building [former lighthouse], mortuary and isolation ward, and an outhouse.”⁹ Dr. Carmichael’s report includes a detailed room-by-room description of the hospital and its facilities. In 1896, the three smaller structures were situated in front of the hospital building, “and mar the view of the main building from the water front. Under work now contemplated they will be moved to the rear of the new building so as to give an unobstructed view from the harbor.”¹⁰

As part of the data recovery, PAL completed limited excavation at the top of the stairs leading down the terraced bluff to the roadway. The excavation at the bluff’s edge identified demolition rubble from a nineteenth-century structure. The materials included brick and mortar, nails and hardware, window glass, and fragments of painted interior wall plaster that are remnants of the old lighthouse building and the mortuary/isolation ward described by Carmichael.

Carmichael indicates that these buildings were slated for removal or relocation in 1896, and the relocation was complete by 1914, when a Sanborn Insurance Co. map of Vineyard Haven shows a two-story building (the old lighthouse) and two smaller one-story buildings (the 1891 mortuary building and an outhouse repurposed as a storage shed) standing at the rear of the property.¹¹ Aerial photos taken in the early 1950s and the late 1970s show the buildings still in place, and comparisons of the two-story structure in nineteenth-century photos with images of the building taken in 1979 indicate that they are the same structure. The MHC Inventory form for this structure in 1979 indicates that it was abandoned after 1976.¹² The building was uninhabitable and unsafe when it was demolished in the 2000s. Refuse pits containing fragments of glass medicinal vials and US government tablewares document this period of the site’s history, as do structural materials like slate roof tiles, machine-cut nails, and window glass.

In 1938 a brick addition (also listed in the MHC Inventory) with a formed-concrete foundation was added to the rear of the 1895 hospital

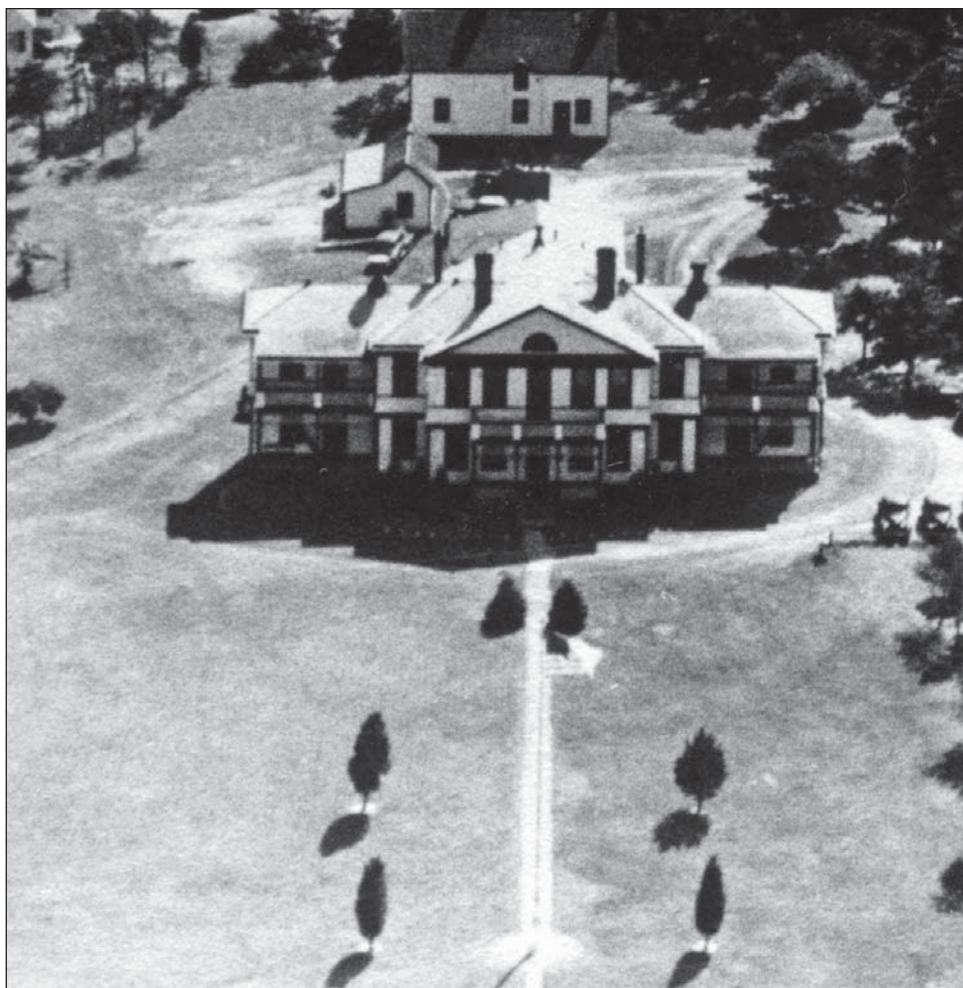
8 Banks, *History*, 64; Carmichael, “Historical Sketch,” 282.

9 Carmichael “Historical Sketch,” 285.

10 Carmichael, “Historical Sketch,” 285.

11 Sanborn Insurance Map of Vineyard Haven (1914), MVM Map Collection, 2012.034.043.

12 MHC Inventory Form for TIS.142. On file, Massachusetts Historic Commission.



The Marine Hospital seen from the air in the late 1940s or early 1950s. The old lighthouse building, then in use as staff housing, is visible at the rear of the property.

building, replacing the 1885 “Pavilion Ward,” which had been detached from the old (1879) Marine Hospital and attached to the new (1895) one during its construction. Despite objections from the town to maintain the architectural styles typical of the community, the government architects insisted on a modern, fire-proof design.¹³ The hospital closed in 1952 and the buildings on the bluff were vacant until 1959, when the St. Pierre School of Sport took occupancy. The organization, primarily a summer sailing camp, was closed in 2007 but the buildings were utilized as residences until the Museum’s purchase of them in 2011.

13 MHC Inventory Form for TIS.141. On file, Massachusetts Historic Commission.

Taken as a whole, the archaeological studies at the Museum property contribute to the long and continuous history of the Wampanoag island homeland. Since the archaeological record is only comprised of physical materials and visible features, it cannot provide a complete picture of the people who created the site or its significance to them. This is one of the primary reasons that archaeological work on the Vineyard today is always conducted in collaboration with tribal members. The archaeology also provides context to the written records that describe the site's use as a medical facility. There is now clear evidence that the development of the Marine Hospital in the mid-to-late nineteenth century did not destroy the pre-contact site. Rather, it appears that site landscaping, especially filling and leveling the bluff with what was likely soil excavated from the hospital cellar, covered and protected portions of the ancient site. The Martha's Vineyard Museum has now become the steward of this important place that has drawn people for thousands of years and can help carry the site's long history forward.



Campers and counselors from the St. Pierre Camp gather outside the former Marine Hospital. Courtesy of Emily Coggins.

View from the Front Lawn

Three Centuries of the Vineyard Haven Waterfront

by A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER

THE ISLAND OF Martha's Vineyard is a triangle, and Vineyard Haven Harbor is a notch cut deep into its apex. It has, for more than three hundred years, been a destination for vessels bound to the Island—steamers and schooners, ferries and fishing boats, sleek yachts and lumbering barges—as well as a stopping-off point for those bound elsewhere. Its deep central channel, abundant anchorage space, and superb natural protection from any storm but a northeast gale make it (in the slightly antique words of a bygone era) and ideal “harbor of refuge.” Tens of thousands of vessels once passed through Vineyard Sound and Nantucket Sound each year, bound for ports from Havana to Halifax, and hundreds of them stopped off at Vineyard Haven Harbor. Some, particularly in the Age of Sail, waited only long enough for the wind to shift, or the tide to turn, in their favor. Others lingered for a night, a day, or a weekend, as their captains and crews took advantage of the opportunities that awaited them ashore.

The Vineyarders who lived along its shores—at Eastville in what is now Oak Bluffs, at “The Head” (Holmes Hole, later Vineyard Haven, village at the head of the harbor), and at a small West Chop settlement known as “The Neck”—and did not follow the sea themselves frequently made their living catering to the needs of these transient sailors. They operated inns and taverns, grocery stores and ship chandleries, boatyards and waterfront churches designed to keep sailors away from the less-uplifting forms of recreation that the waterfront offered. The 1895 Marine Hospital, like its 1879 predecessor perched on the front edge of the bluff, was part of a booming waterfront economy. A visiting sailor could find fresh meat and vegetables, a new set of oilskins or sea boots, or the latest government charts. His money could buy him a glass of beer or a tot of rum, a night in a bed instead of a bunk, and (persistent rumors suggest) the sexual favors

A. Bowdoin Van Riper is editor of the *MVM Quarterly*. He offers his thanks to all those who offered amendments, corrections, and suggestions to earlier versions of this piece, delivered as oral presentations in the summer of 2018.

of a female companion. The doctors at the Marine Hospital stood ready to minister to his body, and the chaplains at the Sailor's Free Reading Room or (later) the Seamen's Bethel to his soul. All this, within a short block or two of the waterfront.

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, and sail gave way to steam, the nature of the vessels that called at Vineyard Haven Harbor gradually changed. At first, there were fewer schooners, and more tugs towing strings of barges. Then, as the Cape Cod Canal began siphon coastal shipping traffic north through Buzzard's Bay, schooners and tugs alike faded away. The passenger steamers that had once linked Portland and Boston to Fall River, New York, and points south lasted only a little longer, unable to compete with ever-more-efficient railroad networks and the new multilane highways that began to appear in the 1930s. The steamers that linked the Island to the mainland still came, and in ever-greater numbers, as did yachts from ports up and down the coast of New England. One morning in the summer of 1943, as the rising sun set the sky over East Chop afire, a worn-out old schooner raised sail on her three masts and slipped quietly away into Nantucket Sound—the last merchant sailing ship, it is said, ever to call at Vineyard Haven.

The declining numbers, and shifting types, of vessels using Vineyard Haven Harbor were signs of the Island's decades-long transition from a maritime/farming economy to a tourist economy—what historian Arthur Railton referred to simply as *The Change*.¹ The years immediately following World War II revealed the magnitude of the transformation: there were more visitors, more ferries, more yachts, more cars, more recreational fishermen in the new fall “shoulder season”—more, in short, of everything associated with the brave, new tourism-driven world. The Vineyard Haven waterfront evolved to meet the needs of the new tourist economy, as it had evolved to meet the needs of the older maritime one. The transformation, however, was not complete. Vineyard Haven's waterfront retained some of its old maritime-industrial character, even as new tourist-centered businesses that turned their faces toward the sidewalks and streets of the town slipped into the space between—and shouldered, sometimes incongruously, up against—much older firms that still looked toward the sea.

