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English settlement before the Mayhews: The "Pease Tradition" Revisited

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TRACES

Some past events offer the historians who study them an embarrassment of riches. The archives of a successful company or an influential US president can easily fill a building, and distilling them into an authoritative book can consume decades. Other events leave behind only the barest traces—scraps and fragments of records, fleeting references by contemporary observers, and shadows thrown on other events of the time—and can be reconstructed only with the aid of inference, imagination, and ingenuity.

The two articles in this edition of the *Quarterly* are exercises in recreating past events from fragmentary traces of them visible in the present. First, A. C. Trapp, Jr., reopens one of the central questions in the early colonial history of Martha's Vineyard: Who were the Island's first English settlers? Challenging the primacy of the Mayhews—endorsed by Dr. Charles Banks in 1911 and accepted by most historians in the century since—Trapp revisits the idea that another group, led by John Pease, had arrived years or even decades earlier. The “Pease Tradition,” as it is known, is more tenuous than the claim of the Mayhews, but—as Trapp's meticulous survey of the historical record shows—it rests on surprisingly firm ground. The second article—my own—concerns episodes in Vineyard history that are neither forgotten nor disputed. It explores the rise and fall of villages, the shifting of town boundaries, and the life and death of industries as revealed by the most public of all traces of the past: the place names on maps and road signs.

— A. Bowdoin Van Riper

MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM QUARTERLY

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The First English Settlers of Martha's Vineyard

The Case for the Pease Tradition

by A.C. TRAPP, JR.

Editor's Note: *The article that follows—composed in 1986 and printed here for the first time—is a meticulously detailed argument for the validity of the “Pease Tradition,” the idea that English settlers were already living on Martha’s Vineyard when the Mayhews arrived in 1642. It represents, I believe, the strongest possible case for the Pease Tradition that can be made from the available evidence. Whether that case is compelling enough to change our understanding of Island history between 1602 and 1642 is a decision each reader will have to make for themselves. I’ve made mine, and I invite you to read the article and make yours.*

I HESITATE TO SUGGEST that the first continuous settlement on Martha’s Vineyard may well have occurred a few years before the one at Jamestown, Virginia, for I am confident that this cannot be proven. What is true, in contradiction to all known current histories that mention this subject, is that the earliest settlement had been in existence for several years before 1642, the year historians now accept that the island was first settled. No one is likely to confidently determine for how long before, but I believe any fair-minded reader will find the evidence on this point irrefutable. And if this point is established, at the same time, so is the truth of what I will call the legend of Martha’s Vineyard.¹

Although a record of the first settlers is reported to have been made by a member of the group, this same record is stated to have been stolen, or to otherwise have disappeared, in 1674. Irregular as this element of the legend may seem at first, ample evidence does exist that this, and

¹ That is, the “Pease Tradition.”

A resident of Louisiana, A. C. Trapp, Jr. is a descendent of Thomas Trapp, one of the principal figures in this article. This is his first contribution to the *Quarterly*.

even more, did occur during that period.

No further history of the first settlers is known to have been written down much before 1807, when two separate accounts appeared in print. One was the work of Rev. James Freeman, the other the work of Edward Kendall.² Both accounts told of English settlers having been on the Island some years before 1642, when Thomas Mayhew and his son acquired permission for themselves and their associates to settle there.

No contradictory information, or any sort of a challenge to either account, is known to have been brought forth in 1807, or for more than a century afterward, with the exception of a semi-fictional story that was printed in serial form in 1880 in England, and which could hardly have been widely known in America.

When the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* came to reprint Kendall's account verbatim in the year 1849, we may assume that the information was then unquestioned. It stated:

One traditionary account is that in the fall of 1632 or a year or two later, a vessell bound from England to South Virginia fell in with the south shoal of Nantucket, came up through the Vinyard Sound and anchored off Cape Poage, on account of distemper, which like a plague raged among the passengers and crew, twenty-five of whom died, or according to another account, scarcity of provisions was the occasion. Four men with their families requested to be put ashore, preferring rather to take their chances with the natives than to pursue the voyage under such distressing circumstances. They landed at the spot (Pease Point) since called Edgartown. Their names were John Pease, Trapp, Thomas Vincent and Browning or Norton. A red coat presented by Pease to the Chief or Sachem, secured at once the good offices of the tribe, and they were treated with hospitality. In order to shelter themselves from the approaching winter, Peace and his company made excavations in the side of the hill near the water, whence they could command a full view of the harbor, and remained there through the cold season and were joined by others at different times until in 1642, the whole number of families amounted to twenty-four.

Similar brief accounts appeared in the nineteenth century, many of which appear in Volume I of Charles Edward Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard*.³ The situation is somewhat ironic in that Banks, who claimed that he did not believe them, found room to include them, while I, who do value them, must omit them for want of space.

2 James Freeman, "A Description of Dukes County," *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 1971, 1-51; Edward Kendall, *Travels through the Northern Part of the United States in the Years 1807 and 1808*, 3 vol. (1809); <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001261729>

3 Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, 3 vol. (G. H. Dean/Dukes County Historical Society, 1911/1926), vol. 1, 89-103.

The Legend Unchallenged for More Than a Century After Being Printed

I have found no indication to suggest that the legend was at any time questioned before 1911, and to, the contrary, all indication is that it was undoubted. As late as 1916, an article in the *American Anthropologist* stated of Martha's Vineyard: "The island remained in the sole possession of the Indians until sometime after 1623, when several English families settled on the eastern end. The elder Mayhew having received a grant to the island in 1642, established a colony at what is today Edgartown."⁴ C. G. Hine's work *Martha's Vineyard* expresses no doubt of the legend, although it does not go so far as to imply that the author had personal knowledge of that event. Hine states: "The first settlement by white men was, according to tradition, about 1632, when four men, Norton, Pease, Vincent, and Trapp, and possibly others, are said to have wintered in roughly built stone houses in the side of Green Hollow, a little south of the oldest burial ground in Edgartown."⁵

G. W. Eldridge, in his *Martha's Vineyard, Its History and Advantages as a Health and Summer Resort*, states:

A few years after the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth . . . a wave-weary craft, bearing a little band of tired men and women fleeing from depression and death, find a port of refuge at last. Now their determined contest with wind and wave is over, and they cast anchor in the little haven on the northern shore of Martha's Vineyard (now known as Edgartown) secure at last. As winter was near at hand, . . . finding a genial climate . . . they abandoned their original intention of joining the Virginia Colony and decided to establish a permanent settlement which they did, on the present site of Edgartown.⁶

The first work known to have offered any sort of alternative, was published by the Tract Society of London in the year 1880 in the serial *Sunday at Home*.⁷ The contradiction in this case was not one to fear. The work at the outset could hardly have been expected to have caused any reaction greater than involuntary yawns, and if the author had any knowledge of the Vineyard and its inhabitants, this must have been given a low priority. Altogether the work is not particularly convincing as fact or fiction. If the people of the Vineyard had any knowledge of it, there appears to have been no impact on what they thought of the legend, for Eldridge repeated the

4 S. J. Guernsey, "Notes on the Exploration of Martha's Vineyard, *American Anthropologist* [new series] 8, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1916): 81-97, on 82.

5 Charles G. Hine, *Martha's Vineyard* (Hine Brothers, 1908), 6.

6 George W. Eldridge, *Martha's Vineyard, Its History and Advantages as a Health and Summer Resort* (1889), 11.

7 Francis Browne, "Martha's Vineyard," *The Sunday at Home* (1880): 81-84, 97-100, 113-116, 136-139, 145-148, 166-170. <https://archive.org/details/sunday-at-home01unkngoog>



Bartholomew Gosnold encountering a hospitable band of Native Americans on the shores of the New World, as envisioned by Matthäus Marian in a 1634 engraving.

legend as fact almost a full decade later, and *American Anthropologist* did so in 1916, about 36 years later.

No historian is known to have doubted the legend prior to the printing of Banks' *History of Martha's Vineyard* in 1911. What he had to say was challenged then, and intermittently through the years since, but in contrast to all the others, Banks' work was destined for wide circulation and later editions.

I would be the last to detract from the worth of Banks' contribution, for his references are well-documented and he discovered most sources available on the subject. Considering the scope of his undertaking, he was remarkably thorough and successful, and if he is regarded today as the authority on the Island's history, it is because he earned his place. The value of his work caused his viewpoint to become widespread and repeated, and in the absence of any sustained effort of those who believed the legend, it gained precedence.

But Banks had, in his evaluation of the legend at least, one serious fault as great in magnitude as any of his virtues. He deliberately distorted evidence, I believe, in order to support his own point of view, and omitted all dates and names that would prove damaging. The total of Banks' evidence against the legend amounts to little or nothing greater than illusion, and Banks' ultimate claim that he had disproved the legend⁸ cannot be endorsed by any impartial mind that takes the time to carefully examine all of the "evidence" that Banks submitted. I regard him as the major influence among the number that now reject the legend, but his success in this instance is not due so much to his outstanding scholarship (which is real enough generally) as his ability to create an illusion through serious distortions of fact. Even so, I do not suggest that he, single-handed, was able to change the course of historic belief, for other factors may well have acted in his favor, and no doubt his theory was well received in some circles. In justice to the men of the legend, I find it necessary to answer all that Banks said on the subject in order to disprove the story. I have found no other source in opposition to the legend to answer.

Thomas Mayhew's "Purchase" of Martha's Vineyard

One of the major distortions of the Island's history is the choice of words in regard to the Mayhew's "purchase" of, or "grant" to, Martha's Vineyard. The reader of any one of the contemporary reference books known to mention the subject would conclude that the Mayhews received the entire island as their own personal property. No interpretation of the surviving original documents, no matter how nebulous they may be in some respects, can allow this viewpoint. In each deed, others (however, unnamed) were all granted the same privileges as the Mayhews, and might remain there as long as a yearly payment was made.

It seems apparent that some sort of document related to Martha's Vineyard must have been given to them by James Forrett, the agent of Lord Stirling, early in 1641. At least some of the men then residing on the island were convinced that the Mayhews had some title to the Island, and accepted from the Mayhews as a gift, the land that they had already settled upon, and which some had already bought before that date (March 1641) from the Indians.⁹

It was apparently not very binding, and neither was the one that followed, dated October 13, 1641, in which the Mayhews and their associates were granted permission to make a settlement on Nantucket and two "adjacent islands" (which Banks interpreted to mean Muskeget and

8 *Vineyard Gazette*, September 1929

9 New York State Archives, New York State Department of State Record of Deeds, vol. I, 76.

Tuckernuck), for this deed was also cancelled ten days later.¹⁰

I am unable to discover Banks' source for this deed, which shows only slight variation from the copy preserved at the archives in Albany, New York. As quoted by Banks, it states:

These presents doth witness that I, James Forrett, Gentleman, who sent over into these Parts of America By the honourable Lord Sterling with a commission for the ordering and disposing of all the Island that Lyeth Between Cape Cod [and] Hudsons river and hath better unto confirmed his agency without consideration, Do hereby Grant unto Thomas Mayhew of Watertown, merchant, and to Thomas Mayhew his son, free Liberty and full power to them and their associates to Plant and inhabit upon Nantuckett and two other small Islands adjacent, and to enjoy the said Islands to them their heirs & assigns forever, provided that the said Thomas Mayhew and Thomas Mayhew his son or either of them or their associates Do Render and Pay yearly unto the honourable the Lord Sterling his heirs or assigns such an acknowledgement as shall be thought fitt by John Winthrop, Esq., the elder or any two magistrates in Massachusetts Bay Being chosen for that end and purpose by the Honourable Lord Sterling or his Deputy and By the said Thomas Mayhew his son or associates: it is agreed that the government that the said Thomas Mayhew and Thomas Mayhew his son and their associates shall set up shall Be such as is now established in the Massachusetts aforesaid, and that the said Thomas Mayhew & Thomas Mayhew his son and their associates shall have as much privilege touching their planting Inhabiting and enjoying of all and every part of the Premises as By the patent is granted to the Patent of the Massachusetts aforesaid and their associates.¹¹

The differences between the copy that Banks quoted and the copy at Albany are slight, usually.¹² The first sentence of the Albany copy, for example, reads "without any contradiction" where Banks has "without any consideration." Banks lists the three witnesses to the document as Nicholas Davison, Richard Stileman, and a third whose signature he was unable to fully decipher but that is quite legibly "Robert Covane." I was unable to find any further trace of such a person, but I believe that it may have been a version of "Coffin," a name associated with the early history of both Nantucket and the Vineyard. If the third witness was a Robert Coffin, it would weaken, to some degree, Banks' assumption that the document was executed in Boston, which he bases upon the fact that Davison was a Charleston merchant and Stileman was then a resident of Cambridge.¹³ Davison was at some time a landowner on Martha's Vineyard, and Banks may be incorrect in assuming that he never lived there.

10 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 82.

11 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 82.

12 New York State Archives, Record of Deeds, vol. I, 71-72.

13 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 82.

Ten days after it was signed, the October 13 deed was cancelled (because of a conflicting interest, Banks suggests), and the following was substituted:

Whereas By virtue of a commission for the Lord Sterling, James Forrett, gentleman, hath granted Liberty and full Power unto Thomas Mayhew of Watertown, merchant, and Thomas Mayhew his son, and their associates to Plant the Island of Nantucket according to the article In a deed to that purpose expressed: Nor for as much as the said island hath not Been yett whole surrendered whereby it may appear that Comfortable accomodations for themselves and their associates will be found there, this therefore shall serve to testifye that I, the said James Forrett, by virtue of my said commission, Do hereby grant unto the said Thomas Mayhew and Thomas Mayhew his son and their associates as much to plant upon Martins Vinyard and Elisabeth Isles as they have by virtue heretofore of the deed granted unto them for Nantuckett as therein plainly In al considerations Both on the Right honourable the Lord Sterling's part and on the said Thomas Mayhew & Thomas Mayhew his son and their associates Doth appear.

In contrast to the earlier deed, it was not stated that the government to be established should follow the pattern of Massachusetts, presumably because the Vineyard was then under the jurisdiction of New York.

Only two days later (25 October 1641), yet another document was made in order to satisfy the claim of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, who assumed the right to the Vineyard through the province of Maine. It read:

I Richard Vines of Saco, Gentleman, Steward General for Sir Ferdinando Gorges, Knight and Lord Proprietor of the Province of Maine and the Islands of Cappawok and Nautican, Do by these presents give full power and authority unto Thomas Mayhew, Gentleman, his agents and associates to plant and Inhabit upon the Island Capawok alias Martins Vinyard with all privileges and Rights thereunto belonging to enjoy the premises to himself heirs and associates forever yielding and Paying unto the said Ferdinando Gorges, his heirs and assigns annually, or two Gentlemen Independently By each of them chosen Shall Judge to Be meet by way of acknowledgement.

