

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



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 32, NO. 1

AUGUST 1990

Sketch by Laurie Miller



Nathan Skiffe's house, 1690.

The 300-Year Evolution Of a Chilmark Homestead

by JONATHAN F. SCOTT

The Barn House: What Is It?

"Iceberg" Smith, Coast Guard Captain, Returns to the Island

by FLORENCE KERN

Documents: *Jeremiah Pease Diary*

Book Review: *Splendor Sailed the Sound*

Bits & Pieces

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This journal, *The Intelligencer*, is beginning its 32nd year. It draws from the documents, maps, photographs and books in our library and archives for almost every article. With our new space we will be able to store these priceless materials properly and preserve them for generations to come. But that added space costs money, both to buy and to adapt.

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Editor Emeritus: Gale Huntington

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The Dukes County Historical Society was founded in 1922 to preserve the history of Dukes County for the public benefit. It is a nonprofit institution, supported by membership dues, contributions and bequests, which are tax deductible. Its annual meeting is held in August in Edgartown.

It maintains two historic houses, both providing guided tours to the public during the summer, one in Edgartown and the other in Vineyard Haven. A nominal fee is charged to non members.

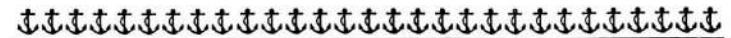
In Edgartown, the Thomas Cooke House, circa 1765, is on the corner School and Cooke Streets. Acquired by the Society in 1935, it is maintained as a museum of Island history.

Also on the Society grounds in Edgartown are the Francis Foster Museum and Gale Huntington Library. Both are open to the public year round. The Museum has an exhibition of the Vineyard's maritime heritage. The Library contains logs, journals, genealogies and other Island documents, plus many photographs and volumes of history.

The Edgartown property also includes the Gay Head Lighthouse exhibit with its 1854 Fresnel lens and the Carriage Shed containing various old boats and wagons, including an 1854 hand pumper fire engine. These, too, are open to the public all year.

In Vineyard Haven, the Society maintains the Jirah Luce House, circa 1804, formerly operated by the Tisbury Museum, now part of the Dukes County Historical Society. The exhibits are of early Vineyard explorers and settlers, and other aspects of local history.

The public is invited to visit the Society and also to take out a membership, which includes a subscription to this quarterly journal and free admission to our buildings.



U. S. Coast Guard's
200th Birthday

"Iceberg" Smith, Coast Guard Captain, Returns to the Island

by FLORENCE KERN

THE headlines on the front page of the *Vineyard Gazette* were big and bold Friday, September 21, 1928:
Ed's Ship Is Home
From Arctic Ocean

Cutter Marion Brings Polar Bear, Tisbury Township People Board the Ship

The excitement had begun very early Sunday morning when Isabel Smith received a radiogram at her home in Vineyard Haven. It was from her husband, Captain Edward Hanson Smith of the United States Coast Guard cutter *Marion*, then on his way back from the Arctic.

The message announced that he was going to stop at the Vineyard that same day and she was to "pass the word around for all the children in town to meet him and see the polar bear he had brought from Baffin Land."

The excited Isabel wasted no time in alerting friends and neighbors. By the time *Marion* rounded into Vineyard Haven harbor, the steamship wharf was crowded, not only with children, but with adults as well. Captain Ed was a favorite son, valedictorian of the Class of 1909 at Tisbury High School. After a year at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he entered the United States Revenue Cutter

FLORENCE KERN, a summer visitor to the Vineyard since 1926, has written this tribute to "Iceberg" Smith to commemorate the 200th birthday of the Coast Guard, in which many Islanders, like Captain Smith, have served with honor. She is the author of two bicentennial books: *Revenue Cutters in the Civil War* and *Coast Guard Tradition*. A Wellesley College graduate, she has a graduate degree in American Studies from Seton Hall University.

Service, now the Coast Guard, as a cadet in 1910.¹

He was a direct descendant of the Rev. John Smith of Barnstable and Sandwich, whose son Benjamin married Jedidah Mayhew, youngest child of Thomas Mayhew Jr. Through this marriage he was related to many old families of the Island, including the Chases, Worths, Osbornes, Daggetts and Claghorns in addition to the Mayhews. One of his paternal forebears was Capt. Nathan Smith, master mariner, distinguished for sea service in both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution.

On his maternal side he had Pilgrim ancestry. He was related to noteworthy master mariners and clergymen on the Cape and the Island. One ancestor operated the ferry between Holmes Hole and the mainland in 1756. Two others were in the Sea Coast Defence Company in 1776.

But the crowd on the wharf wasn't there because of his ancestry. His immediate family was among the best known and most popular in town. His father, Edward Jones Smith, was the owner of the steamship wharf in Vineyard Haven and served as the local agent for the New England Steamship Lines. His mother was Sarah (Pease) Smith. The family lived in the stately old house, now known as the "1785 House," a hundred yards or so from the today's ferry slips.

Perhaps because he had been brought up on the shores of Vineyard Sound, he was interested not only in the handling of vessels of all kinds, but in the tides and the currents. He grew up in an age in which memories of the *Titanic* disaster brought the study of icebergs to the fore and it was their meanderings that became Captain Ed's special science.

He was enthralled with the dynamics of ice and water, even to the point of studying the movement of a piece of ice in a glass of water. So enthralled was he that he was dubbed "Iceberg" Smith, a nickname that clung to him for the rest of his life.

In 1925, he was sent abroad to confer on the subject with

¹ Edward Hanson Smith was born in 1889, died in 1961. He married Isabel Briar in 1924.

U. S. Coast Guard photograph



Capt. Edward Hanson Smith of Vineyard Haven, authority on icebergs.

European oceanographers. His wife, Isabel, went with him and their first son, Porter, was born in London that year.² In 1926, he assisted in the establishment of the International Ice Patrol. In 1928, he was placed in command of the small, sturdy cutter *Marion* and in July was sent to the Arctic to study and chart the frigid waters between Labrador and Greenland. It was on his way back from this assignment that he decided to stop in his home town en route to the Coast Guard base at New London.

As the home-town crowd awaited her arrival, the little cutter swung toward the dock. Her three-inch rifle "barked twice and everyone knew it was Ed's ship," the *Gazette* reported. Isabel was there, waving from the caplog, with three-year-old Porter by her side.

Once *Marion* was tied up, Captain Ed invited the crowd to come aboard to meet his crew and the polar bear cub, secured in a cage on deck.

² Porter served as Tisbury Town Clerk in later years.

"The bear was there," the *Gazette* reporter wrote, "all 150 pounds of extremely cantankerous white bruin with plenty of teeth and claws." Evidence of those teeth and claws could be seen in the bandaged fingers of several crew members. The bear had been captured in Baffin Land after her mother had been shot. The mother's skin was ten feet long and, in a rather ghoulish gesture, was hung on the deck near the caged orphan. On display also were many Eskimo relics, including a kayak.

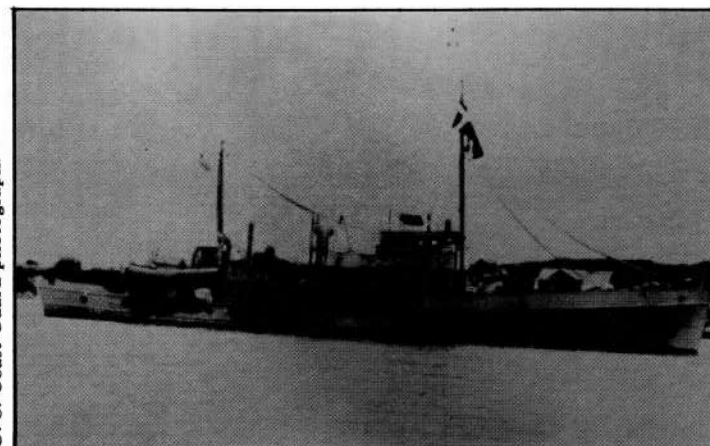
The crew totalled 37, six more than the usual complement for the small cutter. The voyage had been rugged and they were happy to be ashore. *Marion* was one of a fleet of cutters, affectionately known as the "buck and a quarters" because they were 125 feet long. All had long and interesting careers in the service.

On her Arctic assignment, *Marion*, crowded with extra men and Captain "Iceberg's" research equipment, had crisscrossed Davis Strait and Baffin Bay, the waters between Labrador, Greenland and Baffin Island, "taking stations" along the way. She had recorded 2000 observations of water temperature and salinity, made 1700 soundings, and taken numerous bottom and water samples.

During the voyage, both her winches had broken and repairs were made in Greenland, with the permission of the Danish government. She stopped in Godthaab and Bodhavn, at that time the capitals of north and south Greenland. Some of her men had gone ashore to climb the Greenland Ice Cap. With the serious overcrowding, there was little room for food storage so rations consisted mainly of codfish, whale meat, seal and polar bear steaks.

Marion sailed within 20 degrees of the North Pole, turning south when she encountered pack ice near Cape Dyer on Baffin Land. Before leaving the North Atlantic, she had seen a multitude of glaciers and the countless icebergs they had calved. It was "Iceberg's" conclusion on this voyage that the state of the pack ice determined the drift of the bergs. Heavy

U. S. Coast Guard photograph.



Cutter Marion flies a Danish flag while under repair in Greenland.

pack ice sent them ashore; loose ice let them drift south into the sea lanes.

Always quick to make friends and to renew old friendships in whatever port he was, Captain Ed spent a busy Sunday in Vineyard Haven. Before the day was over, he had invited all the Tisbury school children to come aboard *Marion* the next afternoon to see his ship with her polar bear and the relics of the far North.

