

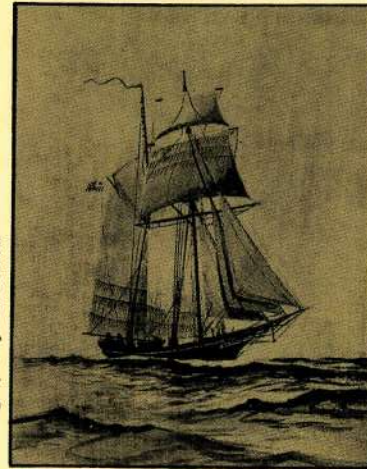


# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 34, NO. 2

NOVEMBER 1992

Drawing by C. J. A. Wilson



*Revenue Cutter Dobbin was stationed  
in Edgartown from 1865-1866.*

## Customs Collectors At Edgartown

(Continued)

John Vinson

1861-1870

by FLORENCE KERN

## Rev. Joseph Thaxter And His Politics

## Edgartown Schools In the 1830s

by HENRY BAYLIES

## Documents: *Jeremiah Pease Diary* (Final Installment)

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*if all whom it may concern*

Having for some time been personally acquainted with  
Mr. Hebron Vincent, I do hereby certify that he sustained  
a good moral character; that his attainments in literature  
are such as fully to qualify him to take charge of a  
Public School. He has taught the Public Town School  
in this place for the last five months, and has given  
full and entire satisfaction to the Committee, both  
in his government and teaching. I do therefore re-  
commend him, most cheerfully, as an able and faithful  
teacher.

*Leavitt Thaxter.*  
Edgartown  
Dec. 3<sup>d</sup> 1830.

Hebron Vincent, later a Methodist minister, taught public school in Edgartown briefly in 1830, as Leavitt Thaxter certified.

# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

Vol. 34, No. 2    © 1992 D.C.H.S.    November 1992

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(Final Installment)

Editor: Arthur R. Railton  
Editor Emeritus: Gale Huntington

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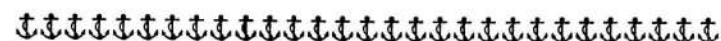
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The Dukes County Historical Society was founded in 1922 to preserve and publish the history of Dukes County for the public benefit. It is a non-profit institution, supported by membership dues, contributions and bequests, which are tax deductible.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

The Society operates The Vineyard Museum on its grounds at School and Cooke Street, Edgartown. The Museum includes the Thomas Cooke House, circa 1765, a house museum of Island history, open from mid-June to mid-September. Also on the grounds are the Francis Foster Gallery, the Capt. Francis Pease House and the Gale Huntington Library of History, open all year, as are the Gay Head Light exhibit with its 1854 Fresnel lens and the Carriage Shed containing boats, wagons, an 1854 Button hand-pumper fire engine and many other examples of Vineyard memorabilia, including the gravestones of Nancy Luce's favorite hens, circa 1860.

All buildings are open free to members. Non-members are charged a nominal entrance fee. Research assistance is provided in the Huntington Library.

You are invited to join the Society. You will receive this journal four times a year with your membership.



## Customs Collectors At Edgartown

John Vinson 1861-1870

by FLORENCE KERN

WHEN John Vinson was sworn in as Collector of Customs for the District of Edgartown, the Civil War had just begun. Five weeks after the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter in April 1861, he received a temporary appointment signed by President Abraham Lincoln. The appointment became permanent when he was confirmed by the Senate in August.

Edgartown had been a Customs port since 1671, first under the British, then under the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and finally under the United States of America in 1789. Early English mariners had been quick to realize the potential of this Vineyard port with its two beautiful harbors, outer and inner. By the 1630s, it had become a favorite anchorage for vessels coming from Europe, or sailing along the coast to Virginia.

In the 1640s, the Mayhews, Thomas Senior and Junior, obtained the charter to settle the Vineyard (along with Nantucket and the Elizabeth Islands) and an English village was born, soon attracting traders, developers and settlers, all bent on building a new world for themselves. In the following century, wharves, shops and homes were constructed along the protected inner harbor, a few miles from the principal Indian village at Mashacket.<sup>1</sup>

Early Islanders called the settlement "Great Harbour" and

<sup>1</sup> Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, DCHS, 1966, v.I, p.42, also v.II, p.18. Mashacket, also called Mashakemmuck, was the location of the Sachem of Nunnepog's Great House along the shore of Great Pond, Edgartown.

FLORENCE KERN of Bethesda, Md., and Chappaquiddick is a Society member and a dedicated researcher and historian, specializing in the U. S. Revenue Service and the Coast Guard. This is the seventh article in her series on the Customs House at Edgartown.



a great harbor it was, with its sheltering bluffs, good holding ground and easy access to fertile plains. It was, and still is, a favorite port of call for any number of latter-day Santa Marias and Mayflowers.