It is a matter of conjecture as to where any one of the deeds were written, but the second deed from Forrett (which substituted Martha's Vineyard for Nantucket) being signed by two residents of Watertown—John Vahane and Garret Church—strongly argues for Banks' suggestion that this deed was drawn up there.

There are, again, slight discrepancies between the copies of the October 23 deed in the Edgartown Records (quoted by Banks), and the copy at Albany. None of these have any significant effect on the question of the legend, the most noteworthy being that Banks reads the Edgartown copy as stating that Nantucket "hath not Been yett whole surrendered," while the Albany copy states in the same place "hath not been yet well Surveyed." Likewise, the Albany copy refers to "Martha's Vineyard" in

contrast to the Edgartown copy's reference to "Martin's Vineyard."

None of the deeds mentions any financial consideration, and although Banks states that the Mayhews paid 40 pounds in the deed to Nantucket, citing the deed itself in the Edgartown courthouse (Book 1, p. 12). He quotes it as stating "without consideration, do hereby grant unto Thomas Mayhew," which seems definitive. Similarly, none of the deeds quoted gave a clear title of any specific land to any person. The provision, stated in each of them, that an annual payment was to be made perpetually, suggests that the transaction was not a sale but, at best, a permanent lease.

Twenty years later, in 1663, the Earl of Clarendon purchased the rights to Lord Stirling's lands in New England, on behalf of the Duke of York. The fact that the list of properties still included Martha's Vineyard suggests that, whatever deed that the Mayhews had, it did not convey ownership of the Island.¹⁴ In the meantime, the inhabitants of the Island evidently considered the Indians to be the owners of the land. The had bought land at will from the Wampanoag (not Lord Stirling, Ferdinando Gorges or the Mayhews) right up to 30 December 1661, when the Edgartown Records (Book 1, p. 44) records an agreement—approved by vote at a meeting of Edgartown freeholders—that forbid further purchase of lands from the Indians within the boundaries of the town and imposed a penalty of £10 per acre on violators. The town thus imposed some control on the acquisition of land, but in doing so reaffirmed that the Indians still owned whatever the land that had not been purchased by English settlers. This understanding was evidently still in place in 1751, when Simon Trapp testified in favor of some Indians (Joseph, William, and Sachene Peneuph) who had then recently returned to a certain tract of land that they had lived upon 50 years before, and had not sold. As late as 1871, a state Commissioner was appointed to determine all questions of land boundaries and title, including those of the Indians, of all land at Gay Head.

Rather than clear title to the land, the deeds seem to convey some position of leadership for Mayhew. It seems likely that he was expected to collect from each inhabitant their appropriate share of the annual payment, or rent, to be paid to Stirling and Gorges, with the understanding that those who failed to pay might find their right to remain there forfeited. It is equally apparent, however, that no great personal power for the Mayhews was intended. The first deed to Daggett and others (dated 16 March 1641) states that all who would settle on the island would have equality in all respects. The deed to Nantucket (dated 13 October 1641) specifies a government like that of the Massachusetts colony, with power spread among the landowning citizens. Even in 1671, when Thomas Mayhew was made governor for life, the title

14 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 139.

The South part of New-England, as it is
Planted this year, 1639.

Weymouth
Boston
Plymouth
Natick
Wampanoag
Merrimack River
Charles River
Connecticut River
Cape Fear River
Gulf of Maine
Elizabetha Gie

Map of Southern New England drawn by John Wood in 1639.
Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod are the mass at the lower right.
Courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public
Library.

unger Mayhew states that “nothing but the
duce (them) to essay the settlement of the
gradually of the heathen which could not at
1.”

on we have for the purchase of the island,"
e, for in two centuries of Christian churches

of this essay, but nothing encountered gives

sending missionaries to all parts of the world, there are no known cases in which the method of conversion began with the purchase, from another authority, of all of the land that the prospective converts owned. Admittedly Spain did something similar in conquering territories, but I am unaware of any Christian group that regards this as a true example of Christianity. Banks, presenting that in the manner that he did, adds to the evidence that he had no real wish to give an objective account.

The misconception that the Mayhews owned the entire island is central to our understanding of the Pease Tradition. If accepted, it would render implausible the idea that “squatters” could get away with remaining on land that clearly was the property of another. Had this actually been the case, the legend could hardly be true.

Other Factors That May Have Contributed to the Legend’s Rejection

Recently (October 1985) I pressed a friend—a most successful doctor in our area—for an answer as to whom he thought were the first permanent settlers in America. Admitting that history was not his major interest and with some doubt, he answered: “The Pilgrims?” His wife, however, responded: “Jamestown, Virginia.” I suspect, had the same question been asked my elementary school graduating class in 1943 or my high school graduating class in 1950, the doctor’s viewpoint would have won the day.

It was not that our textbooks had failed to include a chapter on Jamestown (which, growing up in Chase, Louisiana, was much closer to us geographically and culturally than the Pilgrims) but the annual observance of Thanksgiving, and the emphasis that it received at both school and church, gave the Pilgrims a foremost place, whereas there was little to keep reminding us of Jamestown. We may assume that the Pilgrim’s place of prominence would not be less than that in the New England area, and that in earlier times most of the Vineyard population would not have received a higher education.

The assumption that the Pilgrims were the first permanent English settlers of the Vineyard may well have diminished the legend and its general acceptance in two ways. First, in the minds of those who related the legend, it may have suggested that the events occurred between 1620 and 1641, when in fact they may have taken place earlier. Second, the primacy of the Pilgrims have discouraged belief in the possibility of an English settlement on Martha’s Vineyard at the time, is that they made no mention of one. Banks’ charge that “Contemporary Historians are silent upon the subject of the alleged settlement” seems to have weight, if it does not go so far as to indicate that they had all been asked, and only good taste prevented them from speaking out in favor of the Mayhews. Yet, more

than one historian has pointed out that the dangerous shoals of Martha's Vineyard discouraged any sort of trade between the Pilgrims and whoever was then living on Martha's Vineyard.

To the extent that I have been able to discover, the first mention of Martha's Vineyard that the Pilgrims came to record was not made until 1694, more than half a century following the Mayhew "purchase." It stated:

Our brother Jonathan Dunham sent letters to the church desiring our advice about gathering a church at Edgartowne upon Martha's Vineyard, where he was employed in teaching the word, these letters were read to the church April 8, & left to their consideration. Apr: 22 ' the Pastor having prepared an answer, read it to the church, they approved of it & voted it should be subscribed by those 2 bretheren with the Pastor & sent to us from the bretheren of the vinyard & others who offered to joyne with them in that worke to desire us by our Pastor & Messengers to be present and assist them to gather a church settle a Teaching Officer, the church agreed that either of the nominated Elders or of the deacons or any other of the bretheren should accompany the Pastor in that service: the Pastor and Mr. Samuel Fuller went to the vineyard, the church was gathered, Mr. Dunham was ordained Teacher, October 11.

If we knew nothing of the Vineyard from other sources, significant misinterpretation of this scant mention is possible. The Pilgrims mentioned no existing church on the island, and by several accounts, there had been a church there in 1641, certainly by 1642. Quite likely the Pilgrims were of a different denomination, and even of a different culture, but altogether it is impossible to avoid the impression that the Vineyard was not in the center of the Pilgrim's interest before 1694.

If they waited 50 years and more after the arrival of the Mayhews to mention the Vineyard, it is not surprising that they had no occasion to mention an earlier settlement. They would certainly have known of English on the Vineyard. There was simply no occasion requiring them to mention it before they too became involved in 1694.

Evaluating Banks' Criticisms of the Legend

It is significant that most of those who endorsed the legend lived their entire lives on an Island whose population would have been well aware of their veracity. The group also included a very high percentage of clergymen, whose calling, it is assumed, would not have encouraged them to deliberately perpetuate a falsehood. Each professed to believe the legend. No challenge of the truthfulness of any one of the deponents has been found, and if the legend is reducible to the "Pease vs. Mayhew, trespass" that Banks more than once claimed it to be, the witnesses on behalf of the Pease camp must have appeared formidable.

While minor discrepancies between all of the various accounts may be

found (and individuals with marginal knowledge may have been deliberately consulted in an attempt to increase these) the following nine points emerge in common, although not all narrations of the legend include all nine points:

1. A small number of men or families
2. whose surnames included Browning, Norton, Pease, Trapp and Vincent
3. aboard a ship bound for Virginia
4. in some year before 1642
5. who were suffering from illness, a shortage of shipboard provisions, or both
6. obtained permission from the ship's captain to remain on Martha's Vineyard.
7. where natives treated them hospitably
8. and granted them land, in exchange for a red coat offered by John Pease
9. but all records involving the land were lost when John Pease died in 1674.

Banks attempted to make the most of the inconsistencies, but they really did not damage the legend, and were rare. They fell into the following categories:¹⁷

- The number of people who remained
- Whether they were single men, or men with families
- The cause that made them decide to stay
- Whether the men later married wives from England or from Indian tribes
- The destination of the ship

Banks' assertion that the legend was known only among members of the Pease family does not withstand close scrutiny. He himself quotes Rev. Joseph Thaxter's letter to Dr. James Freeman (dated 12 December 1814), which states in part:

The account which I gave you of the gathering of the church in this town (Edgartown) was taken from either a preface or an appendix to a sermon preached at the ordination of Mr. Newman by Mr. Experience Mayhew and is probably correct. I have searched the records of the town and they are transcribed from a former record and go no further back than 1661. It is said that the old record was, for reasons unknown, destroyed. It is beyond doubt that several years before the Mayhews had a grant to Martha's Vineyard, there were a number of families settled on the island. It is highly probable that the Mayhews, at least the younger, had been on the Island some time before the grant was obtained. He was a zealous preacher, and undoubtedly collected a church in 1641. Experience Mayhew must have had evidence of the fact, otherwise it is presumed that he would not have said it.¹⁸

Freeman himself stated that the Indians also had handed down a story of the men from the ship having learned a way to fish from the Indians'

17 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 94-97.

18 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 92.

own ancestors.¹⁹ How Thaxter—let alone the Indians—were related to the Pease family, Banks does not explain.

Banks' assertion may be accurate to the extent that the Trapps, Brownings and Nortons did not preserve the legend, as far as is actually known. The Brownings, if they did not die out in the male line, must have migrated away from the Vineyard. The Trapps sold their property, little by little, for full value, and had no injustice to remember. Nothing is known of the Nortons and whether they did, or did not, remember the legend. If the legend was true, the Pease family would have a greater chance of remembering it than the others, who migrated from the scene, and whose ancestors played a less prominent role on the occasion that the land was first acquired from the Sachem. Unless Banks was willing to imply that the Pease family was incapable, or unreliable in some way, of preserving their own heritage (and he never went that far) this observation should not detract from the probability of the legend being true.

Banks' next premise was that "if any statements in the story are manifestly improbable, the entire legend becomes open to suspicion." No murder case would be dismissed if a witness testified that the reason so many bullet holes were found in a victim's body, was because the victim had previously been seen shooting bullets from itself. There would still be valid testimony and other factors to consider, that would in no way tarnished by the false testimony.

Even with this extreme skepticism, Banks was unable to accomplish much. He could only mention that in one account the ship's destination was stated to have been Port Penn, which did not exist until 1682. He further attempted to prove that all men mentioned in the legend were elsewhere at the time, but this effort was doomed from the start. Other than John Pease, none of the individuals mentioned in the legend are identified by their given name, and with the latitude of a surname, none of the other individuals could possibly have been proven to have been anywhere at any time.

Banks' only chance, then, was to prove John Pease elsewhere, and according to Savage's *Genealogical Dictionary of New England*²⁰ he confused the identity of two contemporary men with the same combination of names. I have been unable to confer with any member of the Pease family, but if the protest in the *Vineyard Gazette* in September of 1929 is any indication, they too reject Bank's conclusion that John Pease of Salem was identical with John Pease of the Vineyard. The aforementioned deed to Daggett and others establishes that Pease had been living on the Vineyard for some time by March of 1641.

19 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 90.

20 James Savage, *Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England* (1965).

In focusing on Thomas Trapps, age 20, who arrived in Boston on his way to the Vineyard in 1659, instead of the Thomas Trapp who signed and witnessed the same deed to Daggett, Daniel Pierce, Richard Beers, John Smith and Francis Smith in 1641, I suspect that Banks deliberately ignored some evidence, and manipulated other evidence to support his theory. Banks had quoted the same deed, but omitted the date in addition to the list of witnesses, which included not only Thomas Trapp, but also Joseph Norton, Isaac Norton, and John Pease himself. Since several of the signers of this deed are not linked to any other location in New England before the date of March 16, 1641 (Thomas Trapp, Thomas Bayes, Thomas Burchard, Simon Athearn, John Balles) the greatest likelihood is that the document was made on Martha's Vineyard, where all of the witnesses were stated to have resided.

Banks did discuss one individual of each of the surnames of the legend (Browning, Vincent and Norton in addition to Pease and Trapp) but since no given names were supplied in the legend itself, it hardly seems worthwhile to pursue this facet further, beyond admitting that Banks was correct in concluding that the individuals that he discussed could not have been identical with the men of the legend. No doubt many people lived and died without having left behind any record of themselves.

Banks introduced the subject of the "Black Book," lost at the time of John Pease's death, as follows:

The "Black Book" plays a part in all versions and is told with insinuations of fraudulent dealing on the part of some persons, presumably acting in the interest of the Mayhews. The main point is that with the mysterious disappearance of this "black" volume, the descendants of John Pease lost all records and titles to this prior settlement and his lands. This belief is apparently well fixed among those responsible for this legend. It is certain that John Pease, in his lifetime, enjoyed his property unmolested. There is no allegation to the contrary by the relators, and for forty years his title was unimpeached.