Down to the wharf they came, several hundred of them in orderly procession supervised by their teachers. By grade, they clambered aboard and got first-hand lessons in geography and oceanography. It was a memorable afternoon for them. Somewhere in Vineyard scrapbooks, there must be many school essays about the polar bear and the Arctic that were written after a visit aboard "Ed's ship."

Marion sailed off that night to New London to report the findings of her historic voyage, a first in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay exploration.

In 1930, "Iceberg" was assigned to Harvard where he received the University's first Ph.D. in geologic and oceanographic physics. The next year, 1931, he was the only American on an 8000-mile polar flight aboard the German



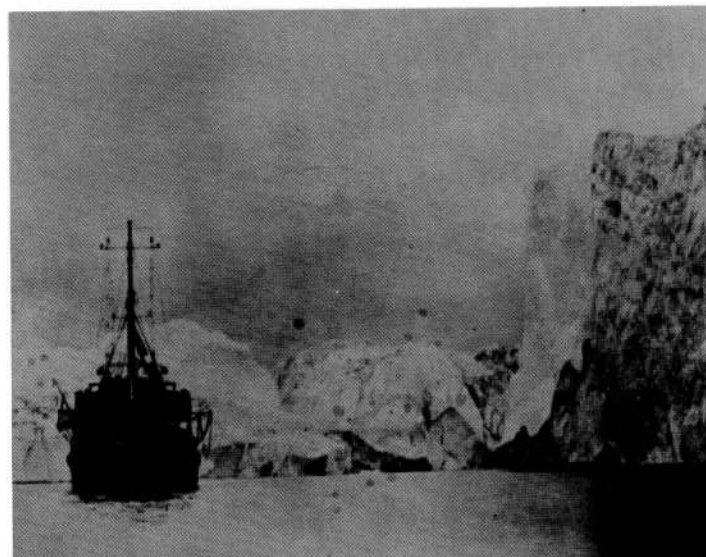
Marion, off the Jacobshaven Glacier, during her 1928 survey cruise.

dirigible, *Graf Zeppelin*, serving as navigator and scientific observer. It is said that when the huge dirigible reached the north magnetic pole, Captain Ed "grinned triumphantly" and gave the order: "Now head south."

Earlier in his career, during Prohibition, he had seen action against rum-runners along the Atlantic coast as commander of several destroyers and Coast Guard bases.

His knowledge of the North Atlantic was invaluable in World War II, both before and after the United States entered the war. As Rear Admiral and Commander of the Greenland Patrol, he had the job of protecting the rugged coasts of Greenland from German invasion. Then, as Commander of the Navy's Task Force 24, part of the United States Atlantic Fleet, he protected American ship convoys from German submarines. At war's end, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

After the war, he became Commander of the Third Coast Guard District. In 1946, he was named Commander of the



Another view of the Marion alongside the Jacobshaven Glacier.

entire Eastern District of the Coast Guard, a post he held until his retirement in 1950. It was said that the only reason he was never named Commandant of the Coast Guard was that he had not had enough desk experience at the headquarters in Washington.

Lithe and energetic, even in his later years, "Iceberg" had a magnetic personality that made many friends, despite the ice-like countenance that went with his nickname. His stern eyes, it was said, sparkled with what was called his "Greenland stare."

From 1950 to 1955, he was Director of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, where from his office he could see his native Island across Vineyard Sound. He lived in nearby Quisset, where he died Oct. 29, 1961, at age 72. He left his wife and three sons, Porter, Stuart and Jeremiah.

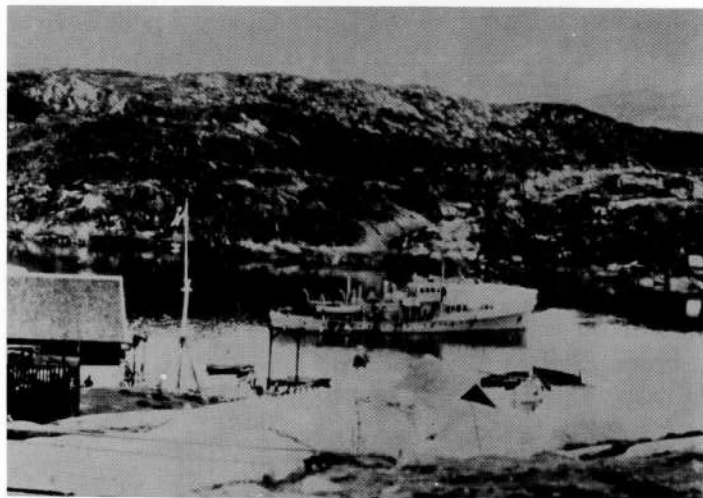
After services in Quisset, he was buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery in Vineyard Haven. There is an extensive exhibit of his accomplishments at the Seaman's Bethel in Vineyard

Haven. The Coast Guard's center for the study of physical and ocean sciences at the Academy in New London, Connecticut, was named Smith Hall and dedicated in his honor in 1974.

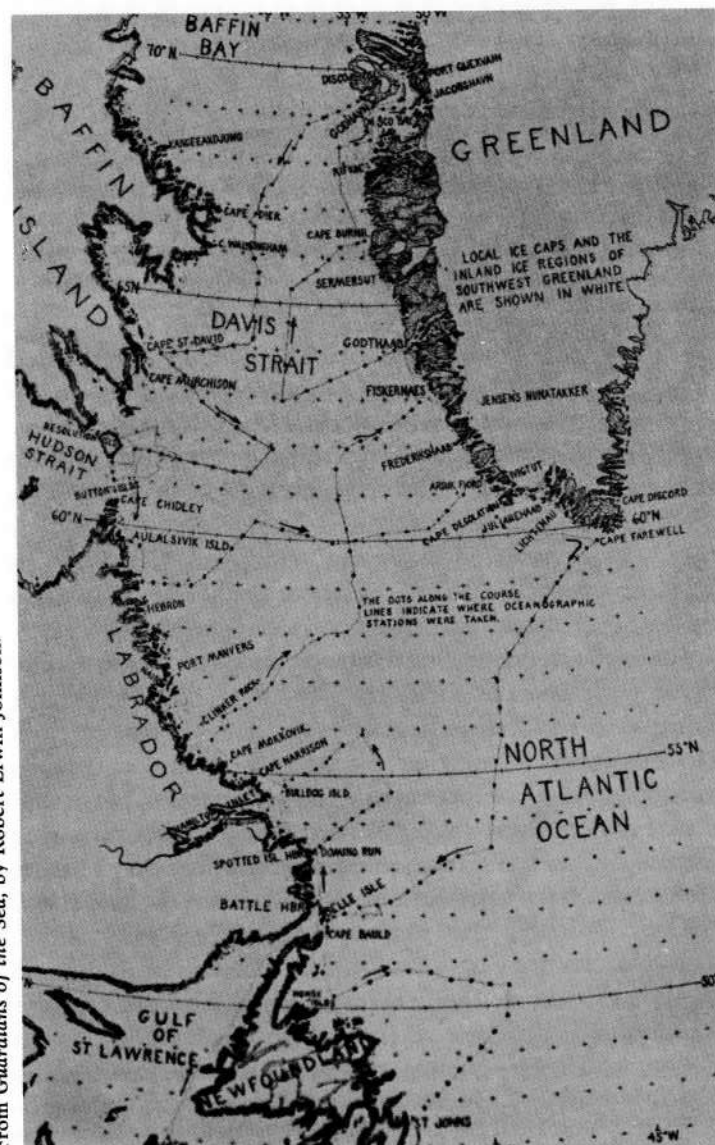
Acknowledgments

For much of the information in the article, the author is indebted to Paul Johnson and Pamela McNulty of the Coast Guard Academy, New London, Connecticut. Also of help were several unnamed reporters of the *Vineyard Gazette*, Marion McClure, Town Clerk of Tisbury, Ralph Packer, a longtime friend of the Smith family, Truman B. Strobridge, Capt. R. B. Dinsmore and, particularly, Prof. Robert Erwin Johnson of the University of Alabama, author of the new Coast Guard history, *Guardians of the Sea*.

U. S. Coast Guard photograph.

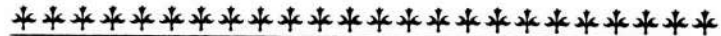


Marion at anchor in an unidentified harbor in northern Greenland.



From *Guardians of the Sea*, by Robert Erwin Johnson.

Track chart of "Iceberg's" survey of Baffin Bay and Davis Strait.



Barn House

The 300-Year Evolution Of a Chilmark Homestead

by JONATHAN F. SCOTT

WHEN Chilmark was first settled in the 1680s and 1690s, the early pioneers built their homesteads in family groupings along South Road.

The Mayhew family holdings were the largest and closest to the already established small village of Tisbury (now West Tisbury). They included the Atlantic beaches and salt meadows between Tisbury and Chilmark Great Ponds (Quansoo and Quenames), the woods and lowland meadows up to South Road and the wooded ridges just beyond.

At the far end of South Road were the Skiffe family holdings. Nathaniel Skiffe's was, for a time, the westernmost homestead in Chilmark. Although its exact location has been lost, we know that his fence line came down to Wequobsque Cliffs between Windy Gates and Stonewall Pond. His brother Nathan owned the land around upper Chilmark Pond and his homestead, now known as "Barn House," is one of the two surviving houses from this period.

Their brother, the wealthy Major Benjamin Skiffe, Commander of the up-Island Militia, chose the area around the large stream at the foot of Abel's Hill and built there a fulling mill. Ever since, the stream has been known as Fulling Mill Brook. Though his house is gone, the remains

JONATHAN F. SCOTT, whose doctoral dissertation is entitled *Early Colonial Houses of Martha's Vineyard*, is a Professor of Art and Architectural History at Castleton State College in Vermont. He has previously written about old Chilmark houses in this journal. In summer, besides researching and writing, he manages his Island building business, specializing in restoration. During the winter, his son Jonathan takes over, with, of course, occasional parental supervision.

of the old mill dam can still be seen along the brook.