A comprehensive history of Vineyard Haven Harbor and its waterfront would stretch, geographically, from the steamer wharf that once thrust seaward from the tip of West Chop to the semaphore-signaling station on East Chop that gave Telegraph Hill its name. It would give due attention to Eastville, The Head, and The Neck. It would begin with Isaac Chase's sloop, the first known ferry from the mainland, and end with the massive

1 Arthur R. Railton, *The History of Martha's Vineyard: How We Got to Where We Are* (Commonwealth Editions, 2006), 373.



What is believed to be last cargo schooner to call at Vineyard Haven heads to sea on a July morning in 1943. Photo by Charles K. Van Riper; MVM Photo Collection.

car ferries and sleek high-speed catamarans of today. It would trace the histories of shipyards and chandleries, yacht clubs and summer camps, and touch on the lives of homegrown entrepreneurs as well as the sailors—from every coastal state and scores of foreign countries—who put boot to sand on its shores and, sometimes, decided to stay.

It would also, when all was said and done, be the size of a substantial book.

This article embodies a more modest set of ambitions. It is a history—in the interests of limited length, an episodic one—of the portion of the Vineyard Haven waterfront visible from the lawn of the 1895 US Marine Hospital, now the Martha's Vineyard Museum. It takes in the head of Vineyard Haven Harbor, the western arm of the Lagoon, and the long strip of barrier beach—capped by the asphalt ribbon of Beach Road—that divides them. The drawbridge across the Lagoon entrance is clearly visible from the bluff, as is Hine's Point, which divides its visible western branch from its invisible eastern one. Lagoon Pond Road skirts the base of the bluff, stretching from the base of Hine's Point, past the Marine Hospital, across the small bridge carries it over the entrance to Mud Creek, and finally into Vineyard Haven, where it intersects Beach Road and Water Street to form the Five Corners intersection.

The view from Marine Hospital lawn takes in only part of the larger Vineyard Haven Harbor waterfront, but the history of that part evokes

the history of the whole. It takes in three three hundred years of history, the evolution of a town, and the rise and fall of entire industries; it encompasses the Vineyard Haven of today, but also hints of natural features long since erased, and human activities long since gone to ruin.

Bass Creek and Ferryboat Island (before 1815)

Judge Samuel Sewall, remorse-ridden veteran of the Salem Witch Trials turned protector of the Indians, came to the Vineyard in 1702 to inspect the missionary enterprises of the Mayhew family.² Like millions of travelers who would follow him over the next three centuries, he left the mainland at Woods Hole and first set foot on the Island at Vineyard Haven, then called Holmes Hole.³ Sewall's voyage, probably aboard the small sloop with which Isaac Chase operated the Island's first regular ferry service, would have followed a familiar path: angling across Vineyard Sound, turning past the tip of West Chop, and proceeding up the harbor toward the then-tiny village of. The view from the deck, however, would have been very different.

There would, to begin with, have been no lighthouses to mark the headlands: those at West Chop and Nobska Point lights would not be established for another century, and East Chop for a century-and-a-half. There would have been few houses visible along the shore, and no large wharfs projecting into it. The opening to the Lagoon where the drawbridge now stands would have been a solid strip of sand, and Chase's ferry would have slipped past it without ferryman or passenger giving it a second thought. A mile ahead, the curving beach that marked the head of the harbor would have been clearly visible. There was not, in 1702 (and would not be for more than two centuries afterward), a stone breakwater to interrupt the view as it blocked north-wind-driven waves.

Chase would have set his course for a spot near the present-day Steamship Authority terminal, and the entrance to the channel that linked the harbor to the western arm of the Lagoon. The channel, a tidal estuary known as Bass Creek, was broad and (at 6-7 feet) deep enough to accommodate modest oceangoing vessels like schooners and brigs. It ran southward through what is now the edge of the Steamship Authority traffic circle and followed the route of present-day Water Street to a point opposite today's Post Office parking lot, where it began to broaden and deepen further as it flowed into the Lagoon. Judge Sewall and the other passengers would have disembarked at the ferry landing at the foot of

2 Railton, *History*, 42-45.

3 From here on, in the interests of intelligibility, this article will use the contemporary names of villages (Vineyard Haven, not Holmes Hole), streets (Lagoon Pond Road, not Howard Avenue), and landforms (Hine's Point, not Little Neck), even when doing so is anachronistic.



Built by Isaac Chase, “The Great House” overlooked Bass Creek and housed a tavern that offered food, drink, and lodging to travelers from the mainland. MVM Photo Collection.

Beach Street, in the middle of what is now the Five Corners.⁴ Once they stepped ashore, they likely stopped for refreshment at the tavern Chase operated out of his nearby home, known as “The Great House” and located at the head of today’s town parking lot.⁵

If the ferry was making its final passage of the day, Chase would have steered it up Bass Creek and moored it for the night behind the barrier beach. His preferred spot was evidently a long, low lump of sand that ran parallel to the beach just north of the Lagoon-side entrance to Bass Creek. The remnants of it, diminished by two centuries of erosion, are still visible . . . and still called Ferry Boat Island.⁶ Chase’s sloop would have had

4 Banks, *The History of Martha’s Vineyard* (George H. Dean, 1911), Vol. II., Annals of Tisbury, 58. Beach Street, one block long, runs downhill from its three-way intersection with State Road and Main Street to Five Corners, and then (as Beach Street Extension) one more block to the sea. Beach Road runs from Five Corners along the barrier beach toward Oak Bluffs.

5 James H. K. Norton, *Walking in Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts* (Martha’s Vineyard Historical Society, 2000), 37-39; the Great House was moved to West Chop in 1923.

6 Chris Baer, “That Was Then: Ferry Boat Island,” *Martha’s Vineyard Times*, May 13, 2015. <https://www.mvtimes.com/2015/05/13/this-was-then-ferry-boat-island/>

abundant company. The western arm of the Lagoon—its waters deeper than they are today—was Vineyard Haven’s principal anchorage throughout the Colonial Era and the first quarter-century after independence. There, sheltered by Hine’s Point, the barrier beach, and the high ground on which the village itself was built, they were safe from all but the worst storms. Sixty years after Chase and Sewall’s time, at least some elements of General Grey’s fleet likely anchored there as they waited to receive their share of the Island’s livestock, driven to—and perhaps loaded from—the ferry landing at the foot of Beach Street.⁷

Thirty-five years later, in the midst of a different war, another encounter between British soldiers and citizens of Tisbury on the shores of Bass Creek ended—at least according to legend—with the Americans victorious. Captain David Smith, who kept a tavern on Main Street, had sailed to New York for supplies, accompanied by his son Nathan, a fellow mariner, in a second boat. Returning to Holmes Hole in their heavily laden craft, the Smiths believed they had eluded the British blockade. As they pulled onto the beach at the mouth of Bass Creek and prepared to unload, however, they looked up to find two boatloads of Royal Marines closing fast. Pushing off, they sailed up the creek and into the Lagoon, under fire from the marines, who had disembarked onto the barrier beach to engage them. (“Hold this child, Sallie,” Nathan’s wife Polly is reported to have told a serving maid, “while I go upstairs to watch those red-coat devils cannonade Nathan!”) The blockade-runners disappeared around the tip of Hine’s Point, and the marines’ commander, fearing a trap, broke off the pursuit.⁸ The Smiths survived, but Bass Creek’s days—though nobody in Vineyard Haven knew it at the time—were numbered.

Shifting Sands and a Growing Village (1815-1870)

The word “hurricane” was not yet part of the American lexicon in 1815. Contemporary observers referred to the storm that struck New England on September 23 of that year as “the Great September Gale.” Whatever name is attached to the storm, however, it was the first hurricane to strike New England in 180 years, and—along with those of 1635, 1821, 1893, and 1938—one of the five most powerful to ever make landfall there.⁹ Winds and flooding killed 35 people and did \$12.5 million in property damage across New England, and salt-laden rain left behind a white coating on

7 On September 10-14, 1778, troops under the command of Major General Sir Charles Grey landed on the Island to collect supplies for British forces operating in southern New England. They appropriated 300 cattle and 10,000 sheep, along with stored crops and nearly £1,000 in tax payments that had been collected by town officials. See Railton, *History*, 101-118.

8 C. G. Hine, *The Story of Martha’s Vineyard* (Hine Brothers, 1908), 109-110.

9 P. Hughes, “Hurricanes haunt our history.” *Weatherwise*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1987): 134-140.



Vineyard Haven Harbor as mid-nineteenth-century sailors knew it, shown in an 1847 Coast Survey chart. There is no bridge over the Lagoon opening, and the beach is undeveloped except for Bradley and Yale's marine railway. Bass Creek, closed a decade earlier, still stretches almost to the village. The land immediately to the west of it is a tidal marsh. The future site of the Marine Hospital lies on a line between the large letters "A" and "S." MVM Map Collection 2006.054.268.

trees and buildings. Floodwaters ran eleven feet deep in downtown Providence and the ship *Ganges*, torn from her moorings and carried inland, drove her bowsprit through a third-story window of the Washington Insurance Company building.¹⁰ The storm's impact on the Vineyard is poorly documented, but its most lasting impact remains visible today. It breached the north end of the barrier beach between the Holmes Hole Harbor and the Lagoon, creating a second entrance.

The new entrance permanently altered the flow of water between the two bodies. Like a river cutting a fresh channel through the narrow neck of a meander, water from the Lagoon surged through the new opening into Vineyard Haven Harbor, scouring the channel wider and deeper. The volume of water moving through Bass Creek diminished, and the speed at which it flowed steadily dropped. The slower-flowing water deposited sand and mud on the bottom rather than sweeping it into the harbor, and the creek grew steadily shallower over time. The western arm of the Lagoon,

10 Rob Emlen, "200 years ago today: Remembering the Great Gale of 1815," *Providence Journal*, September 23, 2015.

between the tip of Hine's Point and the entrance to the creek, likely grew shallower at the same time (and for the same reasons), rendering it less useful as a protected anchorage for large vessels. Bass Creek, once an integral part of maritime life in Vineyard Haven, was steadily becoming more of a nuisance than a boon. Its value as an entrance to the Lagoon diminished with its depth, but its presence cut off the barrier beach and its potentially valuable waterfront from the rest of the village.

In 1835, the people of Holmes Hole resolved to finish what nature had begun twenty years before. They loaded the aging schooner *Zeno* with stone and sank it in what remained of Bass Creek at the foot of Beach Street, cutting off most of what remained of the flow of water. Over the next several years the portion of Bass Creek between the *Zeno* and the harbor was filled—whether by natural processes, human labor, or a combination—with sand and gravel. In 1855, Water Street was laid out on top of it, connecting Beach Street to Union Street.

The remodeling of the waterfront may have been driven, in part, by the interests of the Holmes Hole Union Wharf Company, formed in 1833 and incorporated in March 1835 by an act of the state legislature. The 1835 act granted the company license to establish a wharf at the foot of “the street leading to the water”—an enterprise that would have been impractical, if not impossible, if Bass Creek still existed. The closure of Bass Creek also opened the door to commercial development along the barrier beach that stretched away from town to the north, reaching toward the entrance to the Lagoon.