Banks questioned why the Pease family and the other families never sued anyone to regain their property, but overlooked a number of convincing answers. As noted above, the Trapps suffered no financial loss that would have justified such a suit. The Brownings were evidently in a similar position; in fact, the Indexes at Edgartown only reveal the last of the Brownings as grantors by two deeds, none as grantees. I know little of the affairs of the Vincents or the Nortons at that time, but there is ample reason—mentioned by Banks himself—why neither family would have brought a suit to court just then. They appear to have joined, if not initiated, every movement that opposed the Mayhews' progress toward more power, and the signatures of Nicholas Norton, Isaac Norton, Joseph Norton, John Pease, and Thomas Trappe appear on the documents of 1673

whose purpose was to replace Mayhew, and annex the island to Massachusetts jurisdiction. New York, through which Mayhew's title had been granted, had fallen to the Dutch, and the time seemed right. Banks found no records of a "counter-government" that existed on the island during this time, but there is little doubt that the Nortons, Trapps and John Pease were a part of it. The appeal to Massachusetts was denied, and afterward, according to Banks himself, Mayhew was granted broad powers to deal with the rebels, including banishment and fines that amounted to confiscation of property.²¹

This was hardly an encouraging climate in which to bring forth a suit. In addition, we may imagine that the sachem was significantly older than the young men from the ship to whom he granted the land, and must have predeceased John Pease. Moreover, it might be supposed that the Lord Stirling's interest might be jeopardized if Mayhew fell, and he might find it more difficult to collect the annual payment, and at least some support would come from there. Their appeal to Massachusetts had not long before been rejected. Without support from some source, if Banks is correct in his evaluation of Mayhew's power at the time, they could not hope to win. Perhaps few of the Indians who had witnessed the event had survived or fully understood the exchange, and even their own support might be weakened by others who saw an opportunity to seek their own gain, taking advantage of the situation. As nebulous as the deeds to Mayhew may have been, it is likely that the one from the Indians was even more so, and as Rev. Vincent stated "Rights under the Crown being held to control all others" they did not feel up to the conflict.

Banks' next attack on the legend was launched under the title "In Light of History," and he stated:

Contemporary historians are silent upon the subject of the alleged settlement. Governor Winthrop, in his history of New England written in journal form from time to time as events occurred before his death in 1649, makes no mention of such an incident, and he omitted no detail of any importance concerning such matters. He records the departure of the Mayhews "to begin a plantation at Martin's Vineyard," but nothing else as to any prior occupation. The distinguished voyager, Capt. William Pierce sailed along the sound in 1634 and reported his observations to Winthrop without any reference to settlers living on the Vineyard. He stated that "Nantucket is an island full of Indians."

The handling of the above paragraph is alone, sufficient evidence to discredit Bank's claim in more than one instance, that he was an inde-

21 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 161-162. This event, which has come to be known as "The Dutch Rebellion," will be the subject of a future article in the *Quarterly*.

pendent, impartial and objective writer in regard to the dispute about the legend. The exact words of Winthrop are:

December 3, 1644 [Note: More than three years after the purchase]
Some of Watertown began a plantation at Martin's Vineyard beyond
Cape Cod, and divers families going thither, they produced a young
man, one Mr. Green, a scholar, to be their minister, in hopes to gather
a church there, He went not.²²

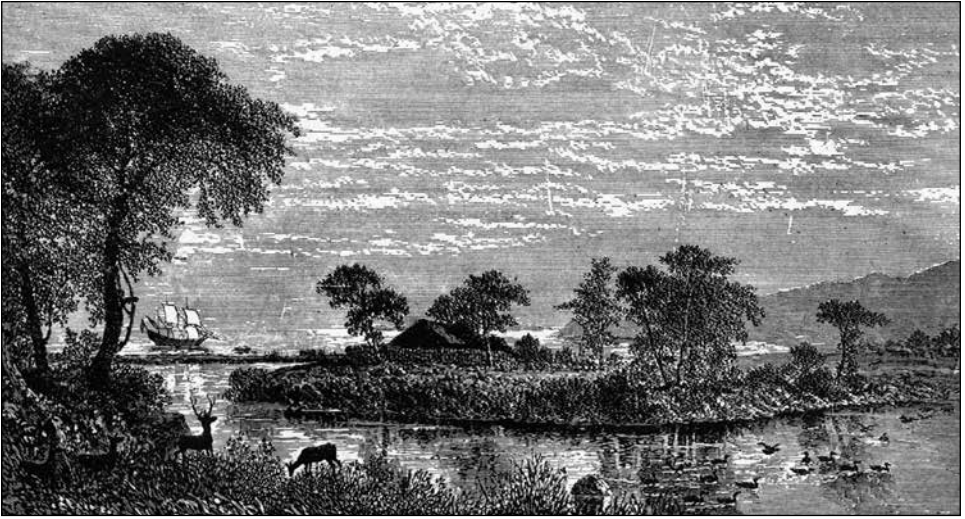
As to there being equal chance that Winthrop might know of, or mention, the earlier settlement, it is obvious that no one would stand waiting to rush the news to him that some men had decided to leave their ship and stay there. In contrast, Winthrop himself was required to set the amount of annual rent that the Mayhews should pay and would have to have known of the Mayhew's departure. The fact that Winthrop did not get around to mentioning this occurrence for 3 years, does not suggest that he regarded it as "a detail of any importance" either. And Banks can hardly be found innocent of distorting facts in suggesting that this was made "as events occurred". By several undisputed accounts, the first church on the Vineyard dated from 1641 (although Banks claimed that it was organized in Watertown, and transferred to the Vineyard) and Winthrop's failure to realize this does not suggest that he had such a thorough knowledge of affairs on the Vineyard as Banks wished us to believe.

As to Capt. William Pierce sailing by Martha's Vineyard in 1634 and not mentioning any white settlers there, this hardly merits a rebuttal. Various early explorers spoke of having seen no habitations, but either campfires at night, or ashes from camp fires. From any number of locations, any dwellings that were slightly inland would not have been visible from a passing ship.

Banks' other appeals to contemporary authorities are no more convincing. He quotes John Underhill's *Newes from America* (1632) to the effect that Martha's Vineyard was "as yet uninhabited," but no historian would accept this as fact, for the Indians at least are known to have lived there at that time. He also cites Thomas Lechford's *Plain Dealing, or Newes from New England*, written in Boston in the summer of 1641 (when Lechford departed for England) and published in 1642, which declares Martha's Vineyard to be "uninhabited by any English, but Indians," while omitting Lechford's claim that the Indians are reported to be "very savage."²³ Lechford's own words, however, call into question his opportunity for first-hand investigation and his commitment to the truth: "I am kept from the

22 John Winthrop, *History of New England*, ed. James K. Hosmer (1908), vol. II, 154.

23 Thomas Lechford, *Plain Dealing or Newes from New England* (rpt. 1867), 107. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009606080>



A 19th-century artist's fanciful conception of Gosnold's settlement on Cuttyhunk, located on an island in the pond at the western end of the island. Most historians conclude that the colony was abandoned within a few weeks due to inadequate supplies.

sacrament and all places of preferment in the commonwealth," he complained, "and am forced to get my living by writing petty things, which scarce finds me bread."²⁴ His description of the Indians on the Vineyard as "very savage" does not conform with the general view others have given, most accounts describing them as a handsome and hospitable people, suggesting that his description was based on hearsay or imagination rather than time spent on the Island. Banks' final witness against the legend was Daniel Gookin "the early historian of the Indians of New England," who stated in 1671 that the younger Mayhew "was, I take it, the first Englishman that settled the Island." Gookin's choice of words obviously indicates that he claimed no first-hand knowledge of the matter.

Stain from the "Black Book"

It should be stated at the outset that by the year 1674 any number of people might theoretically been in position to profit from the loss of John Pease's heirs. I have intentionally made no effort to ascertain who got the property in question. All of the Mayhews, as well as all other contemporary residents of Edgartown, should be presumed innocent until blame is fixed on the proper culprit, or culprits. One can, however, hardly avoid the conclusion that something is irregular in regard to the land records of Edgartown, if all Banks said in their defense is true.

The following is a portion of the account given by Rev. Hebron Vincent (1805-1890) which Banks found "too fantastic for consideration."²⁵ Rev.

²⁴ Lechford, *Plain Dealing*, 44

²⁵ Banks, *History*, vol. I, 98.

Vincent would have been about aged two, when the legend first appeared in print, but Vincent himself states that he received the information (presumably about 1820) from the oldest inhabitants then living on the island, “who themselves received it from an immediate ancestry.”

It was further said that some men came over after who were allowed to share in the division of the section given by the Chief: that John Pease was a man of some education, kept a record of the settlement and of the division of lands in a book called the “Black Book” from the color of the cover, that subsequently to the purchase by the Mayhews, the division above named and this book that perpetuated the evidence of it, became an embarrassment and annoyance, that when John Pease died in 1674 and was lying in his house, the two men came to the house of the deceased and desired of the man in charge to be allowed to see the book; that he complied- placing the book upon the table -and withdrew to attend to other duties and that upon his return the two men were gone and the book also was gone, the later never having been seen by the public since, that the record of evidence of whatever title to the land they had in the way burned - as was supposed- or as some believed abstracted for a purpose, and their rights under the crown being held to control all others, however acquired, and that hence the settlement claims could go no further back than the dates of purchase by Thomas Mayhew and his son Thomas.²⁶

In the first place, Banks himself quotes enough different incidents of incomplete land records to have realized that this state of affairs did not develop after 1731, but in the mid 1670s, co-incidentally or not, following the death of John Pease in 1674.

The letter from Simon Athearn to Gov. Edmund Andros of New York survives in the New York State Archives at Albany, dated 8 October 1675. From it, Banks quoted Athearn’s statement: “I verily believe did your honor know the broken confusedness of the records of Martin’s Vinyard, your honor would see it necessary for all to have a better title.” It is incredible that anyone’s record of land ownership might be among the “many things (that) were not considered necessary for perpetuation in the new book,” but suspicion is increased further when we consider that at least four of the five surnames given in the legend—Browning, Pease, Trapp and Vincent—were so treated.

Some years ago, in going through all of the deeds involving Trapps at Edgartown, I was unable to locate any record of Trapps as grantees for some property they came to sell. I asked assistance in hopes of establishing when they had acquired the property, but was told that no earlier deed or record existed.

The following clipping from the *Vineyard Gazette*, dated 30 August 1929 (kindly mailed to me by Henry Beetle Hough), showed that a simi-

26 Hebron Vincent, “The Early Settlement of Martha’s Vineyard (The Pease Tradition),” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, Nov 1962, 19-28, on pp. 20-21.

lar lack of records existed for the Peases also: "It is certain that John Pease was in Edgartown at least as early as 1646, in which year he appears as grantor of a deed. Where he acquired the land in question, or at what earlier date, is not apparent, so it is conceivable that this land was a part of the land traditionally purchased by Pease from the Indians, prior to the arrival of the Mayhews."

Rev. Hebron Vincent reported a similar occurrence in regard to some of the Vincent property, and stated in his manuscript:

Another instance of somewhat similar import is found on page 2, where William Vinson seems to have been confirmed under the Mayhews, in what was said to be his "possession" it being mainly land adjoining "Meshacket Neck," "Quanomica" and "the pond." It was evidently much added to afterwards, as there came to be, within a compass the radius of which is a mile separate possessions of at least six men, descendants of William, viz., Barnabas, Daniel, Samuel, Timothy, another Daniel and Abner Vincent. Question? How came William in a prior "possession" of the original parcel which was thus confirmed to him, unless it were part of the noted "Towanticut" gift?

As to the Brownings, the Index to Deeds at Edgartown does not list the surname at all as a grantee, and only two deeds of Mary Browning as a grantor, one in 1665 to Joseph Codman (I-35) and the last in 1672, when the administration of her estate was granted to William Vinson (I-316). Banks himself had questioned how Thomas Trapps had come into possession of the "Mansion Seat" formerly belonging to Malachai Browning. Quite obviously, this family's land records also are incomplete. I have had no opportunity to ascertain if the Nortons, also, found their own land records to be incomplete.

Had the earliest deed book been abruptly lost, there would be less reason for suspicion. Fire and other disasters have occurred at various times and places that do account for similar losses, but the fact that much of the old record was copied, and some was not, does not allow this sort of explanation.

It is likely that much careful study will be necessary to confidently conclude the state of affairs from the existing records. Reverend Joseph Thaxter had stated in his 12 December 1814 letter to Dr. James Freeman:

It is beyond doubt true that several years before the Mayhews had a grant to Martha's Vinyard there were a number of families settled on the island, of which I gave you the traditionary accounts. I am confirmed in this by the division of the town: the Mayhews and their associates had twenty-five shares: the others were called half-share men: and made the number of shares forty-two. These half-share men, it is presumed, were settled here when the Mayhews obtained their grant.²⁷

Banks dismisses Thaxter's conclusion in stating "The 'half lots' were simply half shares which had been sold by the original proprietors to *new*

²⁷ Banks, *History*, vol. I, 92.

comers, but does not offer an example of deeds that prove his point.²⁸ However, I too, fail to understand why Thaxter considered this to be significant evidence, unless it were the fact that the men of the legend, and others who settled there before 1641, had already received a greater share than those that came afterwards, and were therefore granted smaller portions.

It is also not understood precisely *which* property of John Pease in Edgartown, by tradition was lost due to the loss of the “Black Book” Banks mentions.²⁹ It is certain that John Pease, in his lifetime enjoyed his property unmolested. There is no allegation to the contrary by the relators, and for forty years his title was unimpeached. It is hardly possible that this might be explained through indulgence of any other owner, and the most obvious explanation is that whatever claim or right John Pease may have had, was at that time considered stronger than any other claim, if any other claim then existed. Banks alternative suggestion could hardly have been true for several reasons.³⁰

In order to prevent fraud the town passed a law that no one should do this (buy land from the Indians) without consent under penalty of 10 pounds for each acre so purchased. John Daggett disobeyed this, as will appear later, and had to stand suit for it, and it is possible that Pease did the same thing in the early days and had to return the land to the natives.

The law Banks referred to was dated 30 December 1661, and exempted all previous grantees who had acquired land from the Indians. By all accounts, John Pease was in possession of the property at the time of his death (1674) and the absence of land records were the earlier ones. Almost certainly, had this been done, there would have been some record of it. But more convincing than any theory as to what may have been, is a copy of Mayhew’s deed, copied from the old book, and recorded by the state of New York in 1644, which leaves *no* doubt that John Pease, and numerous others had been on the island for many years on March 16, 1641, more than 7 months before the Mayhews actually received any final deed to the Vineyard, but this will be fully discussed in the summary. That same day, the Mayhews had granted to a number of men inhabiting the island, the land that they had already a claim to. This list included the name of John Pease.

The Surviving Copies That Prove the Legend True

Any reader agreed with Banks in concluding that the story of one missing deed book was fantastic is in for more strain as we consider if there may not have been two. The “black book” had reportedly been in existence long before the arrival of the Mayhews, and it is unlikely that John Pease would have permitted it to be in the custody of another. By all accounts,

28 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 98.

29 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 97.