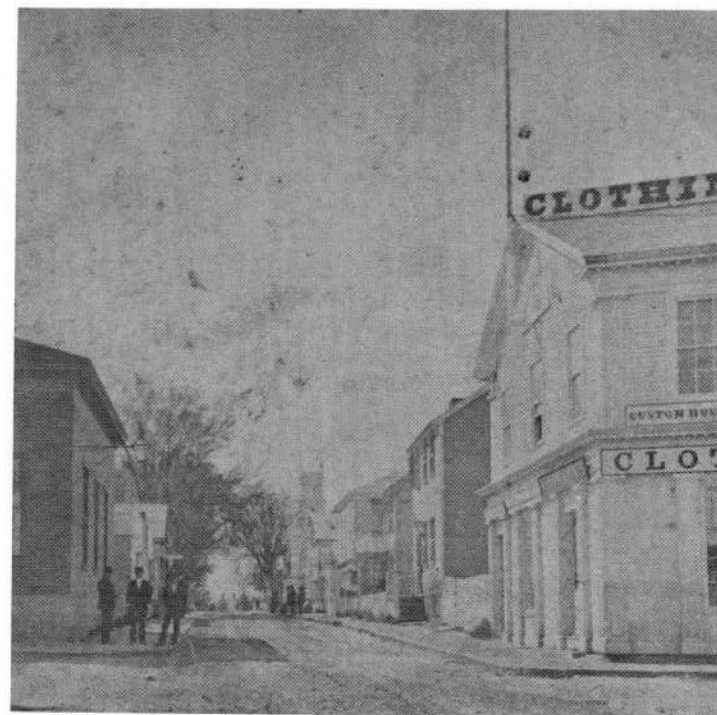
By the mid-19th century, Edgartown's whaling industry had started to decline, but the harbor remained a major port. Dozens of vessels, foreign and domestic, sail and steam, tied up at a series of wharves which now extended from Starbuck Neck southward to Tower Hill. Other vessels swung at anchor, in depths of up to 30 feet, in the outer harbor or inside under the lee of Chappaquiddick.

Since 1849, the Custom House<sup>2</sup> had occupied a prominent location in the center of town, just a minute's walk from Osborn's Wharf at the foot of Main Street. Actually, it wasn't a Custom House at all, but merely two rooms on the second floor of a commercial building on the northeast corner of Main and North Water Streets. There was a separate entrance up an inner staircase, at what is now 2 North Water Street. While ornate and substantial customhouses were built at such larger ports as Boston, New Bedford and New London in the mid-19th century, Edgartown had to make do with only a couple of rented upstairs rooms.

It was a foregone political conclusion that once Republican Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated president in 1861, the affable Customs Collector Ira Darrow, a Democrat, would be removed from office. He, a highly popular man in the village, had held the job for only one year. Despite Darrow's popularity, well over 100 Republicans from all over the Island petitioned President Lincoln to appoint John Vinson as Collector in his place, signing a four-foot-long document testifying to his "gentlemanly deportment, sobriety and strict integrity."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Custom House was then the accepted spelling. It is now "customhouse."

<sup>3</sup> A copy of this petition, dated March 5, 1861, is in the Society archives. Another petition by a Republican group stated: "Mr. Vinson has acted efficiently with the Republican party ever since its organization and is considered by men of all parties as an honest man."



Collector Vinson's office was on second floor of building at right on the corner of Main and Water Streets, Edgartown.

Editor Edgar Marchant of the *Vineyard Gazette* also extolled him:

It is generally understood that Hon. John Vinson will receive the commission as Collector of the Port of Edgartown and all the good people of Edgartown say Amen.

Vinson was described as a farmer, a cordwainer (shoemaker), Abolitionist and treasurer of the Lincoln Club. Born in Providence in 1802, he was living on the Island in 1828, when he married Margaret (Peggy) Pease Arey, a young widow. Her first husband had died on a whaling voyage to Valpariso, leaving her with a small son, Benjamin. The Vinsons had three children, John N., Margaret P., and Anna P., whose diary for the years 1849-50 is in the Society archives.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Their first child, also John, died in 1829 at six months.

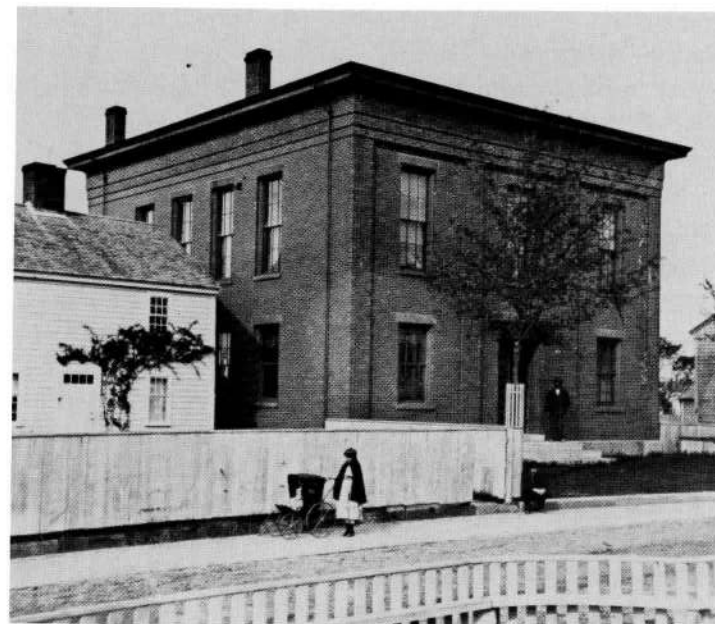
The Vinson homestead was on Main Street, Edgartown, directly across from the Methodist Church. In 1861, he also owned the second floor of the Squire Thomas Cooke house which had served as a customhouse from 1809 to 1830. One wonders if he had planned to return Customs to its former location, if he became Collector.<sup>5</sup>