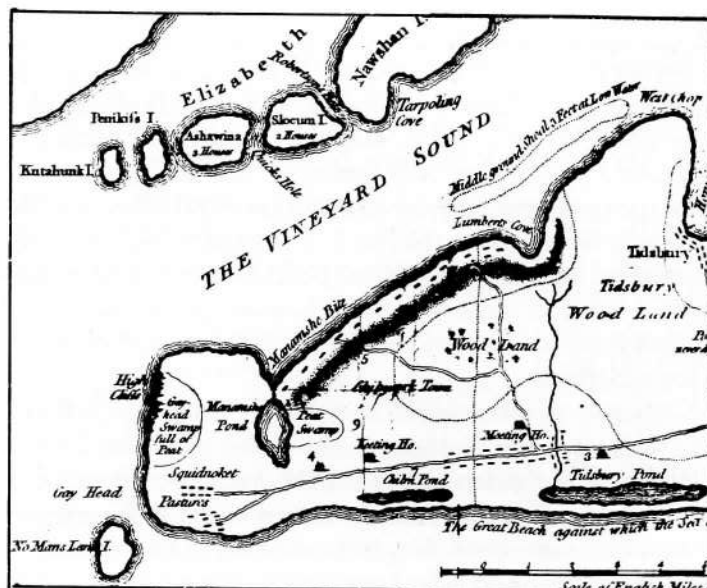
Between the Mayhews and the Skiffes, in what was then the center of Chilmark, was built the meeting house on the top of Abel's Hill. On the Skiffe side of the hill, Rodolphus Thacher, the minister, built his house. Nathan Bassett, who gave the land for the meeting house, owned the eastern side of Abel's Hill down to the Pond. The original Allen family homestead lands extended from the Bassetts to the Mayhews and included all the lowland meadows along the Pond from Allen's Point to Wade's Cove and across the road up to the King's Highway.

Only two of the original homesteads along South Road still survive. One of these is the house of James Allen, founder of the Allen family on the Vineyard. Because it was moved across the road at the turn of the 19th century, there arose some confusion about its history and its origins were forgotten. Recently, I was able to trace it back as the original Allen homestead of 1688-90. Today, it belongs to the Timothy Stanley family.¹

However, a few years ago, the James Allen house would not have been remembered under that name and, in fact, if you were to ask an old-timer what the oldest house in Chilmark was, unhesitatingly, he would have answered: "The Barn House." In one respect he would have been correct. Although the James Allen house may predate it by one or two years, Barn House is the oldest South Road house which still stands on its original site. This year, 1990, it celebrates its 300th anniversary.

As we see it today, Barn House sits at the top of a gentle rise just up the hill from the entrance to the Lucy Vincent Beach. From here you can look out across South Road to the fields which once must have been the pride of the original farm. Now, as then, a beautiful expanse of meadow and pasture stretches down to the Upper Pond, overlooking

¹ Jonathan Scott, *The Early Colonial Houses of Martha's Vineyard*, U. of Minn., doctoral dissertation, 1985, v.II, pp. 200ff. See map in this issue for house sites.



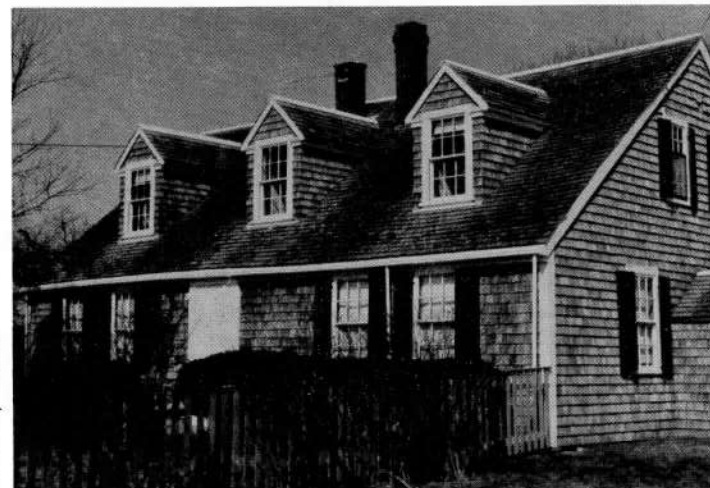
Western half of de Crevecoeur's 1783 map. He describes the area near Chilmark Pond as the "best mowing grounds in the Island."

the ocean beyond. J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, in his late 18th-century description of Martha's Vineyard, noted that along the northern shores of Chilmark Pond were "the best mowing grounds in the Island, yielding four tons of black grass per acre."²

In the 19th century, the old homestead was still part of a flourishing farm, but at the turn of the century it fell into a decline, as did many Island farms. In June 1919, it was purchased by a group of writers, artists and teachers as a cooperative for a summer community. It still exists as such and is commonly known as "Barn House," and legally as "Chilmark Associates."

Though used now for other than their original purposes, the old buildings and outbuildings have been nicely preserved. Here, one can still get a complete sense of an early

² J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, Thomas Davies and Lockyer Davis, London, 1782, p.159, legend to map that follows.



Nathan Skiffe's homestead, now the "Barn House," as it looks today.

Island farmstead. The high stone walls define old laneways, cattle enclosures and the house lot. The better farmhouses, like this, were fenced in to keep wandering chickens and sheep away from the immediate house, or at least out of the front yard. Part of the large barn behind the house, which is now used for communal gatherings and meals, was built in the 18th century with timbers retrieved from the old Chilmark meeting house after it was rebuilt. Many of the fields are kept clear, providing the open areas and vistas so common in earlier times.

When I first looked into the history of this fine old pioneer homestead, I was surprised that its original owner, and indeed the original date of construction, had been forgotten. The well-known architectural historian, Harold Shurtleiff from Harvard, who spent one summer at Barn House in the 1940s, estimated the date of the house at about 1690; in this he was remarkably accurate. Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, who compiled a Vineyard history based on Island lore, called Barn House "the oldest house in Chilmark" and stated that it was "built by Simon Mayhew, son of the



The Barn House from the back yard. Photo was taken in August 1956.

missionary John.”³ Strictly speaking, neither of her assertions is correct, though it is true that Simon Mayhew and his family lived there in the early 18th century, being the first of three generations of Mayhews to occupy the farm.

Thus, it is not surprising that it was later remembered as a Mayhew homestead. The elder Simon Mayhew left the farm to his son, Simon, who in turn willed it to his son, Oliver, and in this succession Mayhews occupied the place through most of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Oliver and his wife, Jane, had no children. After their deaths, the property passed out of the family and was bought in 1834 by Herman Vincent, who lived and successfully farmed there for many years.⁴ At the time of its sale to Chilmark Associates, it was still known as the “Herman Vincent” farm.

In this way, we can trace the farm directly back to Simon Mayhew, but was he the original homesteader on the site, as Eleanor Mayhew stated? If we consult the Charles E. Banks genealogy, we find that Simon, the son of John Mayhew the missionary and great-grandson of Thomas Mayhew Sr., was born in 1687, so he would have been only three years old in 1690, obviously too young to build his own homestead.⁵ Either the house was not so old as Eleanor

³ Eleanor Ransom Mayhew, *Martha's Vineyard: A Short History and Guide*, Dukes County Historical Society, Edgartown, 1956, p.131.

⁴ Dukes County Deeds, 3:202.

⁵ Charles E. Banks, *The History of Martha's Vineyard*, DCHS, Edgartown, 1966, v.III, pp.303 and 306.



Same view in 1990. All that has changed is the vegetation.

Mayhew stated, and as Shurtleiff believed, or some predecessor was the builder.

Simon Mayhew gives us the answer. In his will of August 1, 1746, he stated: “I give and Bequeth unto Ruth Mayhew my dearly beloved wife, the improvement of one half of my lands which I bought of Benjamin Skiffe whereon my dwelling house now standeth.”⁶

Looking back in the land deeds, we find that Simon bought the farm from Benjamin Skiffe in 1732 for 550 pounds and he included in the sale “my Dwelling house and barn.”⁷ Benjamin (not to be confused with his more famous, then deceased, uncle of the same name who had built the Fulling Mill down the road), referred to the house as the “homestead,” and it was, in fact, just that — the original home of his family in Chilmark.⁸ Benjamin had inherited part of the property, the rest he bought from his brothers and sisters after his father, Nathan, died in 1725/6. Nathan’s will spoke of “the lands on which my house now standeth . . . together with the buildings thereon,” half of which he left to Benjamin.⁹

Nathan moved from Tisbury (now West Tisbury) to the new lands being opened up for settlement in Chilmark about 1690, the second Skiffe to do so (his brother Benjamin was first). On August 16, 1686, he had purchased from Matthew

⁶ Dukes County Probate, 4:1213.

⁷ Dukes County Deeds, 5:127.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Will of Nathan Skiffe, Dec.23,1725, Dukes County Probate. Also see Banks, v.III, p.434.



Fig. 1. The Skiffe homestead, a half house, as it probably looked in 1690. Mayhew fifty acres of land bounded southerly and westerly by Pease's Brook, which included the property on which the Barn House now stands.¹⁰ The original part of the house must have been built shortly after this and certainly before 1694 when it was included on the map of that date by Simon Athearn.¹¹ Thus, we have a very probable date of around 1690 for the house and if this is correct Barn House will be 300 years old this year.