One local entrepreneur took almost immediate advantage of the opportunity. Sometime in the early 1840s—no later than 1842—Capt. Thomas Bradley and Dr. Leroy M. Yale established a shipyard and marine railway business on the site where the Martha's Vineyard Shipyard stands today. The yard was incorporated in 1856, and in 1860 a nameless photographer memorialized it in what is likely the oldest surviving photograph of *any* waterfront on the Island. It shows the yard's latest project—a small merchant brig with the apt name of *Vineyard Queen*—in her launching cradle on the beach, hull nearly finished but masts not yet stepped.¹¹ Beneath the ship, invisible in the shot-from-a-distance picture, iron rails would have run down the sloping beach into the harbor, offering a straight, smooth track for the wheeled car on which the cradle rested. At the crest of the beach, a wooden roundhouse protected a large capstan surrounded by a circular track. Teams of oxen, yoked to the bars of the capstan and slowly turning it as they circled the track, provided the power to pull ships out of the water or lower them back in.¹²

11 Hine, *Story of Martha's Vineyard*, 83.

12 “The Shipyard at 150,” *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, July 2006. https://www.mvshipyard.com/shipyard_at_150.php.htm



Charles Gifford, sometimes called “the Old Master,” at work in the Beach Road shipyard. MVM Photo Collection.

The appeal of the barrier beach to Bradley and Yale was obvious: It offered ample space, easy access to the shore, and the ability to launch vessels either into the harbor or into the sheltered waters of the Lagoon. Distance from the village, and the lack of direct road access to Eastville mattered less to them than to most other business owners. Most of the Marine Railway’s customers, after all, would have come by boat. Bradley and Yale were the exception rather than the rule, however, and the full-scale commercial development of the barrier beach did not begin until after 1871, when a bridge was finally erected over the no-longer-new entrance to the Lagoon and Beach Road built northward from Vineyard Haven to meet it.¹³

Residents of Eastville, the waterfront village just beyond the 1815 opening, had wanted such a bridge for years. Though politically part of Edgartown, they were far closer to Holmes Hole—only a mile distant—and made their living providing services to the ships that stopped in the harbor for rest, repair, or resupply. Requests for a bridge, directed to their elected representatives in Edgartown, were repeatedly made and repeatedly turned down on the grounds that it would be too expensive. When they turned

13 MVM Archives, RU 505, Town of Tisbury Records (Box 8, Folder 11; Box 9, Folder 1).

to the state legislature, requesting that it compel the county to establish a bridge, Edgartown fought *that* as well . . . but lost.¹⁴ The bridge went up, at a cost of \$5,700, and instantly reshaped the geography of the northern tip of the Island. Travel from Eastville to Holmes Hole now involved a quick trip over the bridge and down the sand spit, rather than a long detour around the Lagoon. A continuous road now rimmed the harbor, from the steamer wharf at the foot of New York Avenue on East Chop to the ship chandlery at the foot of Grove Avenue, across the harbor on West Chop.

Oklahoma, Cedar Neck, and Two New Bridges (1870-1900)

A few miles beyond Eastville, the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company had established the beginnings of a thriving summer resort community on the shores of Nantucket Sound. The once-empty field between the Methodist campground and the sea had been divided into lots, parks, and sweeping avenues by renowned landscape architect Robert Morris Copeland. Resort hotels and elaborate summer homes were rising at a furious rate, and many more—including the grand, four-story Sea View House at the head of the wharf—were planned. Begun in 1866, the development at Oak Bluffs was a palpable success story by 1870. Governor William Claflin had visited in the summer of 1869, and was honored with a “Grand Illumination” that became an annual tradition.¹⁵ Ulysses S. Grant, the first sitting president to visit the Island, would follow in 1874. Success, and the thriving economic climate of the early 1870s, inspired other would-be developers. Land was bought up across the northern tip of the Island, and elaborate maps were drawn up with names like Lagoon Heights, Ocean Heights, West Point Grove, and Cedar Bluff.¹⁶

Two developments from the boom years of the early 1870s shaped the view from the bluff. Howes Norris, an Eastville resident who had overcome childhood tragedy to become a wealthy and influential businessman, bought a hundred acres of land on the Tisbury side of the eastern arm of the Lagoon. He laid out acre and half-acre lots amid an elaborate network of streets, avenues, and boulevards, and set aside land for parks and scenic overlooks. A prime lot on the edge of the water, overlooking the Lagoon, was set aside for a grand resort hotel. For reasons lost to history, he dubbed the new development Oklahoma; a year later, he sold a half-interest in the project for the then-substantial sum of \$10,000. Thomas Hine, the New-York-based publisher of an insurance-industry trade journal paid the same amount in February 1872 for the finger of land that divided the

14 Banks, *History*, vol. II, *Annals of Oak Bluffs*, 59-60.

15 William Millhome, “Oak Bluffs Grand Illumination Night Was Not Always So Welcome,” *Martha’s Vineyard Times*, August 8, 2012.

16 Henry Beetle Hough, *Martha’s Vineyard: Summer Resort, 1835-1935* (Tuttle Publishing, 1936), 84-87.

two arms of the Lagoon.¹⁷ He renamed it Cedar Neck and, after building himself a \$3,000 vacation home at the northern tip, divided the remaining 15 acres into salable lots and issued a map to attract potential buyers.

The nationwide financial crisis known as the Panic of 1873, and the six-year depression that followed, hit the Island's emerging real-estate boom hard. Cash evaporated, and willing buyers became scarce, leaving some developments undersubscribed and causing others—like West Point Grove and Cedar Bluff, both on West Chop—to collapse entirely. Oklahoma fell into the first category: The resort hotel was popular, but house lots sold slowly, and Howes Norris's plans for an elaborate, planned community that would rival Oak Bluffs and Vineyard Highlands never materialized. Cedar Neck was an outright failure as a commercial enterprise, but over time Hine recouped much of his investment by selling off the house lots to his friends. That venture gave Cedar Neck its modern name: Hine's Point. Along with Hart Haven in Oak Bluffs, it was an early example of a private summer enclave: a community shaped by preexisting shared familial and friendly ties rather than the commercial happenstance of strangers choosing adjoining lots from a map.¹⁸

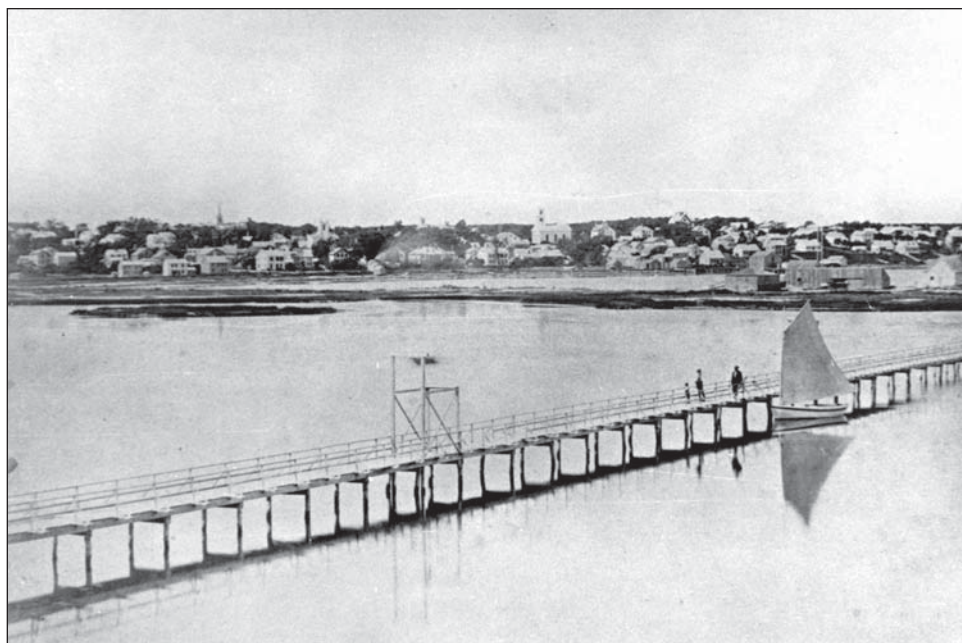
Oklahoma and Cedar Neck, though neither fulfilled their developers' hopes, marked the beginning of Vineyard Haven's emergence as a summer resort. Schooners still filled the harbor, and maritime interests still dominated the economy, but the new homes that rose amid the forest and farmland bought up by the developers were, unlike those in the village center and along the road to West Chop, empty for most of the year. Vineyard Haven was not Oak Bluffs—vibrant in the summer, virtually deserted in the winter—because maritime commerce and tourism remained in uneasy equilibrium even as the former shrank and the latter grew. The 1870s, however, marked the first stages of a long transition to a summer-centered economy.

The most visible markers of the emerging summer-resort economy were a pair of manmade pathways that cut across the western arm of the Lagoon. The first was a footbridge, built at the direction of Thomas Hine, which connected Hine's Point to Beach Road. Erected in 1873 and built by Elihu M. Mosher for \$2,000, it began at the bank below Hine's house and ran straight across the Lagoon for 700 feet, meeting Beach Road north of the marine railway.¹⁹ The second was a causeway, built in the late 1870s at the direction of Wallace Barnes, a real-estate speculator from Bristol,

17 Seller Thomas N. Hillman, who had paid \$800 for the neck (Hough, *Summer Resort*, 85) thus realized a 1,150 percent profit on his investment.

18 For tales of life on the point, see C. G. Hine, *The History of Cedar Neck* (Privately Printed, 1907). <http://history.vineyard.net/cedarnck.htm>

19 Hough, *Summer Resort*, 85



Hine's Foot Bridge seen from Hine's Point, probably in the early 1880s. Except for the shipyard (directly behind the boat's sail) outer Beach Road remains undeveloped. MVM Photo Collection.

CT. It started from the apex of the curve where Beach Road swung north toward the Lagoon entrance, and ran across the narrow isthmus of low-lying land that had marked the entrance to Bass Creek, ending at the base of the bluff near the entrance to what is now Skiff Avenue.²⁰ The only significant gap in the isthmus was closed by a wooden bridge.