Vinson had served the Republican party and the Vineyard well, having been Representative in the Massachusetts General Court in 1856 and 1857 and Presidential Elector in 1856. You may be sure he was in the forefront of the patriotic rally in front of the Edgartown Town Hall on the last Saturday in April 1861 to demonstrate the community's enthusiastic support of the Union in the war that had begun two weeks earlier when the troops of South Carolina fired on Fort Sumter and quickly captured it. Over 1000 Edgartown citizens assembled at 6:30 p.m., drawn there by 15 minutes of continuous bell-ringing from all the village churches. The crowd was far too large for the Town Hall to accommodate, so the rally was held outdoors, in front of the building. It began with the salute to the flag (a flagpole had been raised in front of the Town Hall for the occasion), the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" by the choirs of all the churches and the firing of a 13-gun salute in honor of the "original states." A resolution was proposed and the crowd enthusiastically pledged "unswerving fidelity . . . even our lives . . . to the vindication of the constitution, the maintenance of the laws and the defence of the stars and stripes. . ." Because of "the possibility of lawless violence, even in our own ports," a Committee of Safety was named to defend the Island from attack.<sup>6</sup>

The Vineyard Band "enlivened the occasion with several national airs." The choirs joined in singing "most cheerily the song 'Red, White & Blue.'" The cannon, which had fired the salute "from the hill nigh the North School House," was rapidly trundled past by Cannoneer Lloyd Daggett and

<sup>5</sup> This is the Thomas Cooke House, now owned by the Society.

<sup>6</sup> *Vineyard Gazette*, May 3, 1861. A similar celebration was held the next evening in Holmes Hole.



Court House in Edgartown when Vinson was Collector. The white building was built about 1865 as a residence for the sheriff.

"many enthusiastic young patriots" to a round of cheers by the assemblage. It was, the *Gazette* stated, "the grandest demonstration of the people ever convened in this place." The meeting adjourned amid "the most unbounded enthusiasm for the Union and the Government."

Retiring Collector Ira Darrow had been named, along with his successor John Vinson, to the Committee of Safety. Before emptying the rolltop desk at the Custom House three days later, he took time to visit *Gazette* Editor Edgar Marchant, who reported:

RHUBARB.— We are indebted to Capt. Ira Darrow for a fine bunch of this delicious pie plant. The captain is ahead of all competitors this season.

Darrow, no longer Collector, did not lack things to do. He had many other irons in the fire. Besides operating a coal business on the wharf in front of his home on North Water Street, he ran a bathing beach there at which he

rented bath houses.<sup>7</sup> He also owned and operated two bathing beaches in Oak Bluffs and was a director of the new bank in Edgartown and a proprietor of the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company.

#### War Orders from Washington

The Customs Collectors were slated to play important roles in the war between the States. Vinson was soon notified that his first priority was to prevent trade with the enemy. All vessels going to or coming from a state under "insurrectionary control" were to be carefully inspected and every vessel found to be carrying contraband, particularly gunpowder and other war materiel, was to be seized and forfeited to the United States.

This was a tall order. The Collector had jurisdiction over all the ports on the Vineyard, Noman's Land and the Elizabeth Islands, as well as over the ocean out as far as the three-mile limit. This order gave him more responsibilities than any other Edgartown Collector, before or after. His was the "absolute right" to draft Army and Navy units and to make use of all and any public or private vessels for the enforcement of the revenue laws. He was virtually in command of the Revenue Cutters in his area. In addition, he had the authority to move the Custom House to another location on shore, or even on to a vessel, should Edgartown be in danger of invasion by the enemy, something many Islanders feared.

Employees in the Custom House were required to take a second oath, declaring their loyalty and swearing that they had never borne arms against the United States or voluntarily given "aid . . . or encouragement to persons engaged in armed hostilities against the United States."

Besides the deputy collectors at offices in Holmes Hole and at Tarpaulin Cove, there were a number of inspectors, gaugers, surveyors and weighers on Vinson's staff, some regularly employed and some engaged by the day. He was responsible for the supervision of all wrecks in his District,

<sup>7</sup> This may have been Edgartown's first bathing beach. It is at 73 North Water St.

the collection of revenue, the care of sick or injured seamen, and the maintenance of navigational aids, including, to some extent, the six lighthouses in the District.

Soon after his appointment, Vinson removed Sirson P. Coffin as Deputy Collector for Edgartown and appointed Jeremiah Pease Jr., son of Jeremiah Pease, a former deputy and a Democrat, whose diary is one of the Society's treasures.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, he appointed Henry W. Beetle to succeed Henry P. Worth as Deputy Collector for Holmes Hole.

Although the Customs Service was notorious for bribery and other shady practices during this period, Vinson was never accused of any such activities. "No suspicion of official misconduct ever attached to his name throughout his public career," wrote Editor Marchant in the *Gazette* later.