30 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 99.

it did not disappear until 1674. The “towne book” was apparently begun after the Mayhews arrived, and it is apparently not established when it came to be lost or destroyed. The earlier deeds, or some of them at least, were copied into the newer book, but since the date of the copying is not known, it cannot be determined when the old “towne book” disappeared.

The narrator of one version of the legend, Richard L. Pease, stated that the same John Pease was town clerk at the time of his death,³¹ and if this is accurate, the chances are that the “black book” and the “towne book” are identical are greatly increased.

Overall, whether there were one or two books to disappear has no great impact upon the legend, since either or both disappeared under suspicious circumstances, and apparently for the same purpose. Miraculously, two copies of what must have been the first recorded deeds in the “towne book” survived, to confirm the original that was lost. One presumably, must remain with some descendant of John Daggett (Doggett)’ and was published in the family genealogy in the 1890s. My own hastily written copy of this printed source (I have not seen the original) states:

Whereas Thomas Mayhew, Sen. and Thomas Mayhew, Jr. have granted them by James Forett, Martha’s Vineyard and the Elizabeth Isles, This is to certify that we Thomas & Thomas & hereby grant unto John Doggett, Daniel Pierce and Richard Beers, and John Smith and Frances Smith with ourselves to make choice for the Present of a large town, upon the same terms with us and equal possession, administration of all that shall present themselves to come live upon any part of the whole grant of all the Islands and we grant also to them and their associates with us, to receive another township for posterity up on the same terms as we have from the Grantees.

Immediately following the deed, as given in the Daggett genealogy, the place is given as Twanquatick, Chappaquiddick; the date as 16 March 1641; and the witnesses as Isaac Robinson, Thomas Trapp, Nicholas Horton, John Pease, Thomas Bayly, John Bales, Thomas Butler, Joseph Norton, and Isaac Norton. In the Albany copy the same list of witnesses, with one exception, does not immediately follow the deed to John Daggett and others, but appears at the bottom of the page, following a second deed by the Mayhews of land to the witnesses, all of whom were inhabitants of the Vineyard.

Curiosity is aroused as to what document the Mayhews had shown these men to convince them of their ownership of the Vineyard, and if there were other inhabitants then on the island who questioned (correctly it would seem) the document shown them, and declined to accept as a gift, what the giver then had no power to deliver. No Browning’s or Vincent’s name appears on either list.

Since a number of the witnesses have no link, as far as is known, to any

31 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 98.

New World locality other than the Vineyard, and all were stated to have been inhabitants of the Vineyard (in contrast to all of the grantees being linked specifically to Watertown, MA) the greatest probability is that this document (quoted above) was probably written on the Vineyard. Whatever the document above may have lacked in validity, it is of great value to the history of the Vineyard, not only in proving the existence of the earlier settlement, and at least some of the names of the earliest settlers, but it also establishes, that at the outset, the Mayhews claimed for themselves nothing more than all inhabitants would share in common.

Had only the Daggett deed survived, some might have been able to believe it to have been a forgery, but the fact that another copy was not only made, but recorded in 1644 in the deed book of the New York Secretary of State, can leave no doubt that these deeds are not later forgeries, but copies of an earlier one. We do not doubt any early deed now surviving within the deed books of Edgartown simply because they are not the original, and this can hardly be a reasonable reason for doubting the Albany copy.

John Birchard, apparently the son of the Thomas Burchard who signed as one of the “Men now inhabiting upon the Island, viz, the Vineyard” saw fit to make a copy of the same deed, along with one other, which came to be recorded by the New York Secretary of State in 1644, and is yet extant.³² It confirms, or repeats, the date 16 March 1641, and designates some of the men who were then living on the Island:

A graunt from Thomas Mayhew Senr. & Thomas Mayhew Junr. to Jn^o Doggit, Daniel Pierce et al.

Whereas Thomas Mayhew Senr & Thomas Mayhew Junr have granted to them by Mr. James Pforrett & Mr. Rich Vines, the Island of Nantuckett, Martha's Vineyard & Elizabeth Isles, as by their Deeds now plainly appeareth, This is to Certify that wee the Thomas & Thomas doe hereby Grant unto John Doggitt, Daniel Pierce & Ridhd Beeres & John Smith and Francis Smith with ourselves to make choice for the present of a large towne, upon the same Termes that wee have it. And also Equal Power in Government with us, and Equal Power in admission of all that shall present themselves to come to live upon any part of the whole Grant of all the Island, & wee grant also to l thorn & their associates with us to receive another Townshippe for Posterity upon the same Terms we have from the Grantees. In Witness whereof wee have hereto sett our hands this 16th day of March 1641. Now wee are the Successors of those Men & the first of us was admitted by their Approbation & some purchased their lands

Apparently, the signatures as previously given on the Daggett deed followed here, but were omitted by the New York Secretary of State in copying John Burchard's deed. A space does occur on the page. The lists of witnesses are nearly identical.

³² Banks, *History*, vol. I, 73.

This witnesseth that Mr. Mayhew the Elder and also Mr. Mayhew the Younger have freely given to the Men now inhabiting upon the Island, viz, the Vineyard, this tract of Land following for a Town shipp: Namely all Twanquatick his Right, together with all the Land as farre as the Eastermost Chapp of Homess Hole; and also the Island called Chappaquidick, with full pow-to dispose of all and every part of the said Land as they see best for their own Comfortable Accomodations: The line is to goe from Tequonemans Neck to the Eastermost Chapp of Homess Hole. This I doe acknowledge to be the free Grant of myself and my Sonne.

This is a true Copie of the Towne Grant from Mr. Mayhew.

These two Grants were first taken out of the Towne Book by John Birchard, Secretary when he lived on Martha's Vineyard. And these are true Coppies of those Coppies, word for word.

And Againe we are the Men inhabiting and their Heyres to whom this Gift of Land was given whose Names follow.

The now-familiar list of names included: Isaack Robinson, Thomas Birchard, Thomas Bayes, Thomas Trapp, John Balles, Isaack Norton, Nicholas Horton, Thomas Buttler, Simon Athearne, John Peas, and Joseph Norton.

This is not a precise duplication of the surnames mentioned in the legend, but includes three of the five surnames, and by various accounts the original four or five men (or families) were later joined by other settlers, so that by 1641 there were 24 families, according to Kendall.

It should be remembered that any number of the above *may* actually have been original settlers, for there could conceivably have been more than one person of the same combination of names in New England at the time, as is known to have occurred in the instance of John Pease. Furthermore, it is conceivable that some of the earliest settlers on the Vineyard may have gone for some years to the mainland and returned before 1641. But if this name appears elsewhere in New England before that date, the probability that they were one of the earliest men to live on the Vineyard is somewhat reduced. I principally consulted two works to see if any of these same names appeared elsewhere in New England: Frank R. Holmes' *Directory of the Heads of New England Families*, and James Savage's *Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England*. No Isaack Robinson was found, but Holmes listed one Isaac Robertson son of Rev. John R. Roberson, who was born in England in 1610, and came to New England in Winthrop's fleet. He was taxed at Plymouth in 1634, and was a freeman in Scituate, in 1636 and in Barnstable in 1639. Holmes had no further trace, and it is conceivable that he found his way to the Vineyard by 1641, but it is unlikely that he was one of the first group there.

Thomas Trapp has not showed up elsewhere in New England other than the Vineyard, and most probably was one of the first group there, or else a direct descendant.

No Nicholas Horton appears elsewhere in New England, but Holmes did record three brothers, Benjamin, Barnabas and Caleb to have been in Hampton, NH in 1640, and one Thomas Horton of Springfield in 1638, died in 1641. It is largely a matter of conjecture to conclude if he was, or was not, related to those.

Quite obviously John Pease, the central figure in the legend, is the one who signed the deed to Daggett and others.

There may be some confusion in the case of Thomas Birchard. Holmes and Savage seem in agreement that the Thomas Birchard who came in the *Truelove* from London in 1635, first settled in Dorchester, MA, later removed to Hartford, and was in Saybrook, Connecticut by 1650; neither source suggests that he was ever associated with the Vineyard. Banks concluded that he later came to the Vineyard, whereas the deeds suggest that he had already been there some time before 1641.

No John Balles was found anywhere else in New England before or during 1641. Thomas Butler may possibly be identical with a man of that name who—according to Savage—resided in Lynn, MA, but removed in 1637 to Sandwich, after having stopped some short time at Duxford. Holmes lists no Isaac Norton, and the Joseph Norton that he does list was born too late to have been identical with the signer in 1641.

Both Holmes and Savage listed one Thomas Bayes at Dedham, MA in 1643, who removed to Boston. In spite of the correct name and approximate timing, this person may not have been the signer of 1641, for the Bayes family continued at Martha's Vineyard.

In total, it seems entirely apparent that John Pease, Thomas Trapp, Joseph Norton and Isaac Norton were either original settlers, or direct descendants of original settlers. Next most likely of the group who signed in 1641 to have been also with the first group were Thomas Birchard, Simon Athearne and John Balles. Most probably Isaack Robinson, Nicholas Horton, and Thomas Butler settled on the Vineyard afterward, but before 1641.

The Parallel Between Gosnold's Voyage of 1602 and the Legend

Could the first English settlers on the Vineyard have arrived with Bartholomew Gosnold himself in 1602? Not all points of the legend tally with all that is known of Gosnold's voyage, but there are a sufficient number of points in common to merit our attention.

Four of the five families named in the legend appear to have come to the Vineyard from a small area immediately west of Chelmsford, Essex, and it is probable that two of them were intermarried into the Bure (or Burr) family, from which Gosnold himself was descended, through his mother

Dorothy Bacon, through the relationship is not known to have been a close one.³³ It is likely to remain unknown if Gosnold did, or did not, find any of his crew for the voyage of 1602 in Essex, or—if he did—if the same surnames repeated in the legend would be found in the list of those who sailed with him. Yet, his family connection to the area through the Bures leaves the possibility intriguingly open.

One of the most reputable authorities of the Elizabethan period, Dr. A. L. Rowse, concludes that Gosnold's voyage had "set sail from Falmouth for the New-England coast with the intention of leaving a plantation there."³⁴ The accounts of John Brereton and Gabriel Archer, "gentleman-adventurers" who sailed with the expedition, concur on this point. Brereton states:

But after our bark had taken in so much sasafras, cedar furs, skins and other commodities as were thought convenient, some of our company that had promised Capt. Gosnold to stay, having nothing but a saving voyage in their minds, made our company, (which was small enough before) much smaller, so as Capt. Gosnold seeing his whole strength to consist of but 12 men, and they meanly provided, determined to return for England, leaving this island with as many true sorrowful eyes as were desirous to see it. So the 18th of June, being Friday, we weighed and with indifferent fair wind and weather came to anchor the 23rd of July, being also a Friday, before Exmouth.

Brereton used the phrase, "some of our company", but Archer leaves no doubt in referring to this same party as "planters:"

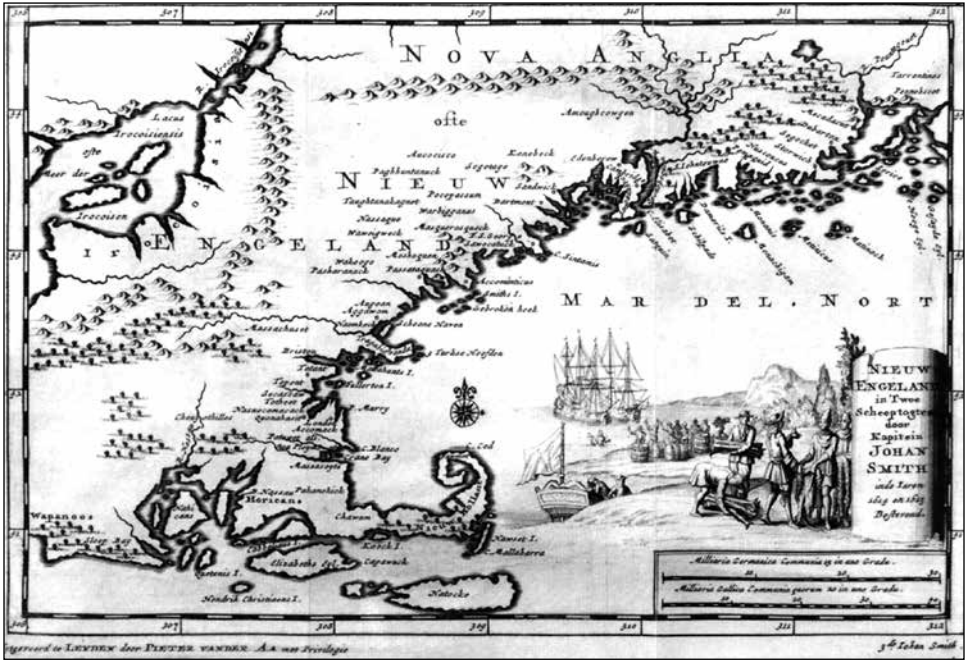
The eighth (of June we divided the victuales, viz. the ship's store for England, and that of the planters, which by Captain Gilbert's allowance could be but six weeks, whereby there fell out a controversy, rather for that some seemed secretly to understand of a purpose Capt. Gilbert had not to return with supply of the issue of those goods should make by him to be carried home.³⁵

It may be argued that the wording of both accounts is not quite as specific as we might wish, and at least two reputable historians, Phillip Verner and Charles Norman, have interpreted these paragraphs to mean that at the last minute, the decision was reversed and everyone returned to England, but it would seem that the consensus of opinion is that Gosnold did leave behind some men on one of the islands near Martha's Vineyard. Logic seems to be with the consensus. Quite obviously Capt. Gosnold or

33 The details of these genealogical connections omitted here in the interests of compactness, are fully elaborated in the original manuscript [MVM Library, Vertical Files Collection, VREF1232.001].

34 A. L. Rowse, "New England in the Earliest Days," *American Heritage* 10, no. 5 (August 1959): 24. <https://www.americanheritage.com/content/new-england-earliest-days>

35 Charles Norman, *Discoverers of America: A Wilderness Continent Seen through the Eyes of the First Explorers* (Crowell, 1968), 215.



Map of New England published in Holland in 1715, but based on the descriptions recorded by Captain John Smith (of Jamestown fame) a century earlier.

Capt. Gilbert (whoever actually made the decision in this case) would not be improving the lot of anyone by simply requiring more individuals to be aboard ship with the same insufficient supply divided in the same way and each person receiving the ration.