The footbridge was a rich man's indulgence. It was designed, Thomas Hine's son C. G. Hine later recalled, "to provide a short walk to the Beach Road," and although the traffic across it "was never comparable to that of Brooklyn Bridge or any other such . . . many a small boy made use of it" as a convenient perch from which to drop a fishing line into the waters below.²¹ Early photographs show it as a single, uninterrupted span stretching across the water, apparently barring access to any boat too wide to slip between the pilings or too tall to slide beneath the deck. At some point, however, a small draw span was added to allow small sailing craft to pass through. Longtime Tisbury resident Craig Kingsbury recalled that it "took two people in a little boat, because one guy had to get out and pick up the drawbridge, and the other guy sail the boat through and then put it

20 Baer, "That Was Then: Oklahoma Causeway," *Martha's Vineyard Times*, August 29, 2018.

21 Hine, quoted in the explanatory notes for "The Hine's Foot Bridge; View of Beach Road and Town," <http://history.vineyard.net/photos/vh8/V84502.HTM>.

back down and get aboard the boat and go up into the Lagoon.”²²

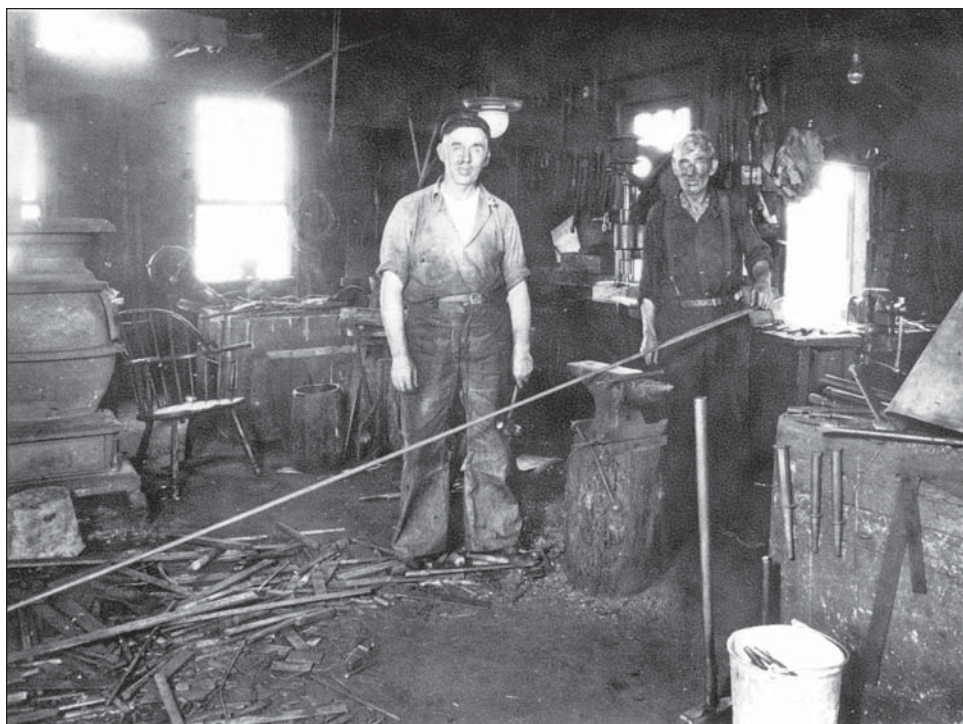
The causeway was more substantial, more expensive, and built for more serious purposes. Barnes, a major investor in the Oklahoma development, was eager for ways to attract guests to its thriving hotel (Oklahoma Hall, later renamed Innisfail) and buyers to its still-unsold lots. The large crowds that flocked to Cottage City each summer represented a key market, but getting them to Oklahoma was a challenge. After his appeal to the Town of Tisbury for a direct connection between Beach Road and Oklahoma was turned down, he acquired a forty-foot steam launch and ran three trips a day from Vineyard Haven and Cottage City to a wharf on the Lagoon shoreline below the hotel. The causeway was the next step: A faster, more permanent, and less weather-dependent solution; after exiting Beach Road and traversing the causeway, travelers swung right at the base of Hine’s Point and continued to Oklahoma along what is now Weaver Lane.²³ Barnes’ bold move did not, unfortunately for him, pay off. He struggled financially, lost more than half his holdings in 1883 in a dispute over unpaid taxes, and died a decade later. The causeway outlived him by decades, remaining passable well into the new century, and acquiring wooden guardrails and even utility poles during the 1910s.

Beach Road was, as late as the early 1890s, still largely undeveloped except for the marine railway. Captain Benjamin Cromwell, master of the steamer *Monohansett* and owner of one of the largest homes on William Street, owned a stretch of waterfront property where he stored anchors and other marine equipment. The site where Tisbury Marketplace now stands, near the entrance to the Oklahoma Causeway, was used by the town as a dumping ground. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, however, that had begun to change. An 1897 business directory lists two blacksmith shops on the south end of Beach Road: Prentiss and Frank Bodfish on the harbor side, and Elmer Chadwick on the Lagoon side. The Massachusetts Humane Society maintained “Station No. 60” nearby: a surfboat on a wheeled cart in a protective shed, stocked with lifesaving equipment and ready for use by volunteer rescuers in the event of a shipwreck.

When the new Marine Hospital building opened atop the bluff in December 1895, replacing the one that had operated there since 1879, it looked out over a Lagoon that had long since stopped sheltering commercial ships, a failed real-estate development that had found a second life as a summer enclave, and a barrier beach that was just beginning to undergo significant commercial development. The most profound changes to the landscape below the bluff would come, however, in the early decades of the fast-approaching new century.

22 Craig Kingsbury, interviewed by Linsey Lee, December 1, 1995 (MVM Oral History Collection), p. 31.

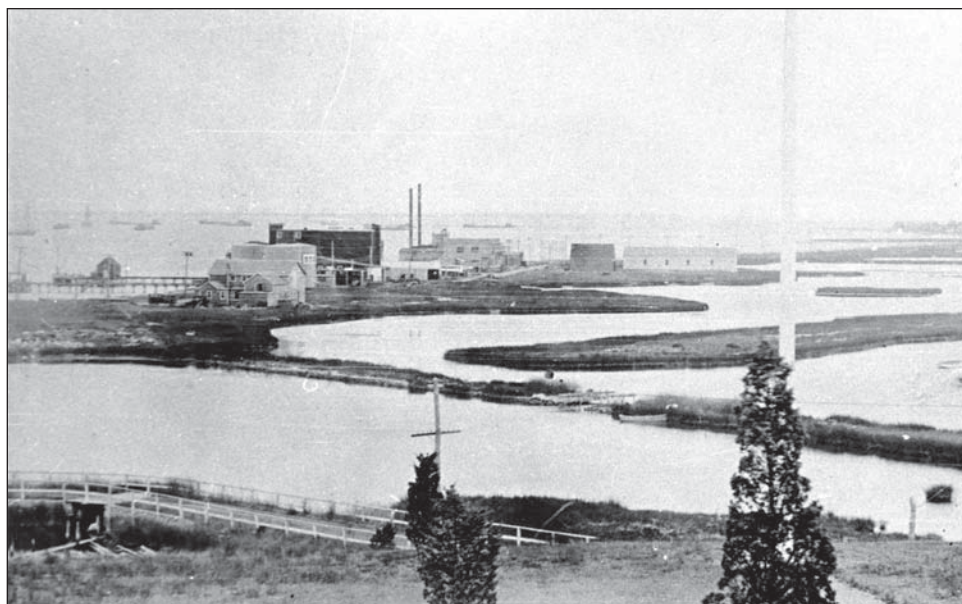
23 Baer, “Oklahoma Causeway.”



Ed Colleton (L) and Elmer Chadwick (R) at work in Chadwick's blacksmith shop on Beach Road in the early 1900s. Tisbury Marketplace now occupies the site where it stood. MVM Basil Welch Collection (RU 465).

Trolley Cars and Heavy Industry (1900-1930s)

The transformation that historians of technology call the “Second Industrial Revolution”—the harnessing of oil, electricity, and steel—took root in, and spread outward from, northeastern cities like Boston, New York, and Chicago in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It reached the Vineyard in the decades bracketing 1900, its arrival heralded by the laying of gas and electric lines and the curious spectacle of automobiles being rolled down makeshift gangplanks onto the foredecks of paddlewheel steamers. The first elements of the Island's electrical grid, and the first miles of its short-lived electric trolley network, were laid in Oak Bluffs, for the same reason that the wiring of the nation as a whole began in New York City. High population density and relative affluence created a pool of potential customers large enough to justify the investment in equipment and labor necessary to establish the system in the first place. The critical difference, of course, was that those conditions existed year-round in New York but only seasonally in Oak Bluffs. When the season ended, the big hotels closed for the winter, and the summer homes lay dormant, the market shrank and service shrank with it. Elec-



Beach Road and the Lagoon seen from the Marine Hospital lawn, around 1905. Oklahoma Causeway, in the near distance, separates Bass Creek from the rest of the Lagoon. The dark mass of Harry Peakes' cold storage building and the twin smokestacks of the Vineyard Lighting Company powerplant are visible along rapidly industrializing Beach Road. MVM Photo Collection.

trical service was available around the clock in the summer, but limited or non-existent in the off-season.²⁴

Vineyard Haven—a village whose population lacked the summer highs, but also the extreme seasonal fluctuation, of Oak Bluffs—became the Island's second important market for the other benefits of the Second Industrial Revolution. The Beach Road corridor, which connected the two, quickly emerged as a key site for the supporting infrastructure. Stretching from the Five Corners in Vineyard Haven to the foot of Eastville Avenue, it became—as historian Gale Huntington once put it—the Island's "heavy industry" district.²⁵

The tracks and overhead powerlines of the Cottage City Electric Railway ran along New York Avenue, Temihagan, and Eastville Avenues to the Oak Bluffs side of the Lagoon Bridge. The trolleys that rolled along them drew their power from a generating plant on the Eastville shore opposite

24 Railton, *History* 310-312, 321-323; Allen W. Hathaway and Thomas B. Speight, "The Vineyard Lighting Company Explosion, 1921," in *Manufactured Gas Plant Remediation: A Case Study* (CRC Press, 2018), section 2.8.6.2; see also comments by Gratia Harrington and Stephen Carey Luce, Jr. in Chris Baer, "Site 32: S. C. Luce's Store, The Post Office, the Phone Company, and Cape & Vineyard Electr" <http://history.vineyard.net/mainst/six/32/index.html>

25 Gale Huntington, *An Introduction to Martha's Vineyard* (Dukes County Historical Society, 1969), 23.

what is now the main entrance to the Martha's Vineyard Hospital. Unable to cross the bridge (built before trolleys were ever contemplated, and unable to support their weight), they discharged Vineyard-Haven-bound passengers at its Oak Bluffs end, leaving them to cross on foot and, on the other end, board a car from the Vineyard Haven line for the short ride down Beach Road and Water Street to the foot of Union Wharf. The two lines merged in 1906, and sometime afterward the bridge was rebuilt, allowing for a continuous passage between the two towns.²⁶

Trolley passengers bound into Vineyard Haven along Beach Road around 1908 would have passed, on the Lagoon side, the end of Hine's footbridge and the barn where the trolley cars were stored and repaired when not in use. The new Vineyard Lighting Company powerplant, slender twin smokestacks rising from its roof, would have rolled by on the harbor side, followed by the shipyard and Harry Peakes' newly completed ice-making and cold-storage plant.²⁷ After that, the view from the harbor side of the trolley would have been mostly wasteland—a long stretch of sand and grass that curved away toward Bodfish's blacksmith shop. On the Lagoon side, however, Chadwick's blacksmith shop and the entrance to Oklahoma Causeway would have swung into view at the apex of the curve, with contractor H. N. Hinckley's newest venture, a lumberyard to compete with Tilton's on Water Street, just beyond.