In *Figure 1*, we show what Nathan Skiffe's pioneer homestead probably looked like in the 1690s. Like so many early Island dwellings, this one, we believe, began as a halfhouse, the east half being the original. We surmise this because of the obvious asymmetry of the front of the house, which often happened when a part was added to an earlier one. The front door, especially, is too far to the left. This was probably because it gave entrance to the front hall and stairway just in front of the large chimney stack built against what was then the end wall of the half-house. We note also that the rafters are numbered from the eastern end and the large southeastern front room is an intentionally perfect square, 15 feet, 7 inches on a side. The western room, which we believe was added later, is smaller in width by a foot

¹⁰ Dukes County Deeds, 1:341.

¹¹ Banks, v.II, "Annals of Chilmark, p.7.

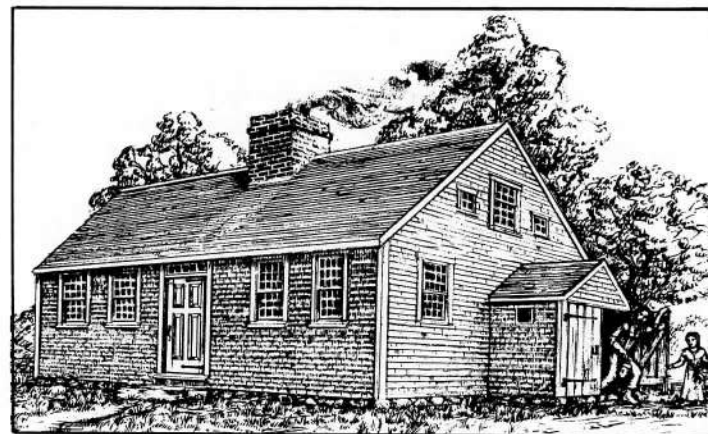


Fig. 2. The house, enlarged to a full house, when Simon Mayhew owned it.

and does not retain the perfect proportions of its counterpart. The logic of this leads me to believe the east room was the original, planned that way from the start. Its large size was also remarkable; in fact, at the time it was built, it may have been one of the largest front rooms on the Island. The stonework of the original cellar, also on the eastern end, and the hewn oak frame are done with particular care and craftsmanship. Nathan Skiffe obviously wanted his homestead to be one of the best in town.

In the second drawing (*Fig. 2*), windows are of the old style: diamond-paned, leaded casement type. They were customarily of small, narrow proportions because glass was hard to get and exceedingly expensive at the time. Reconstructions of the Vincent house in Edgartown, c. 1672,¹² and the Norton (Red Farm) in Lamberts Cove, c. 1700,¹³ show that there was only a single narrow casement window on each side of the front door in the early Island houses, which is what we have shown here. Sash windows did not come into general use until the 1720s and 1730s.

Figure 2, then, shows the house as it may have looked in

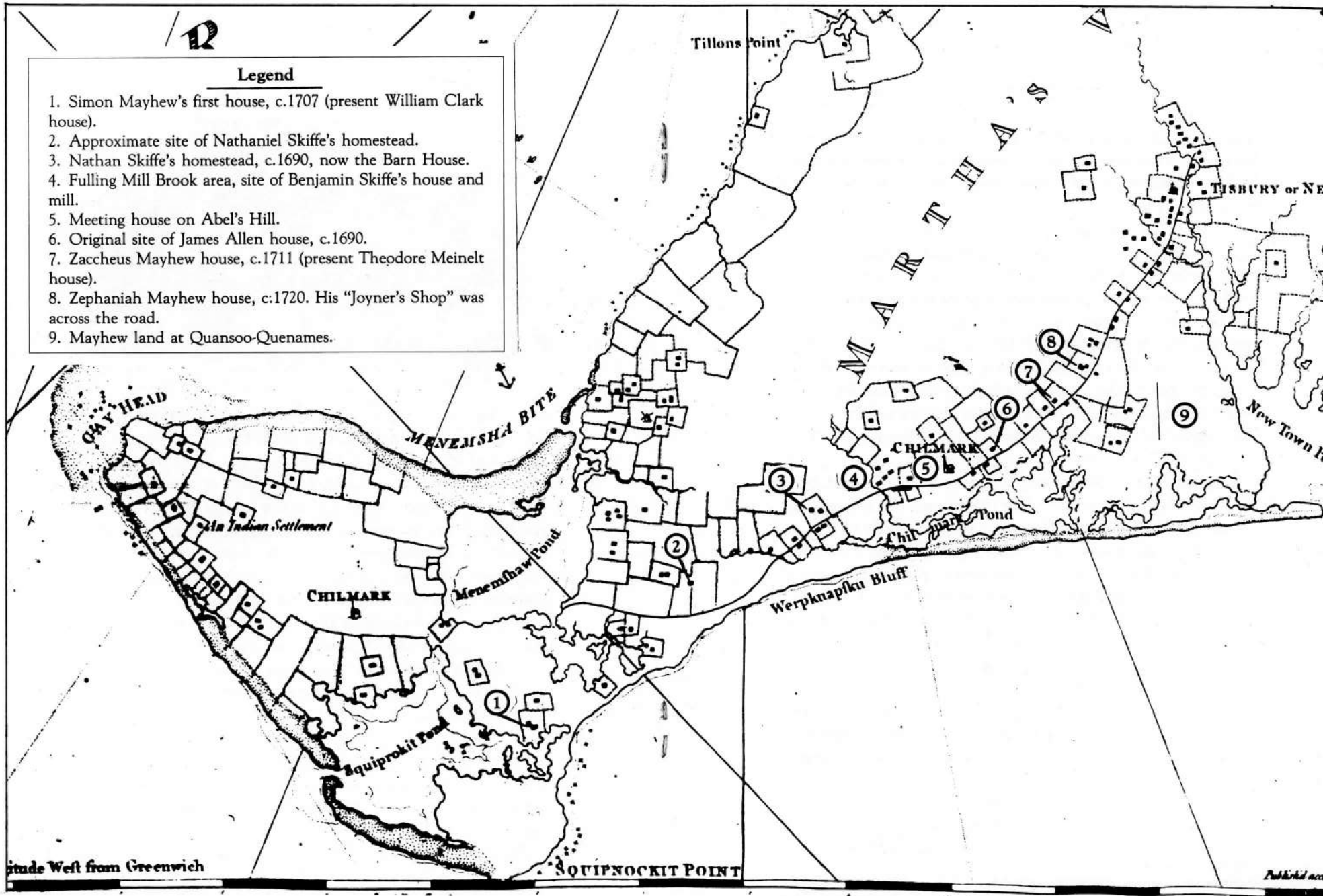
¹² Ann W. Baker, "The Vincent House: Architecture and Restoration," *Intelligencer*, v.20, no.1, Aug.1978, pp.29-59.

¹³ During restoration of the Norton farm in 1975, Tony Higgins found framing for a single casement window between the two windows beside the front door.

R

Legend

1. Simon Mayhew's first house, c.1707 (present William Clark house).
2. Approximate site of Nathaniel Skiffe's homestead.
3. Nathan Skiffe's homestead, c.1690, now the Barn House.
4. Fulling Mill Brook area, site of Benjamin Skiffe's house and mill.
5. Meeting house on Abel's Hill.
6. Original site of James Allen house, c.1690.
7. Zaccheus Mayhew house, c.1711 (present Theodore Meinelt house).
8. Zephaniah Mayhew house, c.1720. His "Joyner's Shop" was across the road.
9. Mayhew land at Quansoo-Quenames.



Des Barres map of 1776, one of the Atlantic Neptune series made for the Royal Navy, shows up-Island buildings. The road to Gay Head crosses the

ponds at Chalker's Creek. Shallow then, it was fordable at low tide. Tisbury or New Town was today's West Tisbury.

the 1740s, when Simon Mayhew owned the farm. In his will of 1746, he wrote of leaving to his wife Ruth, "the improvement of the Western half of my said dwelling house,"¹⁴ so we know that by this time the western rooms had been added, bringing Barn House up to its present full-house dimensions.

We must be careful not to misinterpret Simon's word "improvement." In those days, and in that context, it meant "use" rather than "to change for the better." Thus, he left to Ruth the use of the western half of the house. Simon, his son, who took over the farm, presumably was to occupy the original eastern half with his new family. Shortly after his father made his will, young Simon married Abiah Vincent and, by the time of his father's death in 1753, they had two children with another on the way. Ultimately, Simon and Abiah were to have seven children, all born in this house.¹⁵

It is possible that Simon and his son, planning ahead, built the western "improvement" to the house, as one reading of the will could suggest. However, we cannot discount the possibility that at an earlier time, Nathan Skiffe may have added on to his own original homestead as his family grew, for he had 12 children in two marriages.¹⁶

We note that both east and west ends of the house are vertically boarded in the early "plank frame" construction technique that originated in Plymouth Colony.¹⁷ Nathan and his brothers had come to the Island from Sandwich on the Cape, then part of the Plymouth Colony. Moreover, both halves of the house have similar framing, featuring unusual double summer beams spanning both front rooms.¹⁸

¹⁴ Dukes County Probate, 4:12-3.

¹⁵ Banks, v.III, p.316.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.434.

¹⁷ For the origin and history of the plank-frame technique, see Richard M. Candee, *A Documentary History of Plymouth Colony Architecture, 1620-1700*, *Old Time New England*, Jan., July and Oct., 1969.

¹⁸ Summer beam is an architectural term for a heavy, horizontal timber that serves as a supporting beam, from the Norman French *le somier*, meaning "beast of burden," because it carried on its back the joist of the second floor.