But if the group to remain on the island might be expected to gain sustenance from the land, this could increase the ration for all who were returning to England. While the phrases Brereton used, “saving voyage,” was in one instance interpreted to mean “profitable voyage,” it seems more likely that the planters knew themselves obligated to stay (as was indicated by both Archer and Brereton), and, rather than risk a voyage home with insufficient rations, and later have to return on another voyage, they decided to stay. The same phrase “saving voyage” may also have indicated that those who were to remain on the island, would be increasing the chances of those who were returning, if some remained to live off the land, thereby increasing the ships stores for the return voyage, and at the same time, reducing the number that must share it. Certainly it was hardly a time that additional profit for the voyage would have been given foremost consideration, but survival for all would have. No mention of any sort of privation is suggested in the account of the return, and to the contrary, all seems to have gone smoothly.

Brereton's numbers, on casual examination, do not easily tally as to the size of the group on the voyage. At the beginning, he states that there were 32, in addition to Gosnold. Later in mentioning their trade with the Indians, he states "Captain Gosnold with the rest of his company being 20 in all" and on the occasion of their leaving to return, "Capt. Gosnold seeing his whole strength to consist of but 12 men, and they meanly provided," the only instance in which the sex of the group was actually stated. Since Archer refers to those remaining as planters, it is conceivable that some of that number could have been wives. It would seem therefore that if Gosnold himself had 20 people, Capt. Gilbert must have been in charge of 12. Since Gosnold returned with 12, presumably the number remaining in the New England area, would have been 8, which seems comparable with the size of the group indicated in the legend.

Between the two accounts of this voyage that survived, we may be certain that 20 deaths would not have gone unnoted. To the contrary, Brereton states that none had the slightest "grudging (illness) or inclination to any disease or sickness but were much fatter and in better health than when we went out of England."

While it is admitted that any link between Capt. Gosnold and the Vineyard settlers, whether through the Bure family or localities in Essex, is yet unestablished, it is unlikely that records of any voyage to America were ever made that more closely correspond to the points of the legend that the narrators made in common.

1. A small number of men or families (By various deductions from Brereton's account, eight individuals from Gosnold's voyage remained, and the possibility that some of this number were wives, or even children, is not eliminated)

2. whose surnames included Browning, Norton, Vincent, Trapp and John Pease. (No list of the names of those that sailed with Gosnold & Gilbert seems to have survived, and this remains unknown.)

3. on a ship experiencing difficulty due to shortage of provisions, illness, or both of these (Gosnold's party are stated to have been in excellent health, but two accounts confirm that there was a shortage of provisions.)

4. which ship was bound for Virginia (Brereton suggests Virginia to have been Gosnold's destination; Captains Gilbert and Gosnold, as well as Gabriel Archer, were part of Jamestown, Virginia's earliest history.)

5. some year before 1641 (The fact that the men on Martha's Vineyard that year were stated to have been the "heirs," or the "successors" of the first men there, might easily place the earliest settlement as far back as 1602.)

6. obtained permission to remain on Martha's Vineyard (Cuttyhunk is the island most historians agree that Gosnold left from. The ambiguity of the nar-

ratives allows the possibility of it having been the Vineyard, and Brereton's words suggest that they were left on the first island that they had sighted, perhaps on the way out. From wherever they may have been left, the Vineyard would have been accessible, especially with the help of the Indians.)

7. where the Indians treated them hospitably (Gosnold's records are in complete agreement on this point.)

The remaining two points that the legend had in common are unlikely to find any confirmation from any ship's records, since these events occurred after the men had left the ship. Of the seven points so far discussed, there seems to be some affinity between the legend and the voyage in six out of seven, and no evidence to the contrary. As to the remaining two points, it will be seen that there is ample proof of the main one, and considerable support for the other.

While Gosnold's voyage cannot be established as being identical with the one that brought the first settlers to the Vineyard, it does well establish that the incidents narrated in the legend did occur in the very area and that such had been the plan. In addition, it is established that the men found on the Vineyard in 1641, had been there for some time, and since some of them were "successors" and others "heirs" of the first men to arrive, it is conceivable that the settlement, or at least the settlers, may have gone back as far as 1602. It seems likely that surviving under the same conditions as the Indians, they might have profited from their friendship, or even lived with them for a while, but this is conjecture.

I concede, for want of proof to the contrary, that the island they left from was as likely to have been Cuttyhunk as any other, although I am uncertain that this is definitely established. But even so, I suggest that Brereton's phrase—"leaving this island with as many true sorrowful eyes as were desirous to see it"—would more likely suggest that they left the settlers on the island that they had first sighted on their voyage to America, and since they had lingered on the Vineyard before going to Cuttyhunk, they must have seen it first. It is doubtful if the thoughts of returning home would have produced "sorrowful eyes" so consistently, and so they must have remained somewhere near the Vineyard, if not on the Vineyard.

If they were not the first settlers, who picked them up and returned them to England?

Summary of Contemporary Records

It has been previously mentioned that the few records to mention the Vineyard that have survived from that period all were too brief to include any answer as to the reality of a settlement being in existence there. In addition, many phrases are open to more than one interpretation, and even localities are not always agreed upon, but it is fair to state that no testimo-

ny or account from that time is known that actually contradicts the possibility of a settlement, among the people that we know to have visited there.

Capt. John Smith is reported to have intended to establish a colony there. He stated in 1614:

The nex (island) to this is Capawack, and those abounding countries of copper, corn, people and minerals which I went to discover last year, but because I miscarried by the way. I will leave them till God please I have a better acquaintance with them.

Capt. Martin Pring lived for a short period in May 1603 in some spot historians mostly agree to have been Martha's Vineyard. His description of the people does not precisely correspond with that from Gosnold's voyage, and Pring was quite suspicious of them, and may possibly have encountered a different tribe to those that had been so hospitable to Gosnold. While Pring's account uses at different times the word "people," and "savages," but like Capt. Smith's scant mention, the word "people" cannot be determined to indicate other races than the Indians.

Capt. Thomas Dermer, who was later destined to die at the hand of some of the Vineyard Indians, stated in the spring of 1619:

Departing hence, the next place we arrived at was Capawock an island formerly discovered by the English, where I met Epinew, a savage that lived in England and speaks indifferent good English, who four years since being carried home was reported to have been slain with divers of his countrymen, by sailors, which was false. With him I had much conference, who gave me good satisfaction in everything almost I could demand. Time not permitting me to search here, which I would have done for sundry things of special moment, the wind fair, I stood away shaping my course as the coast led me, till I came to the most westerly part where the coast began to fall away southerly.

Warner Foote Gookin, discussing the post-Gosnold era in his book *Capawack: Alias Martha's Vineyard* notes that:

The final hint of the possibility of a settlement on Capawack appears in a letter from Mr. Cushman, a London advisor to the Pilgrims. He writes about Mr. Thomas Weston, whom history records as a mercenary and unscrupulous merchant of London. Mr. Weston had been one of the original investors in the Pilgrim's adventure, but withdrew his support at a critical time. He was decided that he could do better by starting his own settlement.

"It is like", writes Mr. Cushman, "he will plant to the southward of the Cape, for Mr. Trevore hath lavishly told but what he knew or imagined of Capewack, Mohiggon and the Nargansets. I fear these people will hardly deal with the savages as they should."³⁶

Gookin states further that "After 1623 a curtain of silence falls over Ca-

36 Warner Foote Gookin, *Capawack: Alias Martha's Vineyard* (Dukes County Historical Society, 1949), 19.

pawack. There is no further occurrence in English Sources or direct news about it.”³⁷ If there were not English settlers already on the Island by 1623, it is apparent that this would not be the case shortly after.

Probabilities and Premises

It has been previously mentioned that the legend contains no incredible elements, aside from possibly the “black book” and the evidence is ample to prove that this, or at least some earlier record of land ownership, did exist.

The island must have been one of the most desirable locations in all of the English claim to the New World at that time. As Rowse points out, the English settlements at St. John’s in 1585 and Roanoke in 1586 were situated on islands, and Jamestown’s site was selected because it being “almost an island” and thus highly defensible.³⁸

Although Pring was suspicious of the Indians on Martha’s Vineyard (if historians’ identification of the location is correct) in 1603, overall the Indians there were recognized to have been friendly. With Brereton’s glowing description of the Vineyard well publicized by Capt. John Smith, it is incredible that the island would attract no one for a period of 40 years. Rowse suggests that years before the Pilgrims arrived “there were constantly men visiting the coast, some of them remaining there.”³⁹

Other factors arouse curiosity, without necessarily going so far as to suggest evidence for the legend. One was that English was fluently spoken by some of the natives at the time of Gosnold’s voyage of 1602. No ship’s records are recalled that indicate communication with the natives was impossible, and although some ships are known to have had Indian interpreters, it is unlikely that most did, and for all communication seems to have been an easy matter. There must have been some “acquaintanceship” of a sufficiently long duration to enable the Indians to learn the language, even before 1602.

It has also been commonly observed that the Indians on Martha’s Vineyard were distinct from the Indians on Nantucket and elsewhere. As an example, Allan T. Vaughn says of the Wampanoag tribe: “Anthropologists recognize nine sub-divisions on the Mainland, and an additional four from Martha’s Vineyard, and several others scattered throughout the offshore islands and costal promontories.”⁴⁰ I have not been able to learn if these differences that anthropologists observed had anything in common with the traits of the people of England, and even if they do, I would be the last to suggest that this might have come about only through the men of the legend.

37 Gookin, *Capawack*, 21

38 Rowse, “New England in the Earliest Days.”

39 Rowse, “New England in the Earliest Days,” 28.

40 Allan T. Vaughn, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians* (Norton, 1965), 5.

Brereton spoke of having seen only three native women and stated that they were “low of stature, their eyebrows, hair, apparell, and maner of wearing like to the men, fat and very well favored and much delighted in our company. The men were very dutiful toward them.” There must have been a close relationship between at least some of the Indians and some of the whites. I do not suggest this to have been the source of intellect for the Indians, for the story of Epenow alone proves that the tribe there was not lacking in brilliant members, but this alone did not always lend itself to adapting quickly to the white men’s culture.

Vaughn observed, in speaking of the Indian College at Harvard: “Only one Indian, Caleb Cheeshateaumuch, class of 1665, completed the four year program. This son of a minor Sachem on Martha’s Vineyard thereby attained a unique distinction, but he shortly succumbed to a disease and died within a year after graduation.”⁴¹ It might be further argued that even with the assumption that some infusion of white blood enabled him to adapt more quickly to the white man’s ways, there was ample time for this to have occurred after 1642. But this could scarcely have gone unnoticed in a Sachem’s family, and if this was the case, the probability is that it occurred through an earlier alliance.

The Christian name Caleb is not known to have been a common one, and arouses more curiosity for two reasons. Caleb Cheeshateaumuch must have been born by, or soon after 1642, and it is surprising that a sachem’s family would so quickly adopt an English name, if there had been no previous acquaintance with the English. In addition, the name Caleb also occurs in the Trapp family from the Vineyard. Banks does report that at least one surname, Covell was assumed by an Indian family, but this occurred apparently nearer the end of that century.⁴²

Probably nothing establishes better the close relationship between the races than Rev. Freeman’s account in 1807, which stated that not only the whites of Martha’s Vineyard, but also the Indians, had handed down orally the following tradition:

Four of their names have been handed down to us—Pease, Vincent, Norton and Trapp, the three former of which still remain on the Island. They landed late in the autum and were supplied during the first winter by the Indians. These hospitable natives led them to Great Pond and showed them their manner of taking fish, which was as follows: A passage was opened from the sea into the Pond and through it fish entered. There are many coves in this pond. At the entrance to the coves, the Indians placed hurdles under the water, in a horizontal position, and when the fish had run over them into the coves, they went in their canoes, lifted the hurdles upright, by means they pre-

41 Vaughn, *New England Frontier*, 284.

42 Banks, *History*, vol. II, *Annals of Edgartown*, 63.

vented the escape of the fish, and with their spears struck them in the mud. This event has been preserved by tradition both among the natives and the whites; but has not before appeared in a printed book.⁴³

The names, in existence at an early date, do add some further testimony as to the truth of the legend. Holmes Hole was already a landmark in March 1641. Banks established that, throughout the 1600s, the island itself was far more commonly called “Martin’s Vineyard” than “Martha’s Vineyard.”⁴⁴ Few historians have attempted to guess why. C. G. Hine being the exception stated: “For years the island was called Martin’s Vineyard, the supposition being that Martin Pring named it for himself.”⁴⁵ I should have thought this to have been unlikely since it is assumed that Gosnold’s official connections were stronger, and without Martin Pring remaining there to keep his own choice of names alive, it seems unlikely that his name (if he did in fact name the Vineyard at all) would have gained precedence, for Gosnold had important connections in England.

Some queries I published almost 10 years ago brought a number of replies, and personal letters to respected institutions brought more replies, all in answer to my own question as to why the Vineyard had been more commonly called “Martin’s Vineyard.” A letter from Hugh F. Bell, Associate Professor at the University of Massachusetts, dated 9 March 1977, replied in part:

Your enquiry regarding “Martha’s Vineyard” ended up on my desk and I am not sure whether either I or anybody else in the department can give you much satisfaction. The origin of the name seems lost as is so often the case . . . Inconclusive though Bank’s book may be, he seems to have done the most thorough and judicious research. Even though Gosnold may have had a daughter Martha, I find this origin unpersuasive. As to Martin, we have a bit of a mystery I am incidentally impressed with the Dutch designation of the island as “Martaen’s.”

The sum of all the replies seemed to confirm that Mr. Bell was correct: no one really knows why. Logic seems to suggest that only if some person remained there for long enough to make the name stick, would Gosnold’s name be pushed into the background for more than a century, and the fact that it emerged eventually victorious, seems adequate proof of its official acceptance in England.

There are too many coinciding factors between the account of the stolen “black book” of the legend, the copied deeds from the “towne book” which miraculously survive at Albany, and the incomplete land records of Edgartown to leave any doubt as to the truth of the legend.

43 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 90.

44 Banks, *History*, vol. I, 74-76.

45 Hine, *Martha’s Vineyard*, 3.

1. Ahearn's letter, dated 8 October 1675, proves that the unsatisfactory state of land records there occurred at just the period indicated in the legend, following the death of John Pease in 1674.

2. Four of the five families whose surnames feature in the legend owned or sold property for which the surviving records at Edgartown fail to show how the property was acquired.

3. The property, in each instance, was apparently in the location suggested by the legend.

4. The deeds of 16 March 1641 clearly establish that a minimum of 8 men or families were then residing on the Island, and had been for some years, since some of the eight were heirs of an ancestor who had come earlier. Most probably this document was made on the Vineyard.