As the trolley rolled through Five Corners (over rails and pavement laid atop the long-buried bones of the *Zeno*) and swung onto Water Street, the view to the right would once again have turned industrial: the Crowell Coal Company and the Tilton Lumber Company, with Union Wharf beyond. The left side of Water Street, though softened slightly by a sloping green field where the town parking lot now stands, had a similar industrial quality. A boatbuilder's shop operated at the corner of Beach Road, looking past the current site of the Black Dog to the water, and a feed-and-grain store with a steam-driven grist mill loomed over the street at the other corner of the field. Built in 1875 by Tisbury grocer (and longtime selectman) William Rotch, it had been bought in 1906 by the grocery firm of Bodfish & Call, which would amalgamate with two former competitors to form Smith, Bodfish & Swift in 1910.²⁸ Across the street and a little further along, the Seamen's Bethel—a waterfront mission under the direction of Chaplain Madison Edwards—stood beside the foot of Union Wharf.

26 Thomas Dresser, *Martha's Vineyard: A History* (History Press, 2015), p. 82; Karl Zimmerman, "All Aboard," *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, June 8, 2015.

27 "New Plants and Improvements," *Ice and Refrigeration*, vol. 34, no. 1 (January 1908), 41.

28 Chris Baer, "That Was Then: The Grist Mill and the Rat Fire," *Martha's Vineyard Times*, March 24, 2017. Smith, Bodfish & Swift, much changed with the times, remains in business today on State Road.



The Seamen's Bethel stood at the at the head of Union Wharf for nearly a century, offering wholesome entertainment and spiritual guidance to sailors. The grain mill and feed store is visible in the background. MVM Photo Collection.

The Vineyard Haven waterfront, circa 1910, supplied many of the town's, and the Island's, basic needs: building materials, metalwork, heating fuel, electricity for light and slowly growing numbers of appliances, along with public transportation by both land (the trolley) and water (the steamers that called at Union Wharf). Early in the next decade, local entrepreneurs began to add oil and automobiles to the mix. The 20th Century Garage, with its distinctive concrete walls and corrugated metal roof, opened on Water Street in 1913 under the ownership of the impressively named Le-grand Lockwood Aldrich. It was later acquired by William G. Manter, who renamed it the Dukes County Garage and in 1923 moved the former Luxemoor Leather factory building to the long-vacant lot across the Beach Street Extension.²⁹ The first floor of the Luxemoor building became the showroom for the Buicks and Chevrolets sold by Manter's car dealership, and the triangular apron in front of it became a gas station. Other gas stations, and oil tank farms to supply them, took root elsewhere on Beach Road in the twenties and thirties.

Development of the once-empty areas between the Five Corners and the bend in Beach Road followed as well. The businesses that took root there in the 1930s and early 1940s were commercial, rather than industrial: a

²⁹ Chris Baer, "That Was Then: Five Corners," *Martha's Vineyard Times*, January 7, 2015.



Charles K. Van Riper, whose Beach Road ship model shop operated from 1933 to 1962, reaped the benefits of Vineyard Haven's transformation from a commercial port to a tourist center. MVM Photo Collection.

hardware store, a grocery, a bowling alley, and the Van Ryper shop, which offered attractively priced “models of ships on which you’ve sailed.”³⁰ The Art Cliff Diner opened on the Lagoon side of Beach Road in 1943, to the delight of the modelmakers as well as the crews who built launches and utility craft for the Navy in the sheds of the Martha’s Vineyard Shipbuilding Company and the still-empty fields alongside. It remains in business today, the wall above the counter decorated with signs advertising 1940s specials at 1940s prices.

The End of Bass Creek (1920-1945)

In sharp contrast to the boom along the Beach Road corridor, development along Lagoon Pond Avenue lagged in the early decades of the twentieth century. The west side of the street remained what it had been since the 1890s: a neighborhood of small, working-class homes, many owned by Portuguese immigrant families. Its nickname, “Chicken Alley,” derived from the fowl that pecked in many of the yards—like backyard vegetable gardens, a way to stretch the family’s food budget. Behind the houses, the marshy plain stretched west toward Causeway Road had become an informal dumping ground for old tires and discarded scrap metal, and other detritus of modern civilization. Lagoon Pond Avenue itself was dirt, “improved”—at

30 Anthony K. Van Riper, “Tisbury’s Tabletop Fleet,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1994: 51-65; A. Bowdoin Van Riper, “Toy Boat, Toy Boat, Toy Boat,” *Martha’s Vineyard Magazine*, September 1, 2017.



Portrait of a changing harbor, 1918: Bass Creek still reaches nearly to the Five Corners, where Dukes County Garage (the long, low building with rectangular windows) caters to the Island's growing population of automobiles. Union Wharf is packed with commercial vessels, but they are steam tugs rather than schooners. MVM Photo Collection.

least in the stretch that ran past the foot of the bluff—by being spread with ashes from the coal burned in the Marine Hospital's basement furnaces.

East of the avenue lay—still—the Lagoon end of Bass Creek. It is clearly visible in photographs taken from the front lawn of the Marine Hospital in 1917 and 1918: a long, narrow tongue of water stretching north toward the harbor and stopping just short of the Five Corners. A person standing in the open doorway of the Dukes County Garage could have lobbed a baseball into it with ease. The frequently reprinted photo of two people in a rowboat on Bass Creek, once published by the *Vineyard Gazette* under a headline calling the waterway a “Vanished Beauty Spot of Vineyard Haven,” may well date from this era.

The process by which the last remnants of Bass Creek vanished, sometime between 1918 and 1945, is poorly documented. Unlike the 1835 decision to close the harbor entrance to Bass Creek, or the 1870 agreement to build a bridge across the Lagoon entrance, the decision to fill what remained of Bass Creek seems not to have been a deliberate choice, made at a single moment in time by a formal governing body. It seems, instead, to have taken place in stages: a series of responses to immediate needs rather than the execution of a grand plan. The full story of what happened to Bass Creek between the world wars has yet to be written; what follows is, at best, a first draft—subject to revision.

Stuart Bangs, who was born in 1923 and witnessed the process as a boy,

recalled the filling of Bass Creek with sand and mud as a practical solution:

All this land here and here [pointing, on a photograph, to land east of Lagoon Pond Road] was filled in there from the bottom of Vineyard Haven Harbor when it was dredged out. This was all water in here, all water, just like this: Mud Creek. That's still there, but this side was just as much water or more and it extended all the way up to where the post office is, you know? And the bicycle shop was the head of where the Bass Creek was. But they had to have a place to put the spoil, and they dredged it and they put it there.³¹

Banks also remembers playing, as a boy, on the hulks of aging schooners—wrecked in the Gale of 1898, and stripped of their masts and everything else useful—that lay half-submerged, the waters of Bass Creek. “Well,” he recalled in a 2002 interview with Linsey Lee, “they were in the water and there was enough of them above the water level to give a footing of sorts and we used to run around them. I suppose they’re all under there. They’re probably rotted and still there, or what remains of them anyhow.”³²

The Innisfail Hotel—the centerpiece, and only wholly successful element, of the Oklahoma development—had been destroyed by a wildfire in 1907, and the development itself had faded away. The Oklahoma Causeway had thus, by the time of Bangs’ boyhood in the late 1920s and early 1930s, long since fallen into disuse and decay. It was no longer passable for vehicles, and the once-solid bridge that spanned the one large gap in the underlying strip of land had been removed. In its place stood a makeshift bridge of planks. Bangs remembered: “There was two, couple of planks still left there and a plank or two. We’d walk across there and get across without getting too wet and go over to up near the blacksmith’s shop over there in the corner.”³³ John Coutinho, born in 1914, had similar memories of the decaying causeway: “They use to have planks going across there, so we’d walk across the planks onto the next land. It was three boards. Big enough for feet, that’s all. We used to call that “Three Board Bridge.”³⁴

Dredging operations undertaken after the Hurricane of 1938 generated massive quantities of sand that had been swept into the harbor and its ship channels. Much of it was deposited in the low ground west of Howard Avenue and south of Beach Street, which had been a tidal marsh in the nineteenth century and become an informal dumping ground in the twentieth. Spread flat and dried in the sun, the dredged sand gave the area a new nickname: The Sahara. Beginning in 1954, Post 257 of the American Legion organized a massive cleanup of the area, removing decades’ worth of junked cars, discarded tires, and other refuse from the mud beneath the

31 Stuart Bangs, interviewed by Linsey Lee, November 21, 2002, p. 28.

32 Bangs, p. 28

33 Bangs, p. 28; the shop was Elmer Chadwick’s, located at the bend in Beach Road.

34 John Coutinho, interviewed by Linsey Lee, October 17, 1994.

sand. Graded, covered with soil, and seeded with grass, the area became a recreational space for the people of Vineyard Haven. It was formally transferred to the Town of Tisbury in 1964, and is now known as Veterans Park.

It seems likely that at least some of the sand from the dredging operation found its way into what had been Bass Creek, the last step in a process that had continued on and off for twenty years. By the time the Second World War engulfed the United States, Bass Creek no longer existed. In its place lay a thick wedge of “made land” that filled the once-watery space between Howard Avenue and Beach Road: a blank canvas on which new buildings and new businesses could be erected. The outbreak of war put the development of what had been Bass Creek on temporary hold, but—in Vineyard Haven as in the wider the American economy—the post-war release of that pent-up demand was rapid and intense.

From Then Until Now (1945-present)

The war was over, and boatbuilder Erford Burt was at a crossroads. Born in Chilmark in 1908, he had apprenticed at Manuel Swartz Roberts’ shop on the Edgartown waterfront, then taken a job as foreman of the Martha’s Vineyard Shipbuilding Company (successor to the old marine railway) on Beach Road in Vineyard Haven. There, under the direction of owner William Colby, he had designed a graceful, 21-foot racing sloop—the Vineyard Haven Fifteen—for the newly established Vineyard Haven Yacht Club, and a revolutionary new open-cockpit fishing boat designed, from the keel up, around a gasoline engine. The success of Burt’s “bass boats,” as they came to be known, gave him the confidence to open his own yard after the war.³⁵ The question was where, and the answer proved to be the sheltered waters at the Lagoon end of what had, not so long before, been Bass Creek.