#### An Armed Steamer Wanted

Fearful of the Confederate privateers that were beginning to be seen in Nantucket and Vineyard Sounds, Islanders and their Boston insurance agents sought an armed vessel for their protection. The agents wrote:

Whereas the number of vessels passing through the Vineyard Sound is very large, amounting to more than 50,000 annually and belonging to all the ports of New England, the undersigned respectfully request that an armed steamer be stationed as a coast guard in said Vineyard Sound.<sup>9</sup>

The 50,000 figure seems to have been an exaggeration to bolster the request. A few years earlier, the Keeper of the Cape Poge Light had counted something over 20,000 vessels passing his station in one year. Traffic diminished during the war years as many vessels stayed in port or were transferred to foreign registries. It was estimated that the northern states lost 110,000 tons of shipping and one-third of their foreign trade in 1861. Whaling was particularly hard

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah Junior was a Republican, unlike the rest of his family.

<sup>9</sup> The term "coast guard" appears in a number of documents relating to New Bedford and the Vineyard during the mid-1800s. Much later it was adopted by the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, which was renamed the United States Coast Guard in 1915.

hit. Only one whaler cleared Edgartown in 1861, and by 1867, there was none outward bound. It never fully recovered.

No armed steamer was ever assigned to the Edgartown District, but three small sailing Revenue Cutters, *Agassiz*, *Varina* and *Thompson*, patrolled its water in 1863 and 1864, the first two out of New Bedford and the *Thompson* out of Newport.

Cutter *Thompson* was commanded by Capt. William Cooke Pease of Edgartown, one of the most able men in the Revenue Cutter Service.<sup>10</sup> He had been called east from an important post on the Pacific, with considerable responsibility, and did not relish command of the small sloop. He knew her well, having supervised her construction and that of five similar cutters in 1856 on Lake Erie. His displeasure was heightened by differences with Customs Collector Macy at Newport, who criticized his actions. Captain Pease spent too much time cruising near the Vineyard, said Macy, and recruited too many cuttermen from the Island. Eventually, the Captain was recalled to New York and given command of the armed steam cutter *Kewanee* and ordered to patrol between New York and Boston.<sup>11</sup> He was frequently in and around the Vineyard during 1864 and 1865, sometimes on secret missions and often with dignitaries, such as Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, on board.

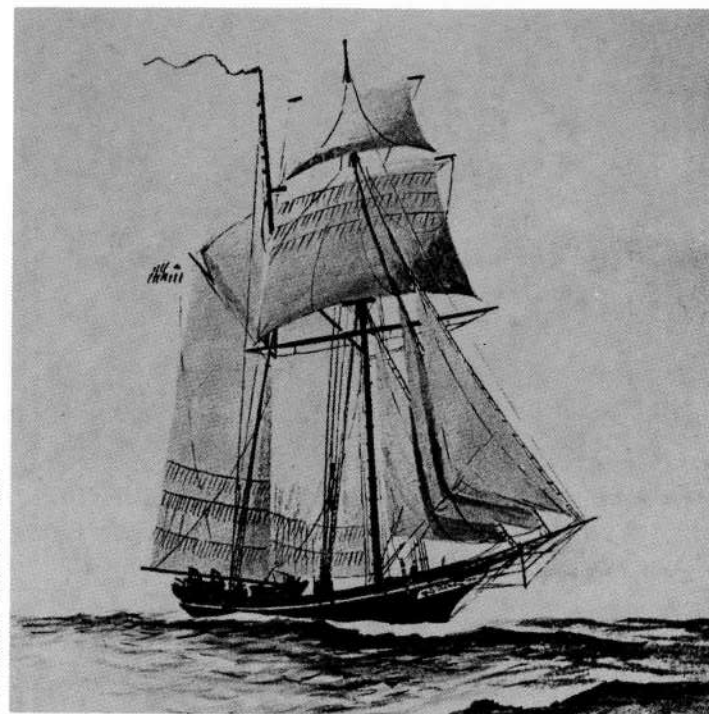
The cutters made numerous inspections of vessels at the request of Collector Vinson. In August 1863, the *Agassiz* spent six days in Edgartown harbor and cooperated with Vinson's men in inspecting 91 vessels. Their constant vigilance, helped by a plentiful supply of well-rewarded informers, kept smuggling at a minimum.

Not until the closing months of the war was a cutter specifically stationed at Edgartown. On January 25, 1865,

<sup>10</sup> He was another of Jeremiah Pease Sr.'s sons.

<sup>11</sup> For details on the exciting life of this Vineyard hero, see his biography by the present author: *Captain Pease, U.S. Coast Guard Pioneer*, Alised Enterprises, Bethesda, MD, 1982. Copies are available at the Society.

Drawing by C. J. A. Wilson



*Late in the Civil War, schooner Dobbin was assigned to Collector Vinson's district to "cruise between Tarpaulin Cove and your port."*

Assistant Secretary of the Navy George Harrington wrote Collector Vinson:

Sir: The Revenue Cutter "J.D.Dobbin" under command of Capt. James D. Usher has been ordered from Portland to your port for duty in the Waters of your Collection District.<sup>12</sup>

The vessel is placed under your control, and you will please direct Captain Usher to cruise the "Dobbin" actively between Tarpaulin Cove and your port, & immediate vicinity, discharging all those duties appertaining to the Cutter Service regulated by law.