Through the years, others have submitted other evidence of the legend, which as far as is known, has never been proven false.

The church records of Edgartown are stated to exist from the year 1641, a year before the Mayhews are stated to have come. Banks stated that the church had actually been organized in Watertown and moved as a body to the Vineyard. While this seems a reasonable explanation, it is unknown if Banks had any evidence to support his viewpoint.

Rev. Hebron Vincent found the surviving land records alone sufficient to establish the presence of not only John Pease, but the widows of two of the other men: the mother of William Vinson, and Mary Browning, the presumed widow of Malachai.

In some accounts, the men were stated to have survived the first winter in caves, which were reported to have been extant in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Rev. Joseph Thaxter's observation that the division of the town granting only half shares to the men who were there earlier, finds some endorsement in the fact that Mayhew had previously "granted" the earlier men all of the land they had acquired from the Indians before he came, and therefore their share, in all fairness, might have been expected to have been smaller than others who had been granted none at all.

The final two points the narrators of the legend mentioned do not go without some support from known facts:

8. and Indians granted them land in exchange for a red coat (Henry Hudson's use of red coats for trading during this same period suggests that this was not a unique item of trade. Also, the deed of 1641 states: "Now wee are the Successors of those Men & the first of us was admitted by their approbation & some purchased their lands.")

9. but the record of this land was lost when John Pease died in 1674. (Those who related the legend apparently had no knowledge that John

Birchard had copied the deed in which the Mayhews presumed to confirm the deed from the Indians)

It is quite obvious that there was indeed a movement to remove all proof of claim for John Pease, and it was due to his descendants continuing to live in the area where they would often see the very property that they considered to be rightfully their own, that they happened to remember the legend.

The alternatives to the legend being true are far more complicated. Someone, presumably of the Pease family, would have to have deliberately made up the whole story, knowing it to have been false. Any such fabricator would have to have been a genius, as well as being a genius of far-reaching connections, to have constructed a story that would fit so well with known facts, and not be contradicted by any evidence. Bear in mind that the legend first appeared in print in 1807. All books were rarer then, but the many history books with indexes that we enjoy today were rare enough to be supposed unique by any scholar from the Vineyard lucky enough to discover one. The detail of the red coat, the estimated number of families to have been 25, and the loss of the “black book” might ordinarily subtract, and have been omitted by anyone deliberately making up the whole thing, but as has been seen, not one of these details seems unlikely in view of what has been since learned.

In addition, there would have been no motive, for as far as can be ascertained no one disbelieved the legend then or through the century that followed.

Finally, the legend would have to have been envisioned by 1644, when John Birchard submitted the copies of the deeds at Edgartown to the New York Secretary of State, and then further he would have had to have had the cooperation of that person to deliberately plant false evidence into the deed book, and again there is no motive that can be discerned for going to this effort. All persons then living on the Vineyard would have known whether or not there were already settlers there before 1642, and these deeds did very little to establish the personal property of any person mentioned.

Presumably Rev. Vincent never found that page, but he concluded his own manuscript with the following words: “. . . all this makes a mass of evidence most convincing, and as such as—in the matter of what is called a tradition—is so near to a plain written record, as to place the truth of it beyond a reasonable doubt.”⁴⁶

I would not close without expressing the hope that all who have ever repeated the Lord’s Prayer will not forget the line “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” As far as I am con-

46 Vincent, “Early Settlement,” 28.

cerned, whoever tampered with the land records will remain anonymous. I regret that I, of necessity, had to subtract from the image of a man to whom I am truly indebted, for it is doubtful that I might ever have heard of the legend, had it not been for the work of Charles Edward Banks. It is unlikely that anyone will ever write of the history of the Vineyard without mentioning him, and it is my wish that none who do so will ever fail to appreciate the worth of his contribution, or to forget that the individual imperfection of any one of us may not necessarily disappear as we do. Happily, our worth is more than these, and so was the achievement, and person, of Dr. Banks.



John Pease offers his red coat to a Wampanoag sachem in exchange for the right to settle on land in Edgartown, depicted in one of a series of twelve paintings done by Charles E. Banks around 1900.

Names on the Land

Maps, Roads, Signs, and the Hidden History of Martha's Vineyard

by A. BOWDOIN VAN RIPER

THE PAST IS FRAGILE. Every archaeologist and historian knows that grim and inescapable truth, because it shapes the fragments from which they recreate the past. Every museum curator knows it, because a large part their job is to preserve what *has* survived—waging President Kennedy’s “long, twilight struggle,” not against guerillas but against mold, vermin, and other agents of destruction.

The things that humans make from the plants and animals around them quickly return to the earth when exposed, unprotected, to air, water, and sunlight: paper crumbles, wood rots, fiber disintegrates, leather is nibbled away. Inside our houses, the dry heat that warms us slowly dries and cracks wood, and the unfiltered light that streams through our windows leaches the color from dyed fabric and painted canvas. The chemical emulsions that color our photographs fade, the powdered metal on video and audio tapes flakes away from its plastic base, and—although the power to create and disperse perfect copies with a keystroke protects them in the short term—digital files become trapped on obsolete media, in file formats no modern program can read.¹ Even memory, when not carefully recorded and deliberately curated, fades. “Old men forget,” Shakespeare has Henry V tell his soldiers before Agincourt. “All will be forgot,” save for a few bright fragments, like the battle they are about to fight.

We look at the human-built wonders of the past—at the Pyramids of Gizeh, the Parthenon, the Colosseum, the temples of Angkor Wat—and reassure ourselves that buildings, at least, effortlessly outlast their builders. We forget that they are famous, in part, *because* they survived. The Pyramids continue to astound us, but the *other* six “wonders of the ancient world” succumbed to fire, earthquake, and war centuries (or millennia)

1 Adam Wernick, “Scientists Warn We May Be Creating a ‘Digital Dark Age,’” 1 January 2018, www.pri.org.

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ago.² The huts of the workers that raised them, and the (doubtless larger and finer) homes of the architects and engineers who designed them, vanished without a trace. Closer to home and nearer to the present, the story is the same: fire, flood, erosion, and decay all take their toll, and the past is sacrificed to the needs of the present. Water and ice flake away the gray slate tombstones of the eighteenth century, while moss and acid rain blur the inscriptions on the white marble monuments of the nineteenth.

Yet, the map remembers.

Buildings are burnt down, torn down, or simply fall down. Entire villages and ways of life fade out of existence. Even after they are gone, however, their names linger: ghosts of the past, quietly reminding the present of what once was. Those traces are visible to us all, hidden in plain sight on maps and road signs. The trick to deciphering the stories they tell about the Island's past—like the secret to seeing the traces of the long-vanished Martha's Vineyard Railroad on the sandy plains of Edgartown³—lies in knowing where to look, and understanding what you're looking at. This is an article about that “where” and “what:” a tour of places where names on the map shed light on the now-hidden history of the Island.

The World of the Five-and-Twenty

Go to the end of Fuller Street in Edgartown and, when the pavement gives way to sand, turn right. Travel—in your imagination; Massachusetts and Maine, alone among the states, do not grant unrestricted public access to the tidal zones of beaches⁴—south along the coast, with Chappaquiddick to your left and the rest of Martha's Vineyard to your right, and note the names on the map. Eel Pond lies behind you, with Sheriff's Pond and Weeks Neck further in the distance. Ahead is Starbuck's Neck (where the Harbor View Hotel stands), Pease's Point (now remembered mostly in the name of the road that leads there), and Lighthouse Beach (formed by sand deposited when a stone causeway replaced the old wooden bridge to the lighthouse). The Edgartown Light and the Harbor View mark—as they have for well over a century—the northern border of Edgartown's village center.

Your trip through the village, still following the shoreline, passes the five wharves where the craftsmen, shopkeepers, and stevedores of Edgartown once serviced whaling ships and fishing schooners: North, Fisher's,

2 Peter D'Epiro and Mary Desmond Pinkowish, *What Are the Seven Wonders of the World?* (Anchor, 1998), 179-187.

3 Walter Blackwell, *Tracing the Route of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad* (Privately Printed, 1973); Tom Dunlop, “Relics, Ruins, and Remnants,” *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, 1 December 2007.

4 Stanley King, “Sand Dunes and Sea Law,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 1961, 10-18.



Shear Pen Pond, south of Cape Pogue, recalls a time when the thousands of sheep pastured on Chappaquiddick by Edgartown farmers were driven to an enclosure there to be relieved of their wool. Photograph by David R. Foster, used under a Creative Commons license.

Chadwick's, Osborne's, and Commercial.⁵ Off your left shoulder, the Outer Harbor narrows to The Channel and widens again to form the Inner Harbor with its sheltered water and broad field of moorings. South of Commercial Wharf, you skirt the base of the bluffs that form Tower Hill, and pass by Green Hollow—where, it is said, John Pease and his fellow settlers passed their first winter on the Island.⁶ Ahead lies the Swimming Place and, a mile-and-a-half further south, Norton Point: the slender strip of barrier beach that determines whether, geographically speaking, Chappaquiddick is a peninsula or an island.⁷

The names in the two preceding paragraphs are uniformly, exclusively English. Only at the far southern end of the three-mile shoreline journey from Eel Point to Norton Point does the language of the Wampanoag begin to resurface in names like Katama Bay, Mattakeset Creek, and Crackatuxet Cove. To the west, along the shores of Edgartown Great Pond, the languages inter-

5 North Wharf is, at this writing, the site of Prime Marina; Fisher's Wharf (now Memorial Wharf) is reserved for fishing boats and the Chappaquiddick and Falmouth ferries; Chadwick's Wharf is occupied by the Seafood Shanty Restaurant; Osborne's Wharf is the site of the Edgartown Yacht Club; and Commercial Wharf is home to the Edgartown Reading Room.

6 See, A. C. Trapp, "The First Settlers of Martha's Vineyard," in this issue.

7 As of this writing, Chappaquiddick is officially a peninsula, the breach in Norton Point made by the Patriot's Day nor'easter or 2007 having closed in 2014. Spiritually, however, it is always an island.

leave: Nashamois Neck and Swan Neck Point, Meshacket Cove and Turkeyland Cove. To the east, on Chappaquiddick, North Neck and Shear Pen Pond share space with far older names: Wasque, Poucha, and Cape Pogue.⁸

The pattern of the names is no coincidence. The first English settlement on the Vineyard—whether founded by John Pease in the 1630s or Thomas Mayhew in the 1640s—was established on the western shore of what the Mayhews called “Great Harbour.” The Mayhews, having settled all competing (English) claims and offered the local Wampanoag (what they saw as) fair exchange for the land, laid out lots for themselves, their fellow settlers—collectively dubbed, by someone with an ear for poetry, “the five-and-twenty”—and a church, establishing the foundations of a settlement with a few strokes of a pen.⁹ The actual village of Edgartown, built of stone and mortar and wood, began to rise almost immediately from those conceptual foundations. As the English spread westward across the Island, the village retained its significance, becoming the Vineyard’s “shire town”—its seat of government, education, and religion—as well as its principal deep-water port.¹⁰ Chappaquiddick, 600 feet and a world away across the channel, was left to the Wampanoag in practice during the 1600s, and reserved to them by law in 1715.¹¹

The presence of English settlers and English culture touched the entire Island by the end of the 1600s, altering Wampanoag culture in ways large and small. Their touch fell first, hardest, and most indelibly, however, on the western shore of Great Harbour. There, the world of the English completely displaced and overwrote that of the Wampanoag—a reality that, nearly 400 years later, is still reflected on the map.

North Tisbury, South of Tisbury

North Tisbury was a village once: a thriving rural community with a post office, a general store, a blacksmith shop, and a Baptist church. Today, it is less than a village but more than the proverbial “wide spot in the road.” A half-dozen businesses bracket State Road in its 200-yard “downtown:” a farm stand, a clothing boutique, an antique shop and a glassworker’s studio among them. North Road divides from State Road there, sweeping away to the right to follow the crest of the old glacial moraine toward Menemsha. A century-old oak tree, subject of portraits by Alfred Eisenstaedt and untold numbers of amateur photographers, spreads over an adjoining

8 Or, more accurately, with Anglicized renderings of the Wampanoag names. “Kapoag” became “Cape Pogue” in the same way that, on the north shore, “Kepigon” became “Cape Higgon.”

9 Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha’s Vineyard*, vol. 2, Annals of Edgartown, 24-36.

10 Banks, *History*, vol. 2, Annals of Edgartown, 142-200; A. Bowdoin Van Riper, *Edgartown* (Arcadia Press, 2018), 7-14.

11 Banks, *History*, vol. 2, Annals of Edgartown, 213.



Motorists sweep past the old North Tisbury Post Office (now painted yellow and used as a retail space), headed north to Holmes Hole, around 1910. Photograph by Edward Lee Luce, from the Basil Welch Collection.

field, the crooks of its lower branches resting wearily on the ground.

Motorists from Tisbury, bound up-island on State Road, sweep through North Tisbury in an instant, registering its existence without knowing its name. Roadside signs give no indication that they are entering (or leaving) North Tisbury, only that they are bound for this or that destination. Consulting a map reveals the name of the place, but also a quirk of Vineyard geography: North Tisbury is clearly and mistakably *south* of Tisbury.

Thereby, as you might expect, hangs a tale.

The first two towns on the Vineyard, Edgartown and Tisbury, were formally incorporated on the same day: July 8, 1671. The third, Chilmark, was incorporated just under a quarter-century later: September 14, 1694. The internal boundaries of the Island remained stable—three towns: Chilmark in the west, Tisbury in the center, Edgartown in the east—for 175 years. “Town,” on the Vineyard as in the rest of Massachusetts, was (and is) shorthand for “township”: an area of land incorporated under a municipal government and sharing boundaries with other, adjacent townships. A New England town(ship) of the 16-, 17-, or 1800s typically contained multiple villages: compact, built-up population centers that often possessed their own stores, mills, churches, and schools.¹² The largest of

¹² Outside the New England and Mid-Atlantic states, “towns” are typically incorporated, self-governing population centers surrounded by the *unincorporated* lands of the county in which they are located, and usually possess police, fire, school, and highway departments independent of the county ones. See Paul

the villages in a given township typically—though not invariably—shared the township’s name, as Edgartown and Chilmark do today.