Discharged from wartime service in the US Navy, he returned to Vineyard Haven and, in 1945, opened Burt’s Boatyard on a parcel of “made land” on the Lagoon side of Howard Avenue. The water between the edge of his new property and the old Oklahoma Causeway—dredged deeper, along with the channel leading into it—became a sheltered basin for the boats launched and serviced at his yard. A year later he bought the former North Tisbury Baptist Church and, with the help of family members, disassembled it and moved it to the site of his new yard. Reassembled, it became his workshop, immediately dubbed the “Bass Creek Meetinghouse” by waterfront wags. Asked, by oral historian Linsey Lee, how it felt to build boats in a former house of worship, Burt replied simply: “Better the building, better the work.”³⁶

35 Erford Burt as told to Hugh Smith, *Erford Burt Remembers: Stories from His Life*. MVM Vertical Files Collection, VREF0533.002

36 Brendan O’Neill, “Walking on History: The Lost Bass Creek.” *Vineyard-ConservationSociety.org*

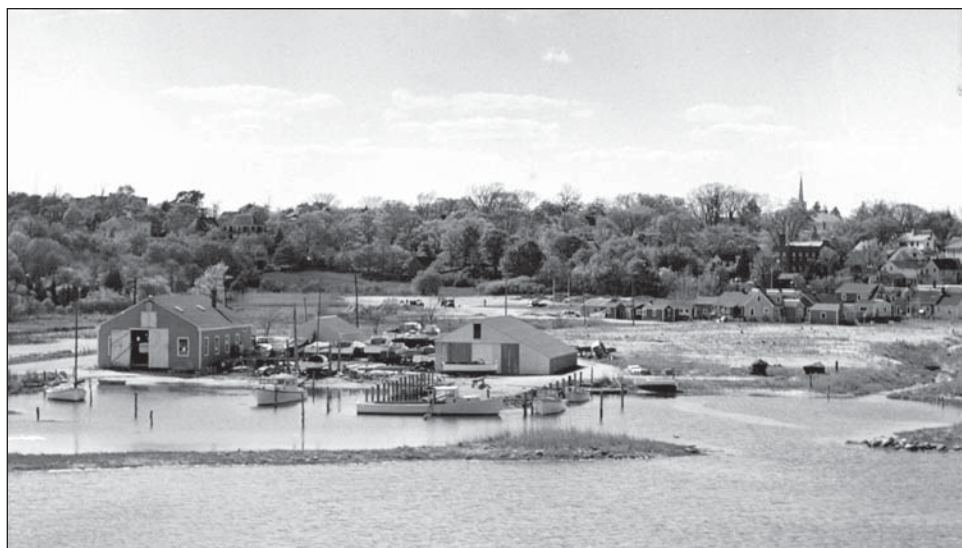
The boatyard prospered, turning out small sailing craft like the Burt-designed Vineyard Gem, still used by the East Chop Beach Club, as well as dozens of Burt's trademark inboard-engine bass boats. Closer to the Five Corners, on both Lagoon Pond Road and Beach Road, other businesses were also settling onto the newly dry land where Bass Creek had flowed. Mike Fontes' paint shop, which opened on Howard Avenue in 1945, was among the first. The building's arrival from Main Street, likely orchestrated by virtuoso house-mover Harry Horton, was the fifth installment in the saga of the most-moved commercial structure in Vineyard Haven, and perhaps on the entire Island. It is also, as of this writing, the final installment. The business now the Vineyard Color Center, but the building remains where it was placed in 1945. Other businesses, and homes that became businesses, were erected atop the remains of Bass Creek over the succeeding decades. A large, modern grocery store—leased first by First National and then by IGA—opened on the site of the current post office in 1955.

The upper and lower ends of Skiff Avenue, disconnected since they were laid out as part of the "Mt. Aldworth Heights" development in 1913, were joined around the same time. The now-continuous street became a secondary automobile route between the Five Corners and the Edgartown Road, easing access to the emerging businesses on Howard Avenue and completing its integration into the long-established commercial zone along Beach Road and Water Street.

The year 1983, of no particular significance in the history of the town as a whole, was a coincidental turning point in the history of the area below the bluff. Erford Burt, after nearly forty years in business, retired from boatbuilding and leased his yard to Robert Maciel, who bought it outright two years later. It became first Maciel Marine and then Prime Marina, which remains in operation today.³⁷ The same year, at the other end of the Oklahoma Causeway, Tisbury Marketplace—a one story complex of shops and restaurants—opened on the site occupied, until 1968, by "Duarte Village," a haphazard collection of a dozen buildings on four acres of land named for its owner: oil-and-gas dealer Manuel Duarte.³⁸ The first new block of small retail spaces built in Vineyard Haven since before the turn of the century, Tisbury Marketplace's conspicuously unified and visibly "designed" appearance set it apart from the painted-cinder-block and cedar-shingled buildings that surrounded it. To some observers it represented an unwelcome erasure of part of Vineyard Haven's distinctive character; others, however, hailed it as a long-awaited step (hopefully the first

37 Mark Alan Lovewell, "From Meetinghouse to Marina, Boatyard Sails Again into the Future," *Vineyard Gazette*, November 14, 2013.

38 Clarence J. Hall, "Manuel Duarte Owns Only Bogs on Martha's Vineyard Island," *Cranberries: The National Cranberry Magazine*, May 1960: 7-13, on pp. 9-10.



Sheltered behind the remains of the Oklahoma Causeway, Burt's Boatyard perches on the edge of the still-raw "made land" created by filling Bass Creek. The building at the far left is the former North Tisbury Baptist Church, repurposed by Burt as a workshop. MVM Photo Collection.

of many) toward the beautification of a conspicuously ugly neighborhood.

The issues raised by the events of 1983—tradition versus modernity, authenticity versus polish; harbor town versus summer resort—remain potent, and divisive, in ongoing discussions of the future of Vineyard Haven. They were renewed by the expansion of the Steamship Authority terminal and parking area in the early 1990s, and by a proposed expansion of the Stop & Shop grocery store in 2013. The sometimes-fragile equilibrium between Vineyard Haven's maritime and resort economies, older than the first (1879) Marine Hospital on the bluff, continues to play out beneath the gaze of its 1895 successor.

Vineyard Voices

Two Sailors and a Scallop Shack: A Patchwork History

by LINSEY LEE

TWO LONG-TIME RESIDENTS of the Marine Hospital stand out in the memories of Vineyarders who knew the building when the hospital was active. Both men were deep-water sailors whose seagoing careers had been ended by infirmity. Their bodies worn out by rough lives spent traveling the world on warships, schooners and fishing vessels, they resided in a ward at the Marine Hospital. Each day, however, they descended the steep hill to the small scallop shack that still stands on the shores of Lagoon Pond at the base of the Marine Hospital's driveway. There, they channeled memories of lives of battling storms and shipwrecks into intricately carved boat models that they put in bottles and sold to an eager public. They also created beautifully carved and inlaid boxes, larger ship models, and all manner of delicate works of art that echoed their past lives.

Captain Corey Hamilton (1868-1945) worked in the shack for a number of years until some unknown falling-out with the Hospital administration led to his eviction from the Marine Hospital's long-term-care ward (located in what is now the Museum's classroom). With Capt. Hamilton's departure, the shack was occupied by Captain Anton Svenson (1888-1951) who continued the tradition of using it as a workshop for the creation of nautical art.

Over my years of collecting oral histories from people on the Vineyard, these men's names and their stories have often come up. These remembered snippets are full of contradictions, changed names, melded attributes—evidence of the vagaries and subjectivity of memory and the way that the same set of facts can be perceived differently. It is from such fragments that we construct our remembered history. To me one of the beauties of oral history is that it makes us aware of the richness and complexity of the

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The scallop shack at the foot of Skiff Avenue, used by Captains Corey Hamilton and Anton Svenson as a workshop. Photo by Brendan O'Neill.

tapestry of truth. Our view of the world, and of our lives, is shaped not only by fact, but also by a complex web of memories, colored by the mists of time and opinion.

What follows are excerpts from oral histories in which Captains Svenson and Hamilton are mentioned, along with excerpts from their obituaries in the *Vineyard Gazette* and from articles *Gazette* reporter and columnist Joseph Chase Allen's "Interesting Vineyarders" series. I have not attempted to resolve their contradictions (which extend even to the spelling of names), or to distill them into a single, unified Truth. Somewhere in their intersections and overlaps, however, lies the story of how the last chapters of two extraordinary lives were played out in a tiny shack in the shadow of the Marine Hospital. Now, come and join the treasure hunt to find and decipher more nuggets of "truth".

Stuart Bangs¹

LL: Your shack down there on the Lagoon, what was it used for back then?

SB: Well, it was built by Hamilton, Charles Hamilton I think was his name. He was a deep sea sailor and an old Down Easter who got sick and turned in at the Hospital up here and they kept him going. He got Mr. Hinckley—who owned all this land that I now own here—to let him build

1 From a November 21, 2002 interview.

the shack there. Hamilton built it and he put boats in bottles and made models and stuff in that shack.

LL: And he had come to the Vineyard when he got sick? Is that what happened?

SB: I don't know whether he was on a vessel that came in the harbor and he was sick and they brought him ashore or what, but that was usually the way they got here to the Marine Hospital.

After Hamilton got upset with the Marine Hospital people, he moved out of there and left the shack over here and he went down at the waterfront and lived in that little boat down by Hancock's Hardware, he called *Three Bells*, that John Ivory later called *Dry Tortugas*.² This shack was then turned over to Svensen who was also a patient at the Marine Hospital and he carried on the model-making and the boats in the bottles and all that sort of thing for quite a long time afterwards.

Hamilton's body was bent double, he couldn't stand up at all. It was bent just like that. He had two little short canes and he used to walk along with them, these little short canes, and his back was frozen, I guess. He could turn his head a little bit, but not much. He lived in the boat down at the waterfront that John Ivory later lived in. When he lived there he called it *The Three Bells* and he had on the stern of the boat three bells cut out of wood and nailed up on there, you know?

Hamilton used to put the boat in the water. Am I telling you right? Yes, I'm telling you right. Hamilton used to put it in the water every year and he'd go cruising. He'd go to Cuttyhunk and he went to Tarpaulin Cove. He stopped here and stopped there, Oak Bluffs or wherever he wanted to go. It was a funny sight to see him doing it because, as I say, his body was frozen at a ninety-degree configuration and he had a seat up in the bow of the boat and a little hatch up there and he'd stick his head up through that hatch and he could see where he was going. He had a little one-cylinder engine with a throw-out gear. He had that rigged up so he could put it out of gear, up where he was and lines all rigged to steer. So that's the way he did. It went all around that way. A little boat with a head sticking up out of the front. He was something. I used to take his groceries down to him when he was living down at Hancock's.

We always helped him put the boat in the water after every winter. It leaked like a basket, every time we did it. And he had a skiff. He would row around there and have the boys, that whole bunch of boys down there, help him go up to the Hancock's and get bags of sawdust and bring the sawdust down to him. He had a long pole with a flat stick nailed on the end of it and he'd pour it on the waterline right by the side of the boat and push it down, see, push it down under there. It would go right where the

2 Now the site of the Boch Park on Beach Road.



Captain John Ivory seated (c. 1950) outside his landlocked boat-turned-home, *Dry Tortugas*, once the home of Captain Corey Hamilton. MVM Basil Welch Collection (RU 465).

water was going into the hull and in no time at all it was tight and he was all set. He was off and running.

When Svensen [who took over the shack after Hamilton left] died, Sam Newcomb—whose house was right here and he was a friend of the family’s and came from Provincetown, the same as my father did—Sam acquired the shack from Svenson. Svenson gave it to him, so he said, and I guess he did.