*Dobbin* was a schooner built by J. M. Hood in Somerset, Massachusetts, in 1853. In 1877, she became the first school

<sup>12</sup> *Dobbin* was named for Secretary of Treasury James C. Dobbin. Edgartown sailors in her crew included Lt. Cyrus Pease, William Cooke Pease (his nephew, named for Cyrus's twin brother), and cuttermen Slamm, Littlefield, Hedden and Gabrielson.



ship of what is now the United States Coast Guard.

The *Dobbin* seems to have had only one exciting engagement during her stay in the District of Edgartown. On September 28, 1865, Lieutenant Pease was attacked while trying to board a schooner off East Chop. He gave chase in *Dobbin* and fired a shot across the vessel's bow to bring her to. The schooner was taken into Holmes Hole where the case was dismissed by Deputy Collector Beetle after the offending captain apologized to Lieutenant Pease.

During *Dobbin's* assignment to Edgartown, Collector Vinson was responsible for provisioning her. He advertised in the *Gazette* for sealed bids for ship chandlery and for rations, consisting of beef, pork, flour, rice, pickles, cranberries, cheese and coffee. The same rations, it was noted, were provided on the cutters as in the naval service.

Less than three months after the arrival of *Dobbin*, the *Gazette's* headlines blazed:

VICTORY VICTORY  
SURRENDER OF ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA  
TO GENERAL GRANT

The news reached our Island early on Monday afternoon. A brief telegram was brought over the Vineyard Sound in a small rowboat by the son of our enterprising mail carrier, Capt. Thomas Hinckley.

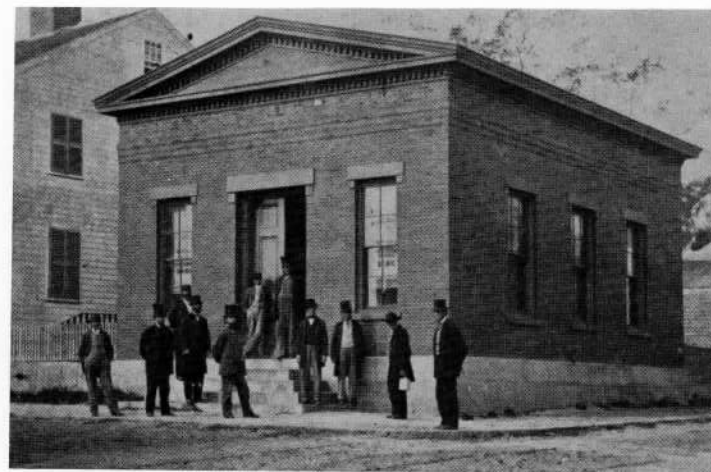
The Boston newspapers were well-scooped by young Hinckley. They arrived two or three hours later.

*Dobbin* remained at Edgartown until September 1866, when she was ordered to Eastport, Maine. On board was First Lt. Cyrus Pease, twin brother of Captain Pease of the *Kewanee*. The twins met in Vineyard waters on at least one occasion when Captain Pease, aboard *Kewanee*, made an inspection of *Dobbin* off East Chop August 12, 1865.<sup>13</sup>

#### After the War

In March 1867, the Custom House almost went up in

<sup>13</sup> Cyrus was not a career officer like his twin. He joined the Revenue Service shortly before the Civil War, after returning from the California Gold Rush. A talented portrait artist who never married, he lived his last years in Edgartown, where he was thought of as reclusive.



Vinson's office looked down on the Martha's Vineyard National Bank.

smoke when fire broke out on the waterfront in the middle of the night, spreading rapidly to Edgartown's Four Corners where the Custom House stood. The *Gazette* reported: "... the intense heat and nearing danger warranted the removal of the important documents and papers." The building was saved by the valiant town people and the powerful Button hand pumper.<sup>14</sup>

The Civil War years were a watershed in the history of Customs in the District of Edgartown. Edgartown harbor became secondary to Holmes Hole as coastal vessels began bypassing Edgartown when cruising along the coast. It was easier and quicker to stop off at Holmes Hole for water and supplies. As for the whaling industry, it had been badly hurt by the discovery of petroleum in Pennsylvania and what remained was increasingly based in San Francisco, eliminating the long voyage around South America to the Pacific grounds. Most of the surviving New England whalers were concentrated in New Bedford. As a result, by the time Vinson went out of office March 1, 1870, the District of Edgartown was contributing very little revenue to the Treasury of the United States.

<sup>14</sup> The Button pumper, bought by Edgartown in 1855, is now on display at the Society.





If you left the Custom House and turned to the right this is what you saw, looking up South Water Street past the new bank.

Few of Vinson's Custom House papers have survived. Many were lost when the Edgartown office was closed by order of President ~~Woodrow Wilson~~ in 1913. All records were shipped to the Boston Custom House where many were damaged beyond recovery when the cellar flooded in a very high tide some years later.<sup>15</sup>

Some records have survived in the Society archives, among them is the following, written by Vinson during 1870, his last year in office:

The ballast of the Revenue Boat at this Port being largely composed of gravel in canvas bags and these bags through age having become unserviceable, I respectfully request authority to make a requisition on the Collector of Customs at Newport, R.I., for two (2) tons of old Iron in government store at said Newport for ballast for said Revenue Boat, said Iron being the Property of the United States and a part of

<sup>15</sup> James Owens, director of the Federal Archives at Waltham, Mass., believes they, along with others, were stored in the appraiser's office, which was on the waterfront.