Vertical plank-frame walls had generally gone out of house construction in Chilmark by 1730, after the death of Samuel Tilton, town carpenter. By the 1730s and 1740s, horizontal exterior boarding and interior walls over studs would have been the common building technique, as seen first in Zephaniah Mayhew's fine house of 1720 (the Fenner farmhouse, now owned by Allen Eisenberg).¹⁹ Zephaniah was a cousin of Simon Mayhew.

Therefore, we are inclined to believe that Nathan Skiffe, not Simon Mayhew, was responsible for both halves of the house. The western part could very well have been added by 1700, shortly after Nathan's marriage to his second wife, Mercy Chipman of Sandwich. Nathan's first wife, Hepsibah Codman, had died in 1696, within a year of the birth of their seventh child. Subsequently, Mercy had five more children, all born in the homestead, which, we hope, had been enlarged by that time!

Although Simon may not have added to the homestead he purchased from the Skiffes, it is probable that he improved it in more subtle ways. We credit him with adding the large, paired, twelve-over-twelve sash windows with six-by-eight panes, as shown in *Figure 2*, replacing the single, small casements. These windows, a Georgian innovation, were coming into vogue after 1726 with the increased availability of glass manufactured in the colony. In Nathan Skiffe's time, glass had to be imported from England.

We know that cousin Zephaniah Mayhew had a "joyner's shop" a short distance down South Road where just such sash windows could have been made.²⁰ Their addition to the house would certainly have brightened the interior rooms. Along with these sash windows, small windows in the upper gables would have eased the darkness in the eaves and in the tiny loft above the collar ties where the many children in the family were tucked away each night. In the

¹⁹ For documentation and a description of the Zephaniah Mayhew house, see Scott, *Early Houses*, v.II, pp.294-302.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

sketch is also shown a paneled front door over which is a five-paned transom window to let light into the front hall and stairway. The technique of raised paneling had come in about 1725 and cousin Zephaniah's front rooms have some of the earliest and loveliest examples of this on the Island.²¹ Thus, a door of this kind to grace the front of Simon's new home seems appropriate.

About 1786, the old meeting house on Abel's hill was dismantled and rebuilt on a new site near Middle Road.²² The younger Simon and his son salvaged timbers from this project and with them built the fine, large barn that gives Barn House its name today.²³ In this way, the meeting house where his father had served as Deacon for so many years was, in part, preserved on the family property.

A little background about the elder Simon is appropriate here. Interest in religious matters ran strong in his branch of the Mayhew family. His grandfather, Thomas Mayhew Jr., had begun missionary work among the Indians shortly after he arrived with the first settlers in 1642. Simon's father, John Mayhew, Thomas's youngest son, grew up fluent in the Indian language and took over the mission work. He was pastor of the English settlement in Tisbury (now West Tisbury) and missionary to the up-Island Indians until he died in 1689 at 37 years of age. Experience Mayhew, Simon's older brother, later became missionary to the Indians, continuing the family tradition for more than 50 years. He gained wide recognition in New England for his Indian language translations of the New Testament and the Psalms. For his missionary work he was awarded an honorary degree by Harvard.

Simon in his own way contributed for, in his mature years, he served as Deacon to the Chilmark Congregational

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Banks, v.II, "Annals of Chilmark," pp.53-4.

²³ The Des Barres map of 1776 pp.20-21, places Nathan Skiffe's homestead barn behind and west of the house, a different location from that of today's barn, built after the map was drawn. The present barn, built with meeting-house timbers, is on the high ground behind and slightly east of the house.



Photo by author.

The barn, for which Barn House was named, with stone cattle paddock.

Church²⁴ and, indeed, we have to believe that his interest in the religious life of this community influenced his decision to buy the Nathan Skiffe homestead and to move his family there.

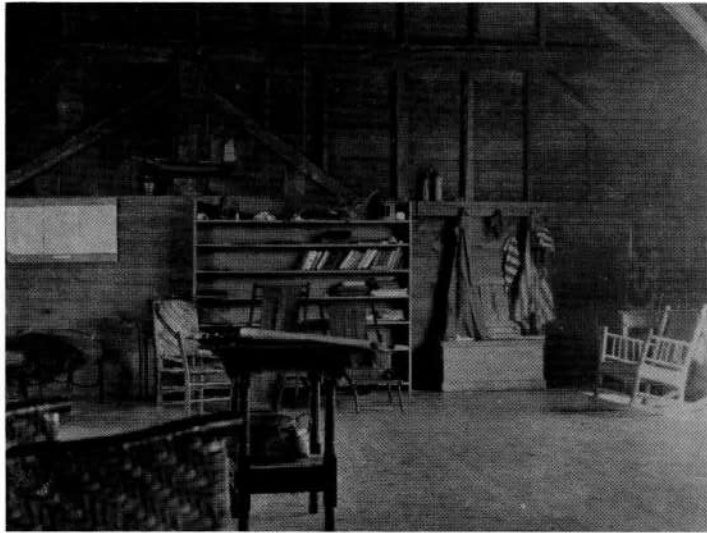
I have been able to trace Simon's earlier dwelling to the westernmost reaches of Chilmark in the upland hills of what was then called Nashaquitsa.²⁵ In a lovely, but lonely spot overlooking Squibnocket Pond and Beach, Simon built his first house (the present William Clark house), probably about 1707 on land left him by his father, John. There he lived, farmed and raised a fine family. His oldest son, Joseph, imbued with the intelligence and idealism of his family, attended Harvard College, graduating in the class of 1730 and became, according to Banks, "a leader of the patriots in the Revolutionary period."²⁶

²⁴ Banks, v.III, p.306.

²⁵ See Scott, *Early Houses*, v.II, pp.243-52.

²⁶ Banks, v.III, p.306. Joseph's education was paid for by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to train him to be an Indian missionary. He went to Block Island as minister/missionary in 1734, but after soon returned to Harvard where he was appointed tutor, with the Freshman class "committed to his care." Eventually, he was made a Harvard Fellow. It isn't clear when he returned to the Island. In 1774 and 1776, he was Chilmark's delegate to the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts Bay.

Photo courtesy Barn House.



1927 photo of the interior of the barn, the group's socializing place.

Though Simon and his family did well at Nashaquitsa, they must have felt at times somewhat isolated from life in the community. Most Chilmarkers, at this time, lived along South Road, some miles to the east. To get to the meeting house each Sunday, Simon and his family would have to ride over the hills to Stonewall Pond (in those days there was no bridge at Hariph's Creek). They would follow along the shore of the pond across the strip of sand known as Stonewall Beach (it was wider then). Then they headed up along Wequobsque Cliffs to join up with what is now the Windy Gates road, crossing Pease's Brook before finally coming to the South Road at the Lucy Vincent corner west of the Barn House. From there, the going would be easy up to the meeting house on top of Abel's Hill.

It was a long, tiring trip. Small wonder then that when the Skiffe homestead became available a few years after Nathan's death, Simon, now in his mid-forties and a Deacon of the parish, decided to purchase the farm. Closeness to the meeting house and the center of the community, plus

Photo by author.



Rafters in the barn came from Abel's Hill meeting house in the 1780s.

the fertile fields and grazing lands certainly must have appealed to him. Simon may also have enjoyed the unusually spacious main room of the house, so appropriate for social or religious gatherings.

The photograph on page 15, shows the farmhouse as it looks today, having undergone many alterations and additions since the time of the Skiffes and the Mayhews. The two slender chimneys were added in the 19th century, replacing the original massive central stack. By then, more efficient iron stoves had made obsolete the old cooking fireplace in the kitchen, so it was removed along with the chimney which, with its original hand-fired bricks, was undoubtedly by this time in poor or possibly even dangerous shape. The old chimney foundation, however, still remains under the house and part of the original masonry was discovered inside the walls during Barn House renovations in the 1920s.

At that time, the present stairs were put in, leading up from the back room of the house near where the old kitchen



Shoe, found in the rubble of Nathan Skiffe's chimney, is 300 years old.

fireplace would have been. The original stairs were probably in the traditional place in front of the main chimney where there is a closet today.

During the renovations, a small lavatory was set in off the back room next to the new stairway. When the workmen were putting in the lavatory vent pipe, they drilled into the brick of the old central chimney, some of which on the second floor had never been removed. Amidst the masonry they found an old wooden-pegged shoe (for the right foot). Roger Allen, the well-known Chilmark carpenter, said it was common Island practice to throw one old shoe into the rubble of a chimney when it was being constructed — the reason for this practice has been forgotten.²⁷

The three front Georgian-style dormers and the two larger back dormers were also added in the 1920s. They were designed by Boardman Robinson, a well-known artist and illustrator, who taught at the New York Art Student's League for many years. He was one of the most active members of the Barn House cooperative. The larger paned six-over-six sash windows were also added at this time. The

²⁷ This information was given to the author by Ann Hopkins at the Barn House, February 1982.