Well, when I finally bought this piece of land, which extends roughly from here to here, Sam knew about it and it was just this little piece of earth that you see here, it’s not much, and says, “I guess you ought to have that shack. It’s on your land, you should have it.” I said, “How am I going to get it, Sam?” “Well,” he says, “maybe you could buy it.” I said, “Well, if that’s the case and you own it, I guess I’ll have to talk you into selling it. Would you sell it to me?” “Oh, yes,” he says, he would. I said, “Sam, how much is it worth? How much do you want for it?” Well, boy, he pondered and pondered and pondered for the longest time, it was like he’d forgotten we were talking about it. Finally, he said, “Well, guess ten dollars would be all right.” So, I paid him, I bought it. I haven’t got a deed to it or anything else, but he didn’t have one either, so . . .

LL: Do you have any of the bottles that either of them made, Svenson or Hamilton?

SB: Yeah, yeah, I got one that Svensen made. Never got one from Hamilton. Hamilton's are better, too, really. He put more in his bottles, Hamilton did. He put a sort of a wharf scene with houses on it and trees and everything like that, and Svensen just put a square-rigger in a bottle.

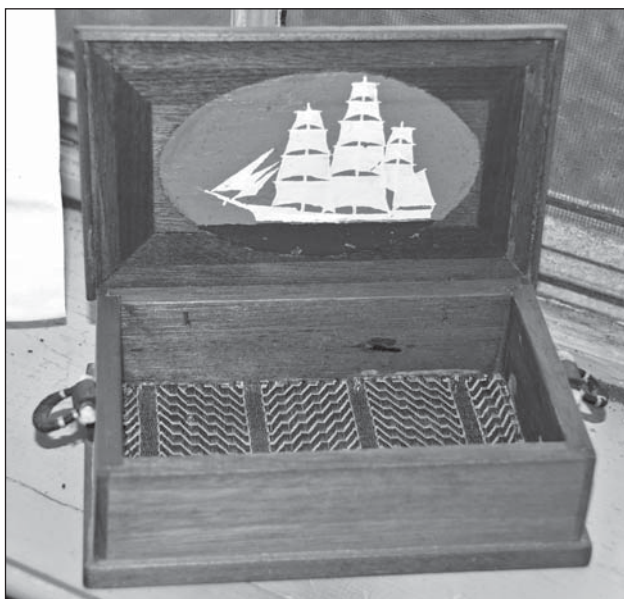
LL: Where was Svensen from? Do you have any idea?

SB: Svensen was from Sweden. He was Swedish. Anton, A-N-T-O-N. Svensen, S-V-E-N-S-E-N, I think it was.

Clifton Athearn³

CA: I worked at the Marine Hospital at the beginning of World War II and then for a bit after the war. In the main building of the hospital, there were four major wards—two downstairs and two upstairs. One of the downstairs wards had half a dozen old seafaring men there. They were there permanently, you know, the disabled guys. So, they were all together in one ward.

Most of them were ambulatory. Some of them with difficulty, but . . . There was one man named Svenson who used to use the little building down at the edge of the Lagoon—it's there now, at the end of Skiff Avenue. Used to use that for his shop and made stuff in it.



Decorative box made by Capt. Svenson for Clifton Athearn. Photo by Brendan O'Neill.

LL: What was he like?

CA: Oh, he was a big old grouch, but if he liked you, he was fine. I got along with him pretty good. I used to sneak in extra stuff that he needed. So, I got along with him. He gave me one of the boxes he made. Miniature sea chests. Got one in here; I'll get it, if you want me to.

LL: And who was he? Where was he from?

CA: I don't know. He was a beat-up seaman. He had great difficulty walking. His legs were very bad. But he could manage with two canes. He used to struggle down there and up again, all by himself. Fell down a few times but he always insisted on getting himself up. He wasn't terribly old.

3 From a September 29, 2009 interview.

Anton Svenson, his name was. He made a lot of those boxes. Underneath is a picture of the man.

LL: Oh, this is wonderful. Was this his Christmas card?

CA: Yes. He gave the box to me because I gave him an order for one. I had him make one for my mother, and so he made one for me, too, while he was at it. Inside the box, on the cover, he made this picture of a square rigger. His carpentry is better than his oil painting. And put a cloth lining inside. The inlaid design on the top is good. The handles on the end are kind of interesting.

LL: This is really nice. Beautifully done.

CA: Yes, I don't know how he did it. I don't know how he had tools that were fine enough to do that kind of work.

Connie and Freeman Leonard⁴

CL: [The Marine Hospital] was very active and very, very nice place. And a lot of us kids used to go over there and just kind of socialize. And the cook at the Marine Hospital used to make fudge for us and he would also let us grind coffee. And we enjoyed doing that. It was a fun place to go

FL: It was sort of a home for a lot of them.

CL: It was, it was. A lot of the men lived there for years. They were comfortable – it was a very sunny and pleasant place.

FL: The guy that owned the little building that Stuart Bangs owns now, down by the pond...

CL: You know that little shack? That belonged, as I recall, to an old man whose home was the Marine Hospital. He was bent almost doubled. And his name was Sweeney. All I know, is they called him Sweeney.

Arnie Fischer⁵

AF: We had Dr. Mitchell for quite a while, because he was at the Marine Hospital there when we had our cows in Vineyard Haven. And he had a dog that got in and chewed up one of my goats once. That's how we got to know him quite well, because I had a wen over this eye and he says, "Come in. I'll take it off." Because, when I peddled papers, I used to peddle papers at the Marine Hospital. I'd come across the Beach Road as far as Hinckley's and Dugan's and I'd take that bridge by Maciel's Shipyard now, then right up the steps into the hospital.⁶

LL: At that point, were there a number of people in the hospital?

AF: Oh, yes, some of them there permanently, crippled up, you know. Mr. Snow was the head cook there, and he'd always have a piece of cake for

4 From a December 3, 1997 interview.

5 From a March 5, 1997 interview.

6 A causeway once ran from Beach Road (near the site of Tisbury Marketplace) to the foot of Skiff Avenue; see pp. XX-XX of this issue for details.



Marine Hospital staff and patients pose on the front steps of the building in 1941. Dr. Mitchell, in his naval uniform, is in the front row, flanked by two unknown nurses. MVM Photo Collection.

me or something when I came through. Gave me my first radio, a battery set with earphones and three or four knobs that you had to adjust, then you put the earphones in a tin pan and three or four people could listen.

LL: Wasn't there a guy who was at the hospital who made model boats in bottles?

AF: Mr. Swenson. Tall, thin man. Stuart Bangs has his little house now, down below the hill there. Then there was Corey Hamilton, he was bent over like that. He'd had clap or syphilis two or three times, and he used to use Ben Luce's shed there to make rowboats when we kept our cows there. And he'd walk down. And Mr. Swenson he'd swing one leg when he was walking down the hill.

LL: Mr. Swenson would, or Mr. Hamilton?

AF: Swenson. He was a tall, thin man, but Corey Hamilton, he was bent over. Then he had a boat the last of it when they closed the hospital up. Must have been down behind the Co-op building by Harry Peakes' somewhere in there. Then he lived aboard this boat for two or three years before he died.

LL: Like Captain [John] Ivory, did you know him?

AF: Oh, yes. Three sheets to the wind. See him going down the street sometimes and the road wasn't very straight sometimes.

Joseph Andrews⁷

There was a fellow that stayed at the Marine Hospital and he was bent over. I'm trying to think of his name now. I've almost got it. He was bent over; and he was so bent over that he couldn't row a boat in the ordinary way, so he always rowed backwards. He was finally kicked out of the Marine Hospital when they made changes. Hamilton had a little boat, and he put it down at the foot of Water Street in Vineyard Haven and he lived aboard that boat. The boat's name, if I remember correctly, was *Letter B* and it was "let her be" He did a lot of odd jobs. Also, I think he put boats in bottles. I think that's what he did.

There were quite a few people from Nova Scotia that stayed at the hospital there. They were taken sick and the United States Public Health Service took care of them. Now if someone here in Vineyard Haven got sick, they wouldn't care of them, unless they were a seaman, then they'd take care of them.

But I worked at Tilton's Drugstore for Mr. Tilton and when he was taken sick Dr. Mitchell from the Marine Hospital, was taking care of him. One of the nice things about it is Dr. Mitchell came every day and saw Mr. Tilton. My wife and Frances Fortes took care of Mr. Tilton, then finally I had to get a nurse when he got that bad. But this head nurse at the hospital said, "You know, Doctor, Mr. Tilton shouldn't be in that house. He should be in the hospital." Dr. Mitchell looked down at her and he says, "You know, Mr. Tilton has never had a bed sore." She shut right up, because that hospital was noted for bed sores. It's easy to get bed sores. If you don't have a nurse that will keep moving you, you won't come out without a bed sore.

Shirley Kennedy⁸

Swenson was at the Marine Hospital, at long term, and he was from Norway, I think, or one of the Scandinavian countries, and came here. He had syphilis. At least that's what I heard when I worked at the hospital. But anyways, he was there for long term.

Somebody made that little shack down at the foot of the hill on the water. That was where he went during the days. He went down there and he made boats in bottles and different things like that.

My stepfather used to go and visit him. And so, I probably went along with him at times. But he had died just the year before I worked at the Hospital. So, my friend Joanne Finnegan, whose place I took at the [Marine] Hospital, knew Mr. Swenson. When he died they had to get all his

7 From a February 25, 2001 interview

8 From a February 3, 2017 interview.

things together and mail them back to the old country as you do when somebody dies. But that was his shack.

Now, whether it was somebody's scalloping shack and he got to use it, or if they made it for him—I would think that in those days it was just somebody put it up to open their scallops in. And then gave him permission to go down there from the hospital and make his boats in the bottle.

When I ever saw him, he was just sitting at his table in that shack, and making those boats in the bottle.

Now, Hamilton lived, like the other man that did the paintings—Ivory—on the shoreline there, right by the Black Dog. And he lived in an old boat. I don't know what his first name was, and I don't know what he did. But stepfather used to visit him, too. He went to Hamilton's more than he went to Ivory's. I know that he used to go over to Mr. Hamilton's often.

Basil Welch⁹

LL: What was going on at the Marine Hospital when you were young?

BW: Well, it was a working hospital. There were sailors there, mariners—it was open to the public, too—but part of the hospital was used as almost like a rest home for mariners who couldn't sail anymore and were crippled somehow.

I remember a couple of them: there was a Hamilton, there was a Swenson. One of them was all doubled over, he had to walk with two canes. Somebody always said that he got shot in the stomach by a cannonball, which accounted for his being bent over like that, but I don't know what he had wrong with him.

Anyway, they lived there and one of them had the little, what is called, the classic scallop-shucker's shack at the bottom of the hill, which everybody takes pictures of and all. Before that was a scallop shack, that was a little like a camp or shop that one of the inmates of the hospital built ship models in.

When I was a kid, I used to go down there a lot and watch him. He was fascinating to watch, building these ship models with the old frigates with all the copper plating. He was putting on each one, each plate went on separately, and doing all the rigging on them. It was fascinating to watch him.

LL: Were these ship models ever in bottles?

BW: Some were—well, he could do that, but those were just a small model. He was doing big models that were a foot to two feet long, and, God, they were handsome things. I don't know where they are or what. I don't know if the Historical Society's got any that he ever made or not. It was fascinating to see him.