Leaving Vinson's office, you turned left heading up North Water Street.

the ballast of the late Revenue Cutter "Crawford" recently sold out of the Service. Should the requisition be allowed, Capt. Baker of Revenue Steamer "Moccasin" touching there frequently during his Winter Cruising will take the Iron on board his Vessel, and land it here, without expense to the government for truckage, wharfage or transportation.

On January 21, 1870, the *Vineyard Gazette* reported: President Grant has nominated Cornelius B. Marchant as Collector for the port of Edgartown.

No reason was given for Vinson's ouster. Grant, of course, was Republican, as were Collector Vinson and Mr. Marchant. Then on March 4, the newspaper confirmed the changeover:

Cornelius B. Marchant, Esq., entered upon his duties as Collector of Customs on the 1st instant. That he will prove to be a faithful and efficient officer, no one can doubt.

Hon. John Vinson, the retiring Collector, one of our most respected citizens, has held the office for eight years to the entire satisfaction of all concerned, discharging the duties thereof with uniform courtesy, urbanity and intelligence, and has been a faithful officer.<sup>16</sup>

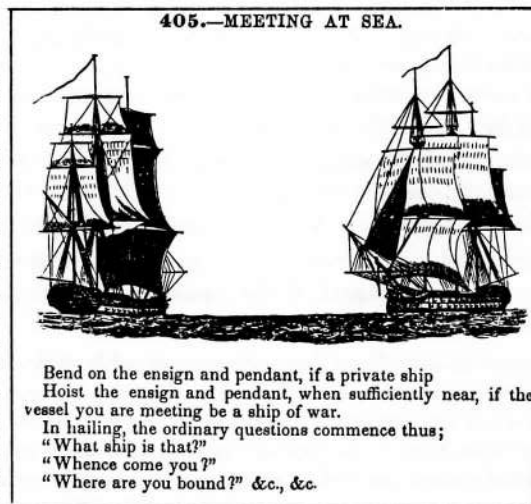
<sup>16</sup> Jeremiah Pease Jr., Deputy Collector, continued in office.

Taft  
March 3  
1913

Vinson lived for many years after leaving office, dying on Christmas Day 1886, at the age of 84, leaving most of his estate, valued at \$1951.75, to his second wife, Phebe Walker (Dunham) Cleveland Cottle, twice widowed before their marriage. His house on Main Street, together with barn and out-buildings, was valued at \$675, while the 60 rods of land on which it stood was valued at \$250. The Squire Cooke house, which he also owned, was valued at \$200, its barn \$20 and its land another \$200. He also owned about 100 acres of brushland and woodland, a share in the Pocha Pond Fishery and a pew in the Congregational Church.

A column-long obituary in the *Gazette* extolled his "unquestioned integrity and sound Judgement" as Customs Collector, Selectman and Commisioner, and said:

The death of Hon. John Vinson removes from earth one whose years of public usefulness cover a greater aggregate of time than often falls to the lot of any one member of the community.



William Brady, USN, *The Kedge Anchor*, N.Y., 1854.

Instruction Number 405 in a textbook that was used by the U. S. Navy during the Civil War.



## Documents

### Rev. Joseph Thaxter And His Politics

REV. Joseph Thaxter Jr., Edgartown's Congregational minister from 1780 to 1827, had strong political opinions. Fortunately for us, he often put them in writing and especially when writing to his younger brother, Caleb, who lived in the Thaxter family home in Hingham. Caleb was unmarried and the letters suggest he was a businessman, but what his business was we do not know.<sup>1</sup>

The letters provide not only an insight into the thoughts of the Reverend, but also of the political mood of the Island, which Thaxter, it seems likely, reflected.

We have excerpted from his letters, modernizing some punctuation and capitalization where it will make the meaning more clear. Minor spelling errors are unchanged.

#### The Adoption of the Constitution

On February 6, 1788, Massachusetts ratified the Federal Constitution which had been so laboriously fashioned in the Convention in Philadelphia. On February 14, one week after the ratification, Thaxter wrote to brother Caleb. If his attitude was typical, the Constitution, which we revere so much today, did not generate great interest. His mention of it was casual, like a comment on the weather:

Dr. Brother:

We are well pleased with the Ratification of the federal Constitution, wish it had been more general.

That was all he had to say about the nation's most important document. Of greater interest to Thaxter and his friends, it seemed, was a new state law providing protection for debtors. The law had resulted from Shays's Rebellion,

<sup>1</sup> Most of these letters are in the *Joseph Thaxter Papers* at the Essex Institute, Salem, Mass., and are quoted with permission, for which the editor is grateful to Jane E. Ward, Curator of Manuscripts.

in which farmers and artisans in western Massachusetts had taken up arms, literally, to end a rash of foreclosures on their farms and homes. A serious downturn in the economy had cut income sharply and money lenders were demanding restitution. The violent rebellion, which was led by Daniel Shays, was put down by the militia. Gov. James Bowdoin, who had ordered the military response, was defeated at the next election and the new legislature quickly passed laws to provide debtors with some protection. The more affluent folk, including Thaxter and Thomas Cooke, thought the law went too far and was unfair to the lenders. Thaxter devoted most of his February 14 letter to a rhyme deriding the new law:

As I have Nothing remarkable, I shall favour you with a few Lines of my Friend Esqr. Cooke upon the late Tender Law & the Law for releasing Debtors from Goal.