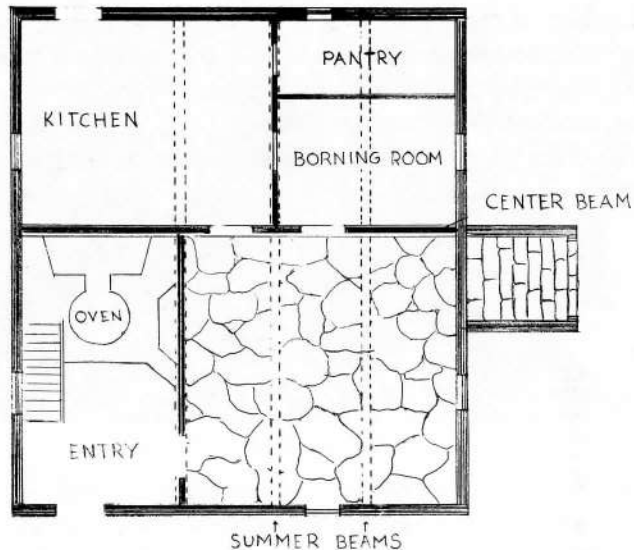
Wooden pegs hold the layers of leather together at the heel.

house once had a tiny "summer kitchen" ell with its own chimney that may have been built at a very early date (like the small 18th century ell on the Vincent house). This was moved out and added onto the present large kitchen ell.²⁸

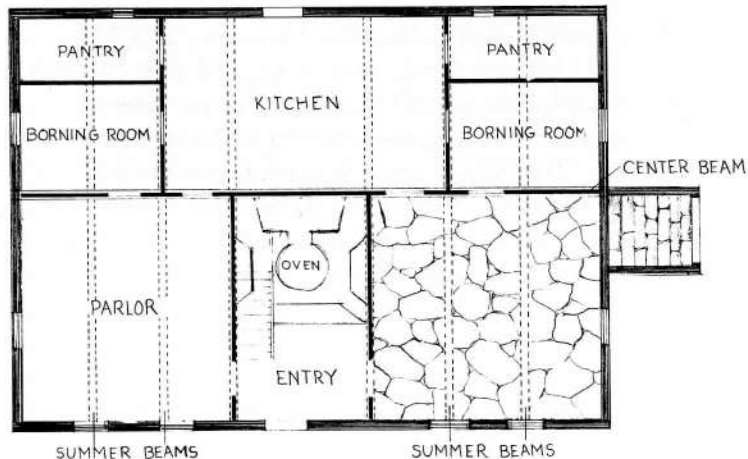
Most of the beams and posts in the house have been boxed in and the old paneling (if there was any) has disappeared with the rebuilding of the chimney. Upstairs, a false ceiling and beaverboard walls obscure the old hand-hewn oak rafters, purlins and collar ties. However, from inside the closets at the base of the rafters, the old roof can still be seen with its wide vertical boards laid on horizontal purlins.

The plan drawings (next page) show the evolution of the floorplan. The first is the half-house, homestead of Nathan Skiffe in the 1690s; the second shows a full-house as it was when Simon Mayhew lived there in the 1740s. Note the unusual double summer beams in both main rooms. Most early Colonial houses use only one summer beam in these areas. We have reconstructed in the plans where we think burning rooms and pantries opened off the old back kitchen area. The stairs are shown coming up from the front hall, as was traditional.

²⁸ *Ibid.*



Nathan Skiffe house floor plan in 1690s. Flagstones under front room locate the cellar, entered from bulkhead at right. Below, full house in 1740s when Simon Mayhew owned it. Dotted lines are summer beams.



This, then, is the history of a fine early Island house, the oldest in Chilmark on its original site. We have seen how it grew, changed and developed over 300 years.

I congratulate the house, its builders through the years, and the Barn House people who maintain it in this its tricentennial year.



The house in the 1920s

The Barn House: What Is It?

MANY may never have heard of the Barn House or of Chilmark Associates, so a few words of explanation may be welcome.

In the summer of 1918, a small group of artists, writers and academics from Boston and New York met at a weekend house party in Chilmark and found themselves to be so compatible and the location so delightful that they decided to form a summer community there. Five of them, three women and two men, came to Chilmark in April 1919 to select a piece of property. After looking over several, they left without making a decision. Two weeks later, another group arrived, this time there were four persons, with only one, Gertrude L. King, having been in the earlier group.

They looked over their options and decided to buy what they called the "Mayhew Place," the Herman Vincent farm with its barn, several chicken coops and sheds, plus about 40 acres. On May 31, 1919, the deed was recorded with Mrs. King of Boston listed as the buyer and Grace E.M. Tilton of Chilmark as the seller. Two months later, in July, Mrs. King, acting on behalf of the group, bought from Florence C. Vincent of Chilmark the beach and land known as "The Vincent Cliffs" just south of the farm. Mrs. Vincent and her heirs reserved forever "the right to carry away seaweed and drift stuff" along the beach.

Remodelling of the farmhouse to accommodate the group began immediately. By the end of July that summer, the house was ready to be used, although much more work was needed. In August, 35 members and guests arrived, plus four others who served as cook, helpers and a governess. Among those in that first summer stay were the Stanley Kings, the Haskells, the Boardman Robinsons, the Warrens, the Pulsifers, the Burbanks, Edwin Bechtel, Dorothy Kenyon, the Johnsons and others.

Through the years, the chicken coops and other outbuildings, some a considerable distance from the house, were converted into dormitories and the barn was renovated to serve as the communal meeting room.

In addition to members and families, many visited the converted farmhouse as guests, often becoming members later. Among the famous guests were Faye and Walter Lippmann, who left a note reading: "With our thanks for the best time, with the nicest people, in the nicest place on record."

Although it was considered by staid Chilmarkers to be a radical group, the record shows that its meetings were quite harmless and generally apolitical. Most frequent were humorous theatricals written and acted out by members. Each afternoon at five o'clock, the group gathered in the barn, which was furnished simply but comfortably, for conversation and

entertainment after a fun-filled day at the beach. It was widely said that they swam in the nude. Perhaps they did, but there are many photographs showing otherwise.

The name, "Barn House," did not arrive immediately. At one time, various suggestions for names were taken. No one proposed "Barn House." Three that are on the record are the "Chilmark Colony," "Stonewall Farm" and "Open Gates." But no official action was taken on a name until 1927.

On August 7 of that year the annual meeting, which started at 2:15 p.m., had on its agenda as the third item the selection of a name. After some discussion, the name "Stone Paddocks" was chosen. The property, under the previous owner, had been called "Paddock Farm" by some.

After the meeting, the discussions in the barn and the dining room must have been tumultuous because at 10:30

p.m., the annual meeting was reconvened with one item on the agenda: the name. A quick vote rescinded "Stone Paddocks." After more discussion, the name "The Barn" was adopted.

But even that late-night second meeting didn't end the matter. That same week, another meeting was held and "The Barn" name was rescinded. There were too many barns in Chilmark that had been converted to residences, it was argued, and there would be confusion. Finally, the group decided on "Barn House." And Barn House it is today, although more often than not it is spelled as one word, Barnhouse.

Its legal name, rarely used, is "Chilmark Associates."

With such an interesting history and with so many talented members and guests, Barn House needs a full history. Perhaps one will be forthcoming.

A.R.R.

Books

Splendor Sailed the Sound

by George H. Foster and Peter C. Weiglin

Potentials Group, San Mateo, California 944401, 384 pages, \$55.

The ways and by-ways of historical research being what they are, it comes as no surprise that this admirable history of passenger steamboat traffic between New York and New England in the early days was compiled by two Westerners, George Foster of Arizona and Peter Weiglin of California.

A by-product of their studies of eastern railroads, it reviews a significant period in the history of East Coast transportation from the War of 1812 to World War II. It will bring back memories of yesterday to vintage Vineyarders — memories of the *Nobska*, *Naushon*, *Uncatena*, *Priscilla* and *Commonwealth* and of the piers at New York, New Bedford, Fall River and the Island.

Well illustrated with 450 photographs of the "Sound steamers," as they were called, the text includes chapters on the many busy ports between New York and Massachusetts, all dominated by railroad interests that controlled traffic on land and sea.

Notable among these companies was the Fall River Line, which provided the fastest service from New York to Boston, operating an overnight steamer to Fall River, where passengers boarded a fast train to Boston. In 1916, two years after the Cape Cod Canal opened, the Fall River's preeminence was lost to the Eastern Steamship Line

whose steamers sailed directly into Boston via the canal.

To lure passengers, the vessels were handsomely outfitted, despite their short voyages. There were elaborate staircases, grand saloons (they were called "saloons" not "salons"), enclosed decks, barber shops and stately dining rooms. There were separate saloons for women and bars exclusively for men. A century ago, an overnight voyage on any one of these Sound steamers was like a miniscule trip on a trans-Atlantic steamer.

A chapter is devoted to New Bedford and the Islands, with an intimate look at the way our forebears arrived on the Island, when the motto was "have trunk, will travel." All the early steamers for the Islands left from either Fall River or New Bedford, steaming through Quick's Hole or Woods Hole. Overnight service to New Bedford from New York began in 1853, just as the Vineyard camp meetings were bringing the Island's recreational advantages to the attention of mainlanders.

Definitely, this is a book for those who want to know what it was like to travel between New York and New England in the days before the Connecticut Turnpike and Interstate highways.

FLORENCE KERN

Documents

Jeremiah Pease Diary

It's 1825, 50 years after the start of the American Revolution. Jeremiah Pease, now 33 years old, has been married to Eliza Worth Pease for 12 years. They are living with their six children in Edgartown, exactly where we don't know. The eldest child is Joseph Thaxter Pease, 11 years old. By 1835, Jeremiah and Eliza will have 10 children.

Supporting such a large family took a lot of work, something that Jeremiah did plenty of. He was a compulsive worker. At the time of this installment, his "regular" occupation was Inspector of Customs in Edgartown under Customs Collector Thomas Cooke Jr. But there were other jobs: he was a surveyor, apparently self-taught; a cordwainer, in business for himself; caretaker of Thomas Cooke's saltworks on the shore near today's Edgartown lighthouse; and, as this installment shows, commission salesman of such

items as molasses, whale oil and shares in whaling vessels.

Although Customs regulations prohibited it, he owned shares in at least one Edgartown whaling vessel, the ship *Loan*.

Religion had not yet taken over his life, although he had been "born again" in 1822, leaving the established Congregational church to follow Reformation John Adams, the Methodist evangelist.