The largest village in the expansive colonial-era township of Tisbury is the village center of today’s West Tisbury, where Alley’s Store, the Grange Hall, and the Public Library stand at the junction of Music Street and State Road. First settled in the 1650s, less than a decade after the five-and-twenty came ashore at Edgartown, it was—like Edgartown village—the township’s center of commerce, government, and religion. The town’s principal cemetery was there (though outlying villages like Lambert’s Cove and Holmes Hole had their own), as was the church whose pastor’s salary was paid by a “ministerial tax” levied on all the town’s residents.¹³ The village was known, in those days, as “Tisbury,” but also as “Middletown,” the latter name reflecting its position near the center of the Island. As late as the mid-1800s, however, someone who said they were “going to Tisbury” was almost certainly headed there.

The original, three-town division of the Island reflected the realities of the late 1600s and accommodated those of the 1700s. The Vineyard, in those days, was a sparsely populated outpost first of the British Empire and then of the new United States, relatively isolated from the wider world. The three towns, though the social and cultural differences between them were apparent to residents, were all sustained by mixed fishing-and-farming economies, supplemented by limited trade with the mainland.¹⁴ As the 1700s gave way to the 1800s, however, the accelerating pace of technological, social, and economic change began to intensify the differences between the towns and among the villages within them.

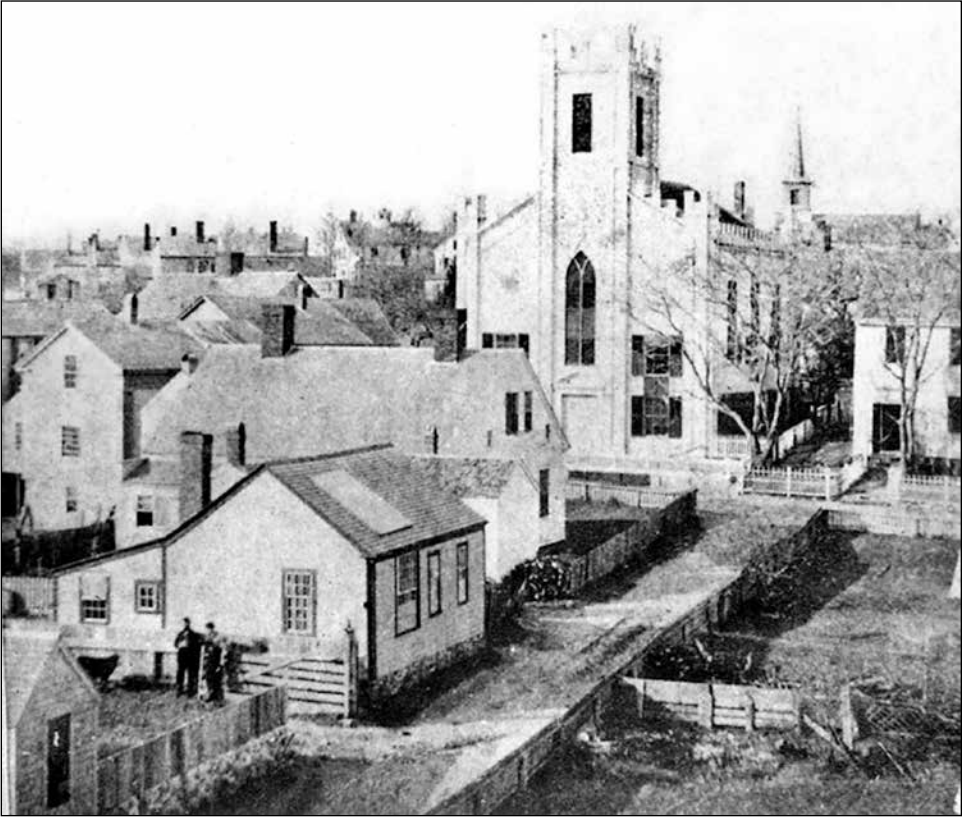
Tisbury was a case in point. Tisbury village, surrounded by some of the richest farmland on the Island and flanked by fast-flowing streams well suited to driving grist mills, looked to the land for its livelihood. Holmes Hole, first settled a decade later (in the 1660s) and located at the head of the Island’s finest deep-water harbor, looked to the sea. The passage of years widened the gulf between the two villages, as more of the land around Tisbury was brought under cultivation and Holmes Hole grew prosperous catering to the ever-increasing ship traffic in Vineyard Sound.

The later decades of the 18th century further intensified the divisions. Tisbury remained primarily Congregationalist, while Holmes Hole was increasingly Baptist and Methodist. The colonial-era “ministerial tax” re-

B. Frederic, “The New England Town: Not a Village,” *American Association of Geographers Newsletter*, December 2016, news.aag.org/

13 A sign listing all the ministers, beginning with Thomas Mayhew, Jr. in 1651, is posted in the vestibule of the current church building, erected in 1831.

14 For an overview of the Vineyard in this era, see: James Freeman, “A Description of Dukes County, August 13, 1807,” *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 1971, 1-51.



The heart of Holmes Hole—a booming seaside village on one of the world’s busiest maritime highways—around 1800. The square-steepled Baptist Meeting House at the corner of Main and Spring Streets (destroyed in the Great Fire of 1883) dominates this picture; the spire of Association Hall, now the Tisbury Town Hall, is visible in the background. Digital Commonwealth Collection, Boston Public Library.

mained in place, and residents of Holmes Hole—while approving of taxpayer-supported religion in principle—objected to paying for a minister of a different faith whose church was, in any event, too far away for them to attend. The town schoolmaster, also paid by tax money, spent only two months out of the year in Holmes Hole, where there was—as far as the sketchy references in town records show—no dedicated schoolhouse until after Independence. Petitions to divide the township into two districts were put before the (mostly sympathetic) Tisbury selectmen as early as 1790, and approved by the Massachusetts legislature in 1796. In that year, Holmes Hole and the land around it became the “East Parish of Tisbury,” with its own school system and taxing authority, separate from that of the western district centered on Middletown.¹⁵

The first formal proposal to make the administrative split complete and

¹⁵ Banks, *History*, vol. 2, *Annals of Tisbury*, 34-36.

permanent, turning the two parishes into separate towns, was floated in 1884. It came not from Holmes Hole, but from the village that had, sometime in the 1860s, begun to refer to itself as “West Tisbury.” The final separation, approved by the Massachusetts legislature in 1892, formalized the name and attached it to a new town formed from the western two-thirds of the old town’s land. The name “Tisbury,” with its municipal history stretching back to 1671, remained attached to the much-reduced town that now reached from the headwaters of the Lagoon to the tip of West Chop, and from Holmes Hole Harbor to Lambert’s Cove.¹⁶

Tisbury went, at the stroke of a pen, from being the Island’s largest town to being its second-smallest. And North Tisbury—named, by the Postal Service, for its geographic relationship to the *old* village of Tisbury—was left stranded by the roadside, south of its apparent namesake.

Once There Was a Village: Eastville

Edgartown once stretched across a third of the Island, from Chappaquiddick to Holmes Hole. In 1880, its northern district seceded, becoming the Town of Cottage City, which in 1907 changed its name to Oak Bluffs. On the day the separation became official, the westernmost outpost of Edgartown became the westernmost outpost of Cottage City, while retaining its old, geographically improbable name: Eastville. The seeming mismatch of name and location reflected Eastville’s once-upon-a-time place in the life of the Island. Located on the eastern shore of Holmes Hole (now Vineyard Haven) Harbor, its life and livelihood were inextricably linked to the ships that anchored there.

The narrow waters of Vineyard Sound, which stretch from Gay Head to East Chop, bounded by

the Vineyard to the south and the Elizabeth Islands and Cape Cod to the north, are edged with rocks, striped with shoals, and swept by currents strong enough to stall a sailing vessel or push it off its intended course. Wind too moderate to qualify as a gale or full-fledged storm, can—if mov-



The wharfs and other businesses of Eastville existed to serve the captains and crews of the hundreds of ships that stopped in Holmes Hole (Vineyard Haven) Harbor each year. H. L. Norton’s grocery store stood at the right-angle corner near the present-day Martha’s Vineyard Hospital. Digital Commonwealth Collection, Boston Public Library.

¹⁶ Arthur R. Railton, *The History of Martha’s Vineyard: How We Got to Where We Are* (Commonwealth Editions, 2006), 323-324.

ing in the opposite direction as the prevailing current—turn the sea into a cauldron of high, breaking waves. Like Nantucket Sound to the east, it is not an easy passage, but easier and safer by far than holding course to the south of both islands, with nothing to seaward but the open Atlantic and—1500 miles to the south—Cuba. Captains who made the passage did so with an eye to harbors where, if faced with contrary winds, an opposing tide, or an impending storm, they could take refuge. The Vineyard offered two, Edgartown and Holmes Hole, but for ships moving along the coast the choice was clear: Holmes Hole was deeper, closer to the channel, easier to enter and leave, and—in anything *other* than a northeast gale—superbly protected. From the Colonial Era to the late nineteenth century, ship traffic in the Sound steadily rose, and the number of ships that stopped in Holmes Hole rose with it.

Vessels in the Sound meant opportunity for local mariners who hired themselves out as pilots: guides through the treacherous and (for many mariners) unfamiliar waters between Gay Head and Chatham. Vessels in the harbor meant opportunity for those on shore: ship chandleries to supply charts and instruments, oil and paint, rope and canvas; blacksmith shops to make or mend metal fittings; grocery stores that offered fresh meat and vegetables, and replenished dwindling supplies of coffee, sugar, and flour. Other establishments attended to less tangible needs. There were numerous taverns and—though documentation is understandably scarce—likely less-regulated, and less-legal forms of entertainment as well. By 1797 there was a Marine Hospital to coordinate the care of sick and injured sailors, and by 1868 a “Sailors Free Reading Room” that provided books, current newspapers, and letter-writing materials as well as offering religious services.

These maritime-oriented businesses and institutions clustered in three distinct villages along the harbor front. Two were in Tisbury: Holmes Hole, roughly today’s village of Vineyard Haven (known to locals as “The Head”), and “The Neck,” a distinct settlement to the north that ran, between Main Street and the harbor, from Hatch Road to Grove Avenue.¹⁷ The third, across the harbor in Edgartown (and later Oak Bluffs) was Eastville. Gale Huntington notes that “Eastville is as fully old as Holmes Hole across the harbor, and perhaps older,”¹⁸ which would make it very old indeed. It was to Edgartown what Holmes Hole was to Tisbury: an outlying community, distant and disconnected from the rest of town. Eastville and

17 “The Head” because it was at the head of the harbor. “The Neck” because that was what Holmes Hole residents called the land between the harbor and Lake Tashmoo (“neck” being a generic word for a narrow piece of land with water on both sides). To “go down The Neck” was to head toward West Chop.

18 Gale Huntington, *An Introduction to Martha’s Vineyard* (Dukes County Historical Society, 1969), 24.

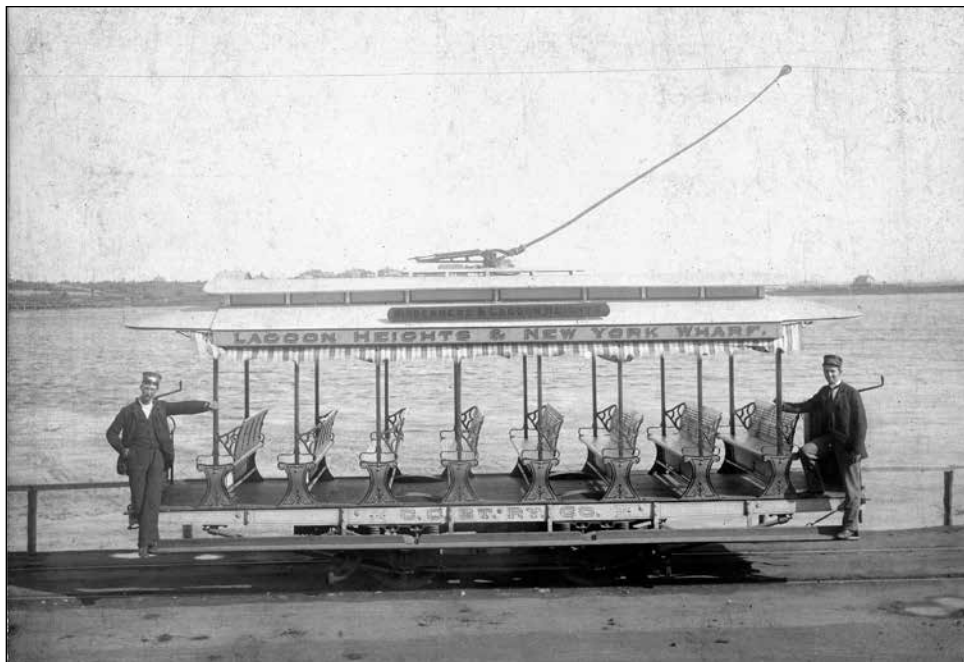


The launch *Helen May*, known as the “Little Devil Chaser,” offered sailors free rides to the Seamen’s Bethel in Vineyard Haven, where they could relax, socialize, and attend religious services. The Bethel chaplains regarded the taverns (and, some said, brothels) of Eastville as their principal “competition.”

Holmes Hole had much in common. In an alternate version of history where *both* shores of Holmes Hole Harbor were part of the same town, it is easy to imagine them gradually blending into a single village, as The Head and The Neck eventually did. In our world, however, they remained independent of one another: rivals for the attention of visiting sailors.¹⁹

Over time, Holmes Hole grew larger and more prosperous. By the mid-19th century it had a marine railway, near the site of the current Martha’s Vineyard Shipyard, where ships of modest size could be hauled out for repairs, as well as an impressive ship chandlery at The Neck, and the Sailors Free Reading Room a few blocks up-harbor. Eastville had the Island’s first marine hospital and its first burying ground for itinerant sailors, both located at the north end of the Lagoon. It also had the reputation of being the Vineyard’s “Barbary Coast,” a reference to San Francisco’s notorious waterfront red-light district. That liquor was readily available in late-19th and early-20th-century Eastville is evident from the writings of temperance-minded waterfront pastors like Rev. Madison Edwards of the Seamen’s Bethel, who saw the village as emblematic of all that they

¹⁹ The Hurricane of 1815 added geographic to political separation by breaking through the barrier beach separating the Lagoon from the Harbor, forming the current entrance and—until a bridge was built over it in 1871—adding several miles to the overland route from Eastville to Holmes Hole.



The electric trolley line that ran from Oak Bluffs Harbor (shown in the background of this photograph, taken around 1900) to the Drawbridge drew power from a generating plant in Eastville, and—as the writing on its canopy announces—served the wharf at the foot of New York Avenue. Photograph by Edward Lee Luce, from the Basil Welch Collection.

were trying to save visiting sailors from. Whether gambling or prostitution flourished there as well is, as yet, undocumented.