Grand News for us,  
 Confined as thus  
 because we won't surrender  
 our Goods & Chattles  
 obtained in Battles  
 To pay the Money Lender.  
 Such wholesome Laws  
 Add to our Cause  
 And he's a bold Pretender  
 who does contest  
 or say it's best  
 To pay the Money Lender.  
 It makes me leap  
 To think how cheap  
 I'll pay in Body Tender.  
 Prove my Intrest  
 And swear I meant  
 To cheat the Money Lender.  
 Pillars of State  
 In Wisdom great  
 Such Knowledge for to gender.  
 It's not the First  
 Law Good & just  
 To fleece the Money Lender.  
 In Thirty Days

My Debts I pay  
 And then I'll live in Splendor.  
 A triffling Oath  
 'Twas made for both  
 The Debtor & the Lender.  
 Great Hudibras [?]  
 Who rode the Ass  
 Had Conscience good & tender  
 Has proved it clear  
 'Twas safe to swear  
 And cheat the Money Lender.  
 It's further said  
 That he who made  
 The Law is the offender,  
 Not he that's drove  
 And swears by Jove  
 To cheat the Money Lender.  
 God bless our Land  
 And long command  
 Such Wisdom to attend her  
 And frame such Law  
 Huzza my Boys!  
 We fear no Money Lender.

Your affectionate brother,

Jos. Thaxter<sup>2</sup>

### The French Jacobins

As one would expect, Thaxter, and most of the Island's English settlers, had little love for France, England's enemy and a Catholic nation. France had undergone a revolution of its own, beginning on July 14, 1789, with the fall of the Bastille, which led to a constitutional monarchy. Then in 1793, the Jacobins, a radical, anti-religious group, took over the new republic, beheading the King and Queen. This was followed by the Reign of Terror, which ended in 1795, with riots in Paris in October. The rioting resulted in much bloodshed and was put down by troops led by Napoleon Bonaparte, then an obscure general in the French army. He crushed the rebellion with artillery fire, which he described as "a whiff of grapeshot."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Joseph Thaxter Papers*, Essex Institute, Salem, Mass., Feb. 14, 1788.

<sup>3</sup> *Columbia Encyclopedia*, Columbia U. Press, N.Y., 1975, p.2873.



This senseless carnage sickened Thaxter, as he wrote to Caleb December 23, 1795:

It is now several Months since I have received a Line from you in which Time I have wrote several. Amidst the Confusion of the Times we have been remarkably Quiet, not a single Jacobin amongst us. Our Confidence in the President, Mr. Jay, the Secret[ary] & Const. has not been shaken in the least.<sup>4</sup>

Capt. F. Butler<sup>5</sup> is now in the Habour [*sic*], direct from Nantz, which he left the Sixth of November. He brought no Papers. He informs me that about the 20 of Oct. there was a terrible Insurrection in Parris. The National Troops attacked the Insurgents about 6 o'clock P.M., the Battle lasted all Night. In the Morning the Insurgents were all dispaired & were so compleatly vanquished that they were not able to collect again. The Number killed & wounded reported from 7000 to 1200 thousand [*sic*]. He had his account from Capt. Thos. Norton<sup>6</sup> (Capt. Hammett's son-in-law) who went into Parris the Next Morning & saw the dreadfull carnage that had been made. Humanity Shudders at the Thought. He says that the Friends of the Convention & the Constitution are so large a majority that they will carry their Point — in Consequence of the Defeat of the Insurgents, the English Fleet which for a long Time had lain in Quiberoon [?] Bay on the Fifth of November left the Coast without attempting to land & that he saw them on the Morning of the 6 of Nov. off Ushort [?] standing for the Channell of England — about 200 Sail. Capt. Butler is an intelligent man & I presume the account may be relied on.<sup>7</sup>

### The XYZ Affair

The US-France relationship worsened as the French began stopping American vessels and impressing their sailors. By June 1797, 300 U.S. vessels had been captured by the French

<sup>4</sup> Chief Justice John Jay had negotiated a commercial treaty with England; the "Secret." probably referred to Secretary of State Edmund Randolph, who had just resigned under charges of corruption; the "Const." refers to the new Constitution.

<sup>5</sup> Captain Butler of Edgartown was lost at sea the following June (Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, v.3, DCHS., 1966, p.58).

<sup>6</sup> Captain Norton of Edgartown married Lydia Hammett after his first wife, Mrs. Priscilla (Webber) Mayhew, died. Their son, Benjamin Hammett Norton, became a well-known journalist as did their two grandsons, Charles Benjamin and Frank Henry Norton.