LL: What was his name?

BW: Hamilton. Don't ask me his first name. All I know is Hamilton and

9 From an August 18, 2000 interview.



"Chicken Alley," the neighborhood west of Howard Avenue (now Lagoon Pond Road), in the early twentieth century. The Marine Hospital is visible in the distance. MVM Basil Welch Collection (RU 465).

Swenson were the two of them. His name was Hamilton.

LL: Was it his shack, or was it the hospital's shack?

BW: Stuart Bangs owns the shack now, but I don't know who owned it at that time. I have no idea. Again, I was only a kid. I used to go down and go fishing down there off the old little bridge that was out there.

John Coutinho¹⁰

JC: I was born on, they called it Chicken Alley at that time, but it was Lagoon Pond Road. Everybody had a garden in back. Chickens and pigs, and everything else.

And the Marine Hospital used to burn coal. All the ashes, they used to dump on that road, to make the road solid. There was no tar on that road, you know. My father bought us a little red cart. We used to go and get leaves for the pigs, and do this and that. We used to go on the road, pick up all the coal that wasn't burned, and cart it home to burn in the stove. There was a lot of coal there. We did pretty good, you know.

The Marine Hospital was on the hill. They had a lot of old-time marine men there. There was a guy who used to live there, an old timer. Hamilton, his name was. We used to call him Old Man Hamilton.

He was always hunched over, with two canes. They had a little shack there, below the Marine Hospital. And you'd go down there and he'd put

¹⁰ From an October 17, 1994 interview.

these ships in bottles. You ever see these schooners, and stuff, in a bottle? He used to put them in there and sell them. In fact, my father won one at the Fair once. I remember he won one for 25 cents.

Denys Wortman¹¹

LL: Can you please tell me about your bottle?

DW: We had just moved to Hines Point that year. It must have been 1948. And I went with my dad down to the shack below Stuart Bangs' to see Svenson and I remember my dad buying this bottle from him at that time. I remember he used to walk down from the Hospital every day. He made his boats in bottles in that shack. And then go back up somehow. He was lame in one leg. I think of him the way he was dressed, that he was wearing hospital outfit. One of their gowns or whatever they wore back then, as they went through their days.

The shack is right at the foot of Skiff Avenue. I call it "Motif Number Two." Because after "Motif Number One" I think it's the most painted and photographed place, at least in Massachusetts.¹²

It was—from what I remember—it was sort of cluttered and dark inside. I don't remember a great deal. I was very young. It was a long time ago and I wish I'd been a little bit older and could remember more and spent some time with him.



Joseph Chase Allen, from "Interesting Vineyarders: Captain Corey Hamilton."¹³

In the United States Marine Hospital at Vineyard Haven, where many a broken or injured seaman makes port to refit or lay up, there is one who has been there so long as to become known in the town. Many have heard his story, but many more have not. Yet one is at once attracted to the man, partly because of his personality and partly because of the grimness of fate's edict, that such a sturdy and almost colossal figure should be rendered so helpless.

For Capt. Corey Hamilton is such a figure as may often be read about but is not often seen in ordinary life. Massively proportioned, with smooth-shaved and iron-visaged features he looks the part of the man who can face death and danger in any form without fear. Old age has not yet touched him and his eye is bright and full of fire, while his great hands are steady and strong, his shoulders broad and firm. Crippled until he cannot stand erect, one suspects that we would prove a tough adversary in a free-for-all, even now. He is not addicted to gloomy periods of depression, nor does he bemoan his fate. His smile is contagious and his greeting hearty. As he sits smok-

11 From a February 7, 2019 interview.

12 "Motif Number 1" is the nickname of a red fishing shack built in 1840 on Bradley Wharf in Rockport, MA, a favorite subject of artists that is said to be the "most-painted building in America." It was destroyed by storm waves during the Blizzard of 1978, but an exact replica was erected by the end of the year.

13 *Vineyard Gazette*, March 29, 1929, 9-10.

ing his pipe and perhaps whittling away on a ship model, he will talk in a pleasant tone and in accents revealing much more education than the average deep-water sailor possesses, speaking of the days when he sailed in blue water and green, and unconsciously describing the wild thrill of a life that a man experiences when his body is free to follow the soaring of his own spirit.

*Joseph Chase Allen, from "Interesting Vineyarders: Anton Svenson"*¹⁴

Chief among the builders of ship models in Vineyard Haven is Anton Svenson, a six-foot, broad-shouldered Swede, whose hair shows not a trace of gray as yet, but who is anchored in [a] backwater of existence, never more to sail again. A scant half-fathom from the rippling, brackish waters of Lagoon Pond stands his little shanty where he can nearly always be found, scraping, whittling, and piecing together the delicate parts of ships with which he delights the collectors and artists who visit the town.

Here, by the side of his workbench, surrounded with the tools and partially completed examples of his art, he will talk of other days, if he has confidence in his listener, his deep, mellow voice sounding above the howl of the wind and slashing of rain upon the windows.

Ships, all rigged complete, inside of bottles fitted as lamps. Wonderfully decorated swords of swordfish, with hardwood hilts and inlaid grips polished and smooth. This work, which is all done in the tiny shop, is performed principally by means of tools which Mr. Svenson has made himself. He had never worked at anything like this in his more active days, and very probably would not have known where to find exactly what he needed, if indeed such tools are made. Therefore, he made them.

They include tiny drills similar to those used by jewelers, but differently mounted. These are to drill the hundreds of tiny blocks and deadeyes on the ship models. There are slender, curious hooks, with which he ties knots in places too small for his fingers to enter, and various other articles each fitted for its own particular purpose.



*From "Hospitalized Since 1922, Anton Svenson Dies" (1951)*¹⁵

Anton Svenson, for many years a patient at the Marine Hospital in Vineyard Haven, died there on Sunday evening at the age of 63. Mr. Svenson entered the hospital on a transfer from Stapleton Hospital, Staten Island, in 1922, and before he was completely bedridden, had become a familiar figure in the village. He was born in Stationkarlen-Landskrona, Sweden.

As a boy, Anton Svenson helped harvest crops of grain, and in winter raced his companions on skis and skates across the frozen lakes. At 18 he entered the Swedish army and served for three years as a cavalryman, becoming skilled in horsemanship and arms. After his discharge he worked in one of the clay factories until he decided to go to sea.



¹⁴ *Vineyard Gazette*, February 26, 1932.

¹⁵ *Vineyard Gazette*, July 31, 1951.

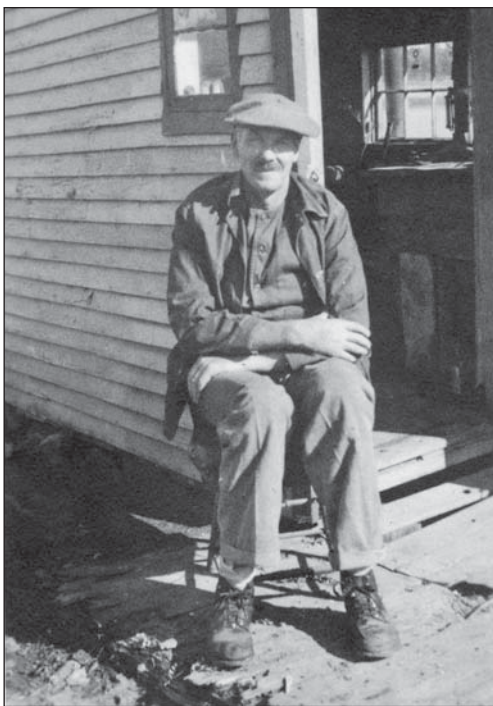
From "Exposure Proves Fatal" (1945)¹⁶

Corey Hamilton, better known as Cap'n Hamilton, died at the Martha's Vineyard Hospital on Sunday, following a three-day period of confinement at that institution. The 77-year-old retired seaman was found on Thursday afternoon aboard the boat in which he lived alone, in a helpless condition.

Captain Hamilton was born in Hopewell Cape, Nova Scotia, the son of William and Harriet Hamilton. He ran away from home as a boy to go to sea, and throughout his active years he led an adventurous career in oceangoing ships of various kinds, visiting many foreign lands, and holding the position of mate in some ships, but never sailing as master so far as is known.

With the advance of years, he became crippled, and came to Vineyard Haven first as a patient at the U. S. Marine Hospital. Here he was an outpatient for many years, partially supporting himself by fishing in summer and building small boats in winter. He built the power launch on which he lived in summer, and lived in the hospital during the cold winter months. Eventually, he became a resident of the town, and his connections with the Marine Hospital ceased.

He is survived by no known relatives, save a niece, somewhere in Canada.



Anton Svenson in the doorway of the scallop shack.
Courtesy of Clifton Athearn.

16 *Vineyard Gazette*, December 28, 1945.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A Building Filled with History

The Marine Hospital now stands proudly, restored, looking down upon Vineyard Haven Harbor from its perch atop a lofty Tisbury hill. Now the new home of the Martha's Vineyard Museum, the 1895 building has new energy and new life blown into her sails. Yes, it is stunning, a proud testament to an island that cares about its history, its culture, all of its people and places. The MV Museum is thrilled to be re-opening its doors to the wonders of the island. Together we are writing a new chapter for the Marine Hospital site, the relocated MV Museum, and the entire island.

Yet, we must remember that we are but stewards of this place. Many have preceded us. The building itself evolved from being a Marine Hospital serving hundreds of ailing mariners voyaging from all parts of the world for over 50 years; to then, for another 50 years, being a thriving summer camp for children. Oh, the stories those walls could tell! But the building only tells the story of the past 125 years. Before that, a smaller Marine Hospital—built in what was, briefly, the Holmes Hole Lighthouse—stood near where the flagpole now rises.

Going back even further, the site was home to Native Americans. For more than 5,000 years, the site was their home, their village, and their vantage point over the harbor and the waters beyond. At that time, Bass Creek flowed past the foot of the bluff, connecting the sometimes turbulent waters of the harbor to the still waters of Lagoon Pond. Imagine this site being an active residential and commercial site for fifty times the duration recorded in written records.

Yes, the site has transformed for thousands of years, and continues to grow and change. Now the island's museum connects our past to our present and future—a repository of all our stories and many more. Stewards we are of the people and places of an ever-evolving island.



Phil Wallis
Executive Director

The St. Pierre School of Sport



Campers at the the St. Pierre School of Sport enjoying a Vineyard summer in the mid-1950s. Founded at the St. Pierres' summer home on Main Street before World War II, the camp operated out of the Marine Hospital from 1959 to 2007.

151 Lagoon Pond Road
Vineyard Haven, MA 02568



The Vineyard Haven Marine Hospital



Fishing vessels and cargo schooners, whose crew members were treated at the Marine Hospital, fill Vineyard Haven Harbor in this glass-plate image, taken c. 1900 by Edgartown photographer Richard G. Shute. The familiar outlines of the still-new 1895 building are partially obscured, in this rear view, by a dining-hall wing and stand-alone staff dormitory, re-purposed buildings from the 1879 facility it replaced.