During this period, Jeremiah makes few entries describing church activities, although the one of February 5, 1826, makes clear the depth of his religious belief. A few years later, as regular readers know, Methodism was to become the central element in Jeremiah's life.

Altogether, the Pease diaries provide the most complete record of Vineyard life during the first half of the 19th century.

October 1825

1st. Wind SW, pleasant. Sloop *Columbus*, lately bot. by Capt. Samuel Coffin & others, arrives from Conn.
5th. ENE, pleasant. Wid. Hannah Butler dies of old age.¹
6th. S, pleasant. Funeral of the above, service by Rev'd Thaxter. Remarkably warm day.

¹ Hannah was Mrs. Daniel Butler, daughter of Seth and Hannah Crossman. The *Edgartown Vital Records* lists the cause of death as "old age and decay." She was 78.

8th. NE, very smoaky. Brig on shoar at the north shore.

11th. S, SW & NE, smoak clears off. Mother Worth sails for N. Bedford, thence to N.York.²

12th. ENE. Elder Hyde arrives from Nantucket. Quarterly meeting this week.³

13th. SW. Went to Chappaquiddic on

² His mother-in-law. Jeremiah should have told us why she went to New York. That was not a casual trip in 1825.

³ Meeting of Methodist Society, as we shall see.

business of P. Norton & others (2/3 day). Sloop *Thomas* arrives from Conn. having had her deck raised.⁴

15th. SE to SW. Methodist quarterly meeting.

17th. NW. Schr. *Seler*, Cyrus B. Worth, master, sails for Charleston.

18th. NE, cold, high wind.

21st. N, gail. Went to Chapaquiddick on business, etc.

22nd. ENE to SSE. Hired of TC 15 [?] for CP.⁵

24th. NNW. Went to Holmes hole to Survey land or to ascertain the lines between Capt. Freeman Norton's and others' land. See surveying Record. This day sold my Shop to Capt. Edmund Bradley.⁶

31st. SW. Court sets. Attended as one of the Grand jurors.

November 1825

1st. SW. Attended court.

2nd. SW. Ditto. Gave up the shop to Capt. Bradley and mooved into I.D. Pease's.⁷ This night I was taken sick with what the Doctor calls the canker rash. Remained very sick for several days.

⁴ Sloop *Thomas* was owned by Jeremiah's brothers, Chase and Abner Pease. It was aboard the *Thomas* that the Edgartown contingent sailed to Boston for the dedication of the Bunker Hill Monument, six months earlier.

⁵ Jeremiah seems to have been the broker for borrowing money from Thomas Cooke, his occasional employer. CP could have been Chase Pease, his brother, and the money could have been to pay for the work on the sloop *Thomas*. It isn't clear whether it is 15 or 150.

⁶ The shop and land that he sold for \$550 was on the northeasterly side of a wharf "now owned by Allen Coffin."

⁷ I.D. Pease (1786-1862) was Jeremiah's older brother and Sheriff of Dukes County from 1822 until he died.

14th. SW, rainy. Not able to work nor prudent for me to be out, confined to the house, but much better through the great goodnis of God. During the time that I was sick the news of the death of Capt. Silas Daggett arrives.⁸

15th. WSW. Engaged in surveying land for Thos. Smith.

16th. WNW, rains AM, PM clear. Court of sessions sets.

17th. WSW to NNW. Went to survey land for Thos. Smith, quit on acc't. of rain.

18th. WNW. Surveyed land for Thos. Smith, 1 day, cold. Mr. Joseph Norton's wife dies very suddenly.⁹

19th. NW, cold. Surveyed land for Thos. Smith, 1 day.

21st. WNW, pleasant. This day mooved my tools, etc., into the Store lately ocupied by Mr. Daniel Fellows, Sr. Agreed to pay him at the rate of \$10 per year.¹⁰

22nd. ESE, rains. Engaged in surveying land for Obed & Darius Norton, 1 day. Storm at night.

24th. WNW, pleasant. Thanksgiving day.¹¹

25th. ENE, fresh breeze. Engaged in surveying land for Isaac Norton.

28th. ENE. Engaged in surveying land

⁸ Silas Daggett of Tisbury, master mariner, moved to Maine about 1806, where he died Nov. 3, 1825.

⁹ Hepsibah, second wife of Joseph, was daughter of Thomas Claghorn, another Edgartown cordwainer.

¹⁰ Ten dollars a year rent for a storefront! That was the equivalent of 10 days' pay for a laborer.

¹¹ Thanksgiving Day was irregularly observed nationally except for Massachusetts until 1863 when President Lincoln declared the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving.

for Emanuel Selvary¹² at Farm Neck by request Obed Norton.

December 1825

2nd. ENE, rainy. Engaged in surveying land for B. Kidder & T. Smith.

4th. ENE to NE. Mr. Benjamin Norton's wife dies, age 65.

10th. W. Engaged in surveying Land for A. Coffin & John Osborn, AM. PM went to Gayhead to the Brig *Atlantic* of Portland, Samuel Blake, Master, from Point Petre [?] with a cargo of Molasses, she being castaway. I remained there until the 29th, then set out for home, arrived here the 30th, being rainy day, wind SE. The Ship *Loan*, A. Tilton, master, arrives during my absence. Mrs. Lydia Marchant & Mrs. Susanna Fisher dies, being very aged & infirm women. For particulars relative to the Brig, etc., See my papers on file. [In margin:] Nantucket Bank stop payment about this time.¹³

31st. Wind WNW. Nathaniel Blake requests me to take some molasses to sell for him which he intends to send me by som small vessel and sell it to the best advantage.

January 1826

1st. SSW, rainy. Received a consignment of 21 hhds. molasses from Nathaniel Blake, Esq., being part of the Brig *Atlantic's* cargo, thinking it would be for his advantage I shipped it onboard of the Sloop Packet *Delia* of New Bedford, Pardon Vars master, for Boston, and consigned it John A. Bacon, Esq. Blake's Agent there. [In

¹² This may be Emanuel Silvara, probably Portuguese; if so, one of the earliest on the Vineyard.

¹³ Can any reader explain this?

margin:] Ship *Loan* arrives about this time.

2nd. W, snows a little at night. Ship *Loan* commences discharging.¹⁴

5th. WNW, cold. Engaged in piling boards.

11th. SW, pleasant. This day Mr. Mayhew Hatch comes from Falmouth and requests me to sell his share of oil obtained in the Ship "Loan," if I can get 70 cents or more and likewise to sell his shares in said Ship and oufits [sic].

13th. SW. Engaged in storeing & rolling oil, etc.

14th. SW, warm for winter. Rev'd. J. Thaxter makes comp etc.¹⁵

16th. SW to W, this day I learned to gauge cask etc., of S. Worthman.

17th. WnW, went eeling.

18th. WNW. Rec'd a visit from T. Cooke, Esq. and Lady, and I.D.P. Esq. & others.¹⁶

19th. Wind W to N. Engaged in surveying land for P. Norton & others.

26th. NW, cold. Went to H. Hole to quarterly Meeting, returned at night. Ship *Enterprise* of Nantucket, Reuben Weeks master, from Conquambo on Pacific ocean arrives.¹⁷

27th. SW. Attended the above ship as Inspector. Ship *Dauphin*, Daniel G. Coffin, arrives.

28th. SW. Attended above ship.

¹⁴ Starbuck's history says the "Loan" arrived Dec. 26, 1825, her barrels full, "last reported with 1650 barrels sperm."

¹⁵ This entry makes no sense. It is aggravating because Thaxter and Jeremiah were feuding at this time. Jeremiah had left Thaxter's Congregational church to become a Methodist.

¹⁶ This too is aggravating. Such visits were rare. What was going on?

¹⁷ She had 2520 barrels of oil, according to Starbuck.

Returned at noon, attended the Ship *Dauphin* of Nantucket from _____ as Inspector.¹⁸

30th. ESE, snows, light wind. Attended as above. Wrote avertisements for the division of land & house of the heirs of Ephraim Pease.

31st. NNW, severe snowstorm, heavy gail & very cold. The harbour freezes over at night. This is the most severe storm for three years, the weather previous to this has been remarkably moderate.

February 1826

2nd. SW to W, rains a little, foggy, thaws fast, the Ice goes out of the lower part of the Harbour & upper part also, at night.

3rd. SW to NE, foggy, thaws fast.

4th. WNW. cold AM, PM moderates. Mrs. Allen breaks her arm.

5th. SW to N, moderate. At about 10 o'clock I was called to the house of Mr. G.W. Arey, his Daughter Emeline being in her last moments, having been long sick of a consumpsion. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his Saints." This was the most pleasant scene that I ever witnessed, her expiring moments were spent in praising God, for redeeming love, & exhorting her parents & connections to meet her in Heaven & her young companions to prepare for Death, Judgment & Eternity. To see her composure of mind, living faith, & heavenly smiles upon her countenance, together with many of her last observations, were inexpressibly

¹⁸ Starbuck has Obed Swain as master of the *Dauphin*. She had 1560 barrels of sperm. Second mate Thomas Clark had been killed by a whale on the Pacific voyage.

pleasant & would (one would think) have been sufficient to have shocked the faith of an Infadal. She expired at 28 minutes past 2 o'clock in the morning of the 6th.¹⁹

(Ship *Equator* of Nantucket arrives the 5th.)

6th. Wind SW to WSE, pleasant. Ship *Dauphin* sails for Nantucket, 10 days.

7th. SW. Attended Ship *Equator* as Inspector.

8th. W, fresh breeze. Attended the funeral of Miss Emeline Arey. Service by Rev'd. J. Thaxter & Rev'd. J. Haven, a solemn & interesting season, the conragation was very large.