<sup>7</sup> *Joseph Thaxter Papers*, Essex Institute, Dec. 23, 1795.

on the high seas. Congress called for an 80,000-man militia. President Adams, anxious to prevent hostilities, named a commission to negotiate a treaty with France. This commission went to Paris and was told in secret that before negotiations could start, the United States must make a large loan to France and also pay a \$250,000 gratuity to the French Foreign Minister, Tallyrand. These demands, later known as the XYZ Affair, were made public on April 3, 1798. Thaxter wrote to Caleb April 26th:

I received yours by the last Post & at the same Time the Communications of the President from our Envoy Ex[traordinary]. It was on the 17 of April. They aroused my utmost Indignation & I had some of those Feelings which I had on that Day Twenty Three Year [ago] - can there be a Jacobin, a Democrat, existing in the United States, if there is he must have lost all Sense of Honour & Justice, he must be the most contemptible animal that lives.<sup>8</sup>

Notwithstanding our Exposed Situation we are not so lost to every Sense of Duty as but that we are united in Sentiments, we love our Country, our happy Constitution & put full Confidence in the Executive. We are united — The Communications of the President have aroused the Indignation of all Ranks among [us] —there is no sound worse than the Name of Frenchmen — greater Despots or a more depraved set of wretches never degraded human Nature more than the Leaders of that Nation. I think their Career is near an End. There must be more Revolutions, they have been from bad to worse. I hope they have reached the Extream & that the next will be better —<sup>9</sup>

### War with France

As the undeclared naval war with France worsened, the nation took drastic steps. The President created the Department of the Navy and ordered naval vessels to seize any French ship that interfered with American commerce. Congress passed the infamous Alien and Sedition Acts, which authorized the deportation of undesirables and limited freedom of the press. Former President George Washington

<sup>8</sup> That date, 23 years before, was the day of the Battle at Concord Bridge, in which Thaxter had participated.

<sup>9</sup> *Joseph Thaxter Papers*, Essex Institute, April 26, 1798.

was named Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The Marine Corps was established.

Reverend Thaxter felt isolated on the Island. He had recently been to Hingham and upon returning to the Vineyard wrote several letters to his brother, but had received no response. He wrote again to Caleb on July 16, 1798:

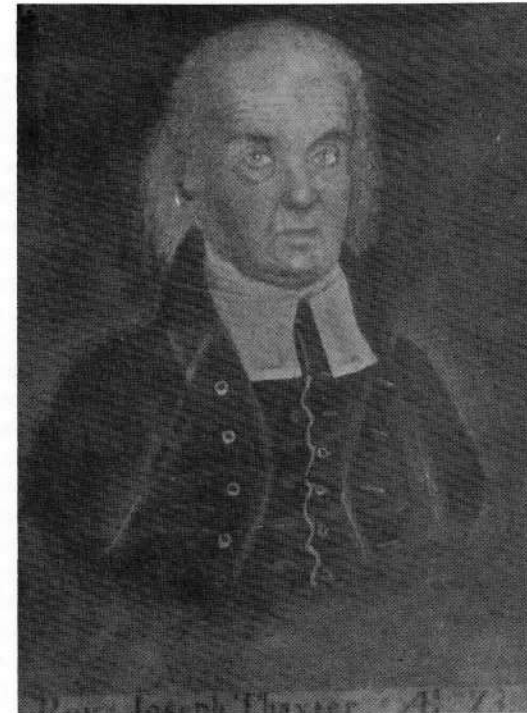
I suppose you are so much taken up with Business that that will be your Excuse for not answering the Letters I have wrote you since I left Hingham, nothing provokes me to write but an anxious Desire to obtain from you a long Epistle filled as usual with pleasing Sentiments & information of what is passing in the great World. In this little world, I am shut up from all Information, except once a Week, I git the Papers, which only serve to raise my Indignation against the French.

The People are ripe for an open War, as preferable to the present State of things. They must know that we are not a divided People & they may know that tho' we have borne their Insults with unparalled [*sic*] Patience, yet that Americans will not always bear, but will support their Independence with Firmness & never submit to their Dictates & Demands — I think Pandora's Box must soon open upon that Government. I feel for, I pity, the poor People, who are made the Tools of, & must suffer for the Pride & ambition of their haughty Tyrants.<sup>10</sup>

#### Mourning for George Washington

The French republic, so disliked by Thaxter, was overthrown in November 1799 by a coup d'état and Napoleon Bonaparte was made first consul, the virtual ruler of the nation. The undeclared war between the two nations continued despite peace negotiations. Then on December 14, 1799, George Washington died. His sudden and unexpected death shocked the nation and Europe. Bonaparte declared a week of mourning in France. On December 26, Gen. Henry Lee delivered a eulogy in Congress, describing Washington as "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen."

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Thaxter Papers, Essex Institute, July 16, 1798.



*The only picture of Reverend Thaxter.  
Its source and accuracy are unknown.*

Thaxter, although an admirer of the first president, did not approve of the enormous outpouring of adulation, as he wrote to Caleb on Feb. 23, 1800, the day after what would have been Washington's 68th birthday:

I[n] my last I expressed my dislike of the Extrem to which some carried their Expressions respecting the great & good Washington. The first Sabbath after I heard of his Death I preached a Sermon on the Occation, little thinking that any thing more would be required. But out came the Proclamation, it was from the most respectable authority, it must be read. I reddey [*sic*] & told my People that if they expected any Performance from me on the Day they must give me Timely Notice. They