Eastville diversified in the second half of the nineteenth century, but remained facing the sea. Howes Norris, a local businessman who owned the *Cottage City Star* and used it to spearhead the campaign for independence from Edgartown, operated a commercial wharf there. The coastal passenger steamers that ran between Boston and New York took on and discharged passengers at a second deep-water wharf closer at the foot of Kedron (now New York) Avenue. The success, in 1880, of Norris's campaign brought further changes. Eastville, once a remote outlying village of Edgartown, became something closer to a suburb of Cottage City, and homes began to fill in once-empty lots. When electric trolley service came to Cottage City in the 1890s, powered (along with the electric lights and appliances in town) by a new generating plant at Eastville, the tracks were laid down New York Avenue and extended to the Lagoon Bridge.²⁰ The trolleys served passengers for the New York steamers, as well as visiting members of the New York Yacht Club,

20 Railton, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, 321-323; Gene Baer, "The Old Island Trolley," *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 1977, 125-134.

which maintained a shore station at Eastville from 1892 to 1917.²¹

Over the course of the twentieth century, Eastville quietly ceased to be a distinct village. The Cape Cod Canal, opened in 1914, drew coastal ship traffic away from Vineyard Sound, and the shift from sail to steam diminished the need to wait for a fair wind or tide. Improved intercity rail connections killed the coastal steamer trade, the democratization of the automobile killed the electric trolley, and the consolidation of electric power producers killed the need for a generating plant in Oak Bluffs. Vineyard Haven quietly reinvented itself as a ferry port and year-round business center, and Eastville was quietly absorbed into Oak Bluffs. Today, even to long-time visitors, it is “that place where the hospital is,” its maritime past forgotten. The hospital, however, still looks westward to the harbor. It seems only fitting.

Roads to Vanished Places

Winds, as every sailor knows, are named for the direction from which they come. Roads, especially major roads, are typically named for where they go. The advantage of doing so is obvious: “Edgartown-West Tisbury Road” lacks the poetry of “Takemmy Trail,” but makes up for it in legibility. The Howard who was memorialized by “Howard Avenue” in Vineyard Haven may disagree, but the street that runs from the Five Corners to Hine’s Point seems better served by “Lagoon Pond Road.” Street names thus record the past in a variety of unexpected ways. “Old Lighthouse Road,” a dirt track that branches off from Main Street a mile or so north of Vineyard Haven, hints at a time when the Main Street of today—extending from the center of the village to the tip of West Chop—did not yet exist. Union Street, which dips from Main Street toward the ferry terminal and the harbor, remembers a pre-Steamship-Authority era when steamers from the mainland tied up alongside schooners and tugs at Union Wharf. Vanished buildings, businesses, and even villages are memorialized, today, by the names of the roads that once led to them.

Herring Creek Road, Various Towns. Commercial herring fisheries are no longer part of life on the Vineyard, but the fact that the Island has at least *three* Herring Creek Roads suggests how important they once were. The first, a tiny squib of a street, parallels the north end of the creek that runs beneath State Road near the Chilmark-Aquinnah border, connecting Squibnocket Pond and Menemsha Pond. The second—a meandering dirt road filled with heaving bumps and deep potholes—winds north from the end of Daggett Avenue in Vineyard Haven, tracing the eastern shore of Lake Tashmoo until it arrives at the channel connecting Tashmoo to the Sound. The channel—once Chappaquonset Creek, a meandering tidal in-

21 A. Bowdoin Van Riper, “Vanished Vineyard: New York Yacht Club Station No. 7,” *MVM Quarterly*, February 2018, 47.

let lined with fishing shacks—was dredged and jettied in the 1930s, giving Vineyard Haven a second sheltered anchorage but transforming the lake by increasing the salinity of its water. The change marked the end of both the herring fishery and of ice-boating on the lake, which no longer froze over in winter.

The third, and by far the best-known, Herring Creek Road runs, arrow-straight, across the plains of Katama. It ends, today, at the parking area for South Beach, but once—just beyond the dunes—Mattakeset Creek connected Edgartown Great Pond to Katama Bay. Gathered into nets and scooped into the backs of horse-drawn wagons, the herring caught there became bait for the fishing schooners of Edgartown and beyond, exported in barrels by the thousands. In the 1920s and 30s, a Hyannis chemist named Ralph Bodman used their scales to create a brand of artificial gem marketed, in gift shops on- and off-Island, as Priscilla Pearls—a maritime refutation of the old aphorism about sow's ears and silk purses.²² The fishery is gone now, and the creek silted up, but the name remains.

School Street, Edgartown. The streets of Edgartown village are named with an impressive show of no-nonsense efficiency. The prominent citizens—Mayhew, Norton, Cooke, Pease, Kelley, and Pierce—are all given their due. The main commercial strip is, of course, Main Street. Dock Street snakes along the wharves, Church Street runs past the village's most prominent house of worship, and Water Street (both north and south) follows the high ground overlooking the harbor. Summer and Winter Streets, names that would barely register in most other towns, stand out by comparison. That they intersect, enabling St. Andrew's Episcopal Church to reside at the crossroads of Summer and Winter,²³ is an unexpected touch of whimsey. In Edgartown, then, the existence of School Street—now wholly residential—implies the one-time presence of a school.

Or three. South School, for which the street was almost certainly named, housing the older students in the Edgartown Public School system—as the North School on Mill Street housed the younger ones—until the consolidated school on Robinson Road opened in 1925. White clapboarded and double-doored, it became the longtime headquarters of the Martha's Vineyard Boys and Girls Club, and is now a private home. Tucked behind high hedges at the corner of School and Norton Streets, it is barely visible today, but the street's other two (former) schools stand in plain sight two blocks away, at the corner of Davis Lane. The first, "Thaxter's Academy," was conducted by Leavitt Thaxter, the (mildly) prodigal son of Rev. Joseph Thaxter, when he returned to the Island after dropping out of Harvard and spending several

22 Lorraine St. Pierre, "The Fishy Secret of Priscilla Pearls," *Martha's Vineyard Magazine*, 1 September 2012.

23 Which *feels* like it should be an echo of a quote from Ecclesiastes, even if it isn't.



Near the end of one of the many Herring Creek Roads on the Island, a trio of Edgartown fishermen gather herring on the shores of Mattakeset Creek in the 1920s. Edgartown once shipped thousands of pounds of herring each year, much of it used for bait on offshore fishing schooners.

years as a merchant sailor. The second, “Davis Academy,” opened shortly after Thaxter’s closed, only to burn down before the year was out. Rebuilt and reopened, it operated until founder David Davis gave up teaching for politics, becoming Counsellor to the Governor of Massachusetts, as well as Tax Collector and Justice of the Peace in Edgartown. The three schools operated in sequence: Thaxter’s from 1825 to 1834, Davis’s from 1835 to sometime in the early 1840s, and the South School (Edgartown’s first public high school) from 1850 to 1925. School Street certainly earned its name.

Clevelandtown Road. There was, strictly speaking, never a village of Clevelandtown: no church, no school, no cluster of shops. Like the Highlands in Cottage City or West Chop in Vineyard Haven, it was a neighborhood: a settlement whose boundaries were clear in the minds of its residents but vague (or non-existent) on the map. “Cleveland” was an old family name on the Vineyard. Moses Cleveland and his wife Ruth (daughter of another Island patriarch, Nicholas Norton) married in 1676 and came to the Island soon afterward, perhaps following his militia service

in King Philip's War. The couple left the Island for Southold, New York in the mid-1690s, but their eldest son Ebenezer, born in Edgartown in 1681, stayed. He married Mary Vincent—granddaughter of another of the five-and-twenty—and in time became a patriarch himself. In good Old Testament fashion, Ebenezer and Mary's descendants were fruitful, and multiplied, and enough of them settled on the plains south and west of the village that the area became known as Clevelandtown.

Meetinghouse Road, Chilmark. Soon after you leave West Tisbury and enter Chilmark, a narrow dirt track called Meetinghouse Road leaves the right side of South Road, headed north toward Middle Road. It once led not just to the Congregational meetinghouse—the town's third, dismantled at its original site on Abel's Hill and rebuilt there in 1787, and the fourth, which replaced it in 1842—and their associated parsonage, but also to the first (1829) and second (1843) Methodist churches and *their* parsonage. Nearby stood a blacksmith shop, two consecutive general stores, the Town Hall (1844), the Post Office (1865), and the Poor House. No trace of that original town center now remains. The Congregational meetinghouse, bereft of members and in disrepair, was torn down along with its parsonage in 1877. As the bulk of Chilmark's population shifted westward in the late 19th century, the town's municipal buildings followed: the Post Office in 1883, the Town Hall in 1897, and the Methodist Church (along with its parsonage) in 1915. By the time the United States entered World War I, the village center of Chilmark stood several miles to the west of its original location—at the junction of South Road, Middle Road, and the Menemsha Cross Road where it stands today.²⁴ The lilac bush once planted by the doorway of the parsonage still blooms every spring, a reminder of a village center that once was.

Lobsterville Road, Chilmark/Aquinnah. Chilmark, like the other up-Island, towns, has no natural harbors. The basin at Menemsha, and the channel that connects it to the sea, are the products of human ingenuity rather than the mindless scraping of the glaciers. Created in the first decade of the 20th century—the same time that Lake Anthony was being opened to the sea and transformed into Oak Bluffs Harbor—they imposed straightness and depth on shallow, meandering Menemsha Creek.²⁵ Menemsha Harbor, thus created, has sheltered Chilmark's fishing fleet for a century, but Chilmarkers have fished for far longer than that. Lacking a natural harbor, they made do with what *nature* did offer them: A long,

24 Town of Chilmark, *Chilmark Master Plan* (1985), 132-134. http://www.chilmarkma.gov/Pages/ChilmarkMA_Planning/1985masterplan/?textPage=1

25 Turn-of-the-century Chilmarkers would have called the old channel "Menemsha Crick," and those who lived in its vicinity "Crickers." The old pronunciation is fading, but by no means gone.

straight, sandy beach just to the west of Menemsha Creek, facing Vineyard Sound and protected by a long, straight shoal—Dogfish Bar—that paralleled the beach and dissipated the force of the incoming ocean swells.

The beach behind Dogfish Bar became a staging area for Chilmark fishermen: a place to store their boats overnight, launch them in the morning, and pull them above the reach of the tide at the end of the day. Many Chilmark fishermen moved there, each spring, and spent the fair-weather months on the beach in a seasonal community that became known as Lobsterville. Native-built Nomans Land Boats (sturdily built and double-ended, designed to be launched and recovered in the surf) lined the sand, catboats moored offshore behind Dogfish Bar, and rows of fishing shacks—gear-storage and living space in one rough-hewn building—stood at the edges of the dunes. There was a summer-only general store, run by E. Elliot Mayhew, who also kept the year-round one in town, and even a baseball diamond.²⁶

Through the 19th century and into the early 20th, Lobsterville—along with the more permanent village of Squibnocket on the south shore—was a center of Chilmark's thriving fishing industry. The opening of Menemsha Harbor, however, soon rendered the seasonal community there superfluous. Lobsterville—a vibrant makeshift village in the summer, a deserted ghost town in the winter—quietly faded out of existence.²⁷ Only Lobsterville Road remains, running beside an empty, windswept beach where sport fishermen cast their solitary lines into the surf.



These examples could be multiplied—Old Courthouse Road, which branches off from State Road in North Tisbury, recalls a long-ago struggle between Tisbury and Edgartown for control of the County Courthouse and twice-yearly sessions of the District Court—but the message would remain unchanged.²⁸ History is recorded not just in fading photographs, fragile documents, and crumbling buildings, but in the names on brightly painted road signs and crisply printed maps. All we have to do is look for it . . . and stay curious.

26 John Leavens, "When Menemsha Was Creekville," *Dukes County Intelligencer*, November 1983, 43-53, on pp. 43-46.

27 Leavens, "When Menemsha Was Creekville," 48.

28 April Hamel and Hap Hamel, "County Jails and Court Houses: Where Were They?" *Dukes County Intelligencer*, May 1998, 175-189.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A New Era, in a New Museum

Beginnings—the setting into motion or progress of something that continues over time. What was set into motion in the early 1600s on the Island we now call Martha’s Vineyard is legendary and real—a community of six towns, of diverse peoples, of changing beautiful land and seascapes. Who actually set that human progress in motion is clearly debatable. Nonetheless, the outcome is evident: a union of land and sea, of people, of place, of culture and nature.

The culture hub of the Island has now also been set into motion—the Martha’s Vineyard Museum. The Island has embraced the bold move of its museum from Edgartown to Vineyard Haven and the reimagining of its original historical society at the Cooke House. They echo each other’s fresh start and the launching of new beginnings in Vineyard Haven, in Edgartown and across the entire Island.

For Vineyard Haven, it is the herculean effort to re-create the 1895 Marine Hospital into the Island’s museum, its new cultural hub for the Island. Soon the Vineyard will have 15 galleries filled with the stories of the Island, exhibiting some of the 17,000 objects given and collected over generations for the museum to steward and interpret. The collection is a wonderful gift from past Islanders to the present, while the new museum is a timeless gift from present Islanders to the future. The New Year will unveil those stories told and yet untold...setting in motion a new era in a new museum.

The original home of the museum in Edgartown at the Cooke House property will also be transformed, interpreting the history of Edgartown from *its* beginnings. The property and program will take visitors back to geologic times and bring it through early human habitation into the whaling era. A “learning loop” trail of historic interpretation, colonial gardens and a contemplative garden and fountain will re-create a new beginning for the Cooke House and the museum in Edgartown.

All will be set in motion with new bold beginnings in 2019.



Phil Wallis

Service Stars, 1917-1918

The tradition of displaying a blue star to honor a family member in wartime service, and a gold star to memorialize one who had died in service, began in the United States during World War I. The far-more-elaborate system shown here, from a pamphlet issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1917, did not catch on. [MV Museum, "World War I" Collection (RU 300), Box 1, Folder 16]



In Service



Wounded in Service



Decorated for
Distinguished Service



Died in Service



Missing



Captured



Wounded and
Decorated for
Distinguished Service



Decorated for
Distinguished Service
and Died in Service



Wounded, Decorated for
Distinguished Service,
and Missing

Edgartown from the Sea



View from the deck of a sailing ship in Nantucket Sound, looking south toward Edgartown, around the American Revolution. The land would have looked much the same to the first English settlers in the early 1600s (from *The Atlantic Neptune*, 1777).

On the Cover: A modern replica of the *Godspeed*, a typical English merchant sailing ship from the early 1600s (photo by Trader Doc Hogan).