9th. W to SSW. Brother Oren Roberts arrives, comes as a Methodist Preacher.

12th. SW. Ships *Equator* & *Enterprise* sail for Nant.

13th. NNW to ENE. Engaged in taking Draught of the Harbour to send to Congress.²⁰

14th. NE. Engaged as above.

15th. NNW, ditto.

23rd. SW. Surveyed land for Joseph Huxford Jr. at Chabaquiddick.

24th. SW. Mr. Jethro Norton's wife dies suddenly.

25th. S to SSW. Attended the Funeral of Mrs. Norton. Service by Rev'd. Jesse Pease. Brother Erastus Otis arrives from Falmouth, attends a prayer meeting this evening.

26th. SW. Br. Otis preaches in the Methodist meetinghouse.

¹⁹ Emeline was 17 years old. Jeremiah's religious fervor comes through strongly: "the most pleasant scene that I ever witnessed" is how he described the young woman's death.

²⁰ As though Jeremiah didn't have enough to do, now he is making a survey of Edgartown harbor, apparently for a U.S. government chart. It took three days.

27th. ENE. Attended the busines of T.M. Coffin & H. Marchant, adjourned till March 1st.

28th. ENE, rains a little. Reformation about this time.²¹

March 1826

1st. Wind E, rainy, stormy. Adjourned until _____.

2nd. Ditto. Engaged in surveying land for the Heirs of Samuel Look at Tisbury.

3rd. Ditto. Engaged as above.

4th. Ditto. Drawing Draught.

6th. N to E. Engaged in surveying, etc., as above.

8th. ENE, rainy. Mr. George Daggett & Violet Wass (a coloured woman) dies, both aged persons.²²

9th. SW. Funeral of the above persons. Foggy. Reformation at Chabaquidic.²³

²¹ Occasionally, entries like this, written in a different style of handwriting, were made at a later date.

²² A coincidence. Both "aged persons" are listed in the "Vital Records" as a "Town-Pauper." George Daggett was 91, and Violet Wass, supposed to be 105 years old, although Rev. Thaxter has her listed as 90.

²³ Readers will notice the variety of ways Jeremiah spells Chappaquiddick.

10th. SW, very wet weather for many days past.

17th. SNW. Brig *Calliope* of Salem from Maranaham arrives.

18th. Wind NW. Attended the Brig before mentioned as Inspector, agreeably to permits, etc.

20th. ENE. Brother E. Otis leaves town for Falmouth. Heavy thunder with sharp lightning at night. F. Baylies Jr.'s wife very sick at this time.

22nd. W to SW. Went to Holmeshole. Bo't. some Joist for my Shop.

25th. SSW to NW, flattering. (Watched with our Sister, F. Baylies' wife).

29th. SW. Received an order from the Selectmen to pay Wm. Steward, Constant Norton & Martin Vincent for clearing the road from Edgt. to H. Hole. The amount of which is thirty Dollars.²⁴

²⁴ Thirty dollars for clearing the road from Edgartown to Vineyard Haven! What did clearing the road involve?

CORRECTION

The photograph shown on page 151, *Intelligencer*, Feb. 1990, is not of Jeremiah Pease, as its caption said it was "believed to be." The only known portrait of him is one painted by his son Cyrus, published in *The Intelligencer*, May 1975.

Bits & Pieces

READING a book review recently I was stopped by a sentence. It was one of those sentences that make you look up at the ceiling and ponder.

It read:

"History is fable agreed upon."

The writer was John Lahr, son of the famed comic Bert Lahr, who was reviewing a biography of Greta Garbo. But there was nothing comic about that line.

"Fable agreed upon." How true it is and how difficult that makes the task of the local historian, amateurs as most of us are, getting our reward only from a sense of doing something of value.

Each community has scores of local traditions created with the best of intentions. These traditions, some call them legends, others call them myths, add a sparkle to history. They began, no doubt, as harmless stories told around the fire on a long winter's night, but through time have acquired the status of fact, embroidered by each story teller to suit his fancy.

They are harmless enough in most cases. But should a local historian, trying to be truthful, sponsor them?

It's not an easy choice. In a small community many members of families involved in the legends are friends and acquaintances.

A national historian who points out that Parson Weems invented the famed cherry tree story about young George Washington isn't likely to meet one of George's descendants on the street, but

a local historian who tampers with local traditions can't hide. He's likely to be confronted in the postoffice by a descendant with sadness in his voice. He feels hurt.

This problem is not fanciful. It is real. What should the role of a historical society be?

I believe it is to cite facts, when such are known, even though they may trample on some local legend. These legends can still be treasured and, no doubt, will be, but somewhere on record should be the facts.

As a real historian once told me when I was discussing this dilemma, there's no need to worry about facts destroying local legend. The most interesting version will continue to be told, regardless of the facts. That is why the legends were created in the first place.

As John Lahr wrote, history is fable agreed upon. We all enjoy a good yarn.

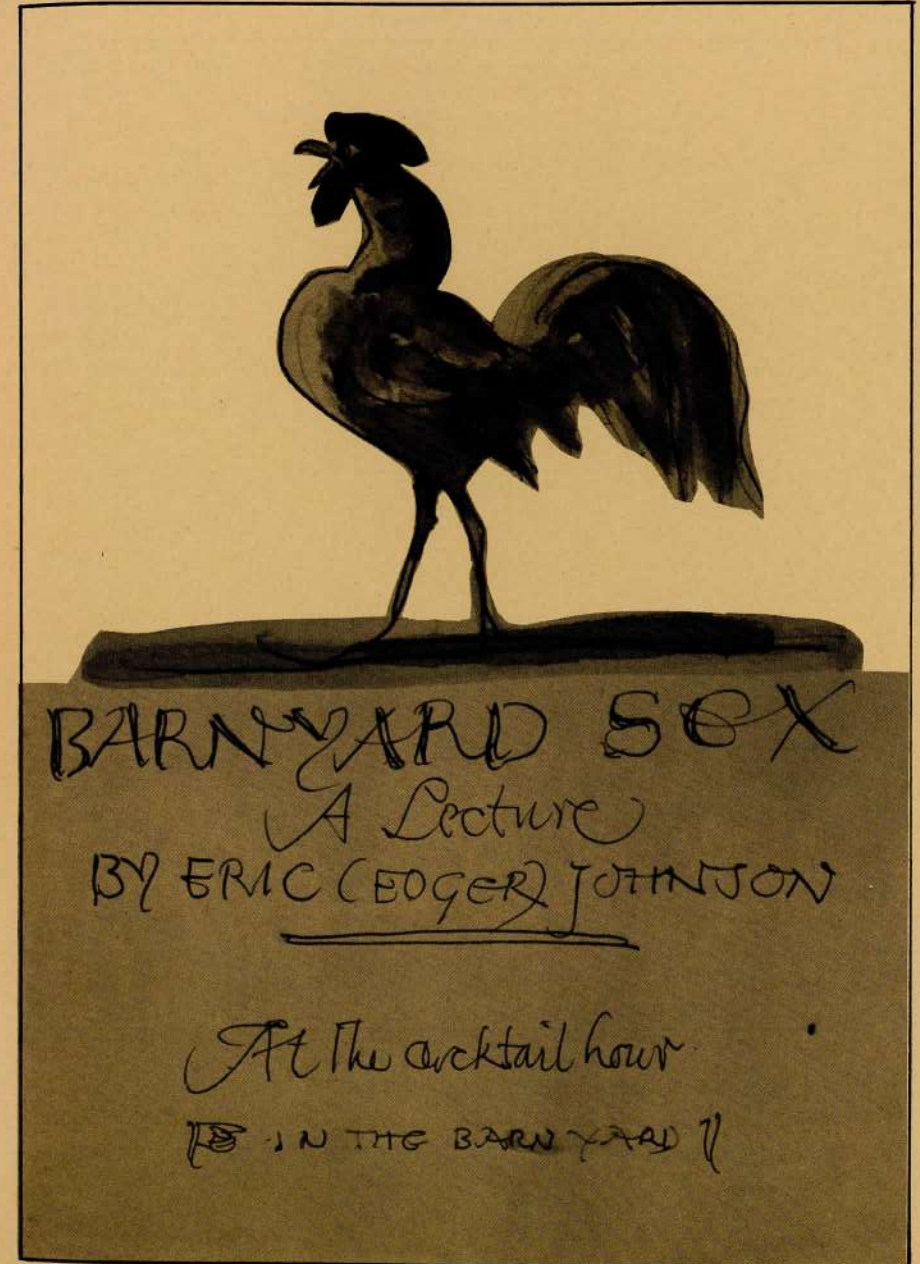
But historical societies shouldn't forget their pledge to preserve and publish the facts of history — even if by doing so some sparkle is tarnished. The fables can still be recited, but identified for what they are. Remember Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. They survive and bring pleasure.

So too can fables of local history. But the facts must be made known as well.

Still it is painful to write a factual account of an event or of a person knowing that some one, some friend perhaps, is going to resent it.

Yet, I think, there's no choice. And I hope our members agree.

A.R.R.



A typical Barn House program for the "intellectuals" held during the cocktail hour. Nobody recalls what lecturer Johnson had to say on the subject.

Poster by Warren Chappell, courtesy the Barn House

SIMON MAYHEW BICENTENNIAL



DEACON SIMON MAYHEW
"makes the ferry" on his first trip to the
CONTINENTAL CONGRESS.

Celebrated at Barn House July 26 '75

Barn House mistakenly celebrates Simon Mayhew's trip to the Continental Congress in 1775. It was Joseph, Simon's son, who went to the Provincial Congress at Salem in 1774. But who cares? It's Barn House fun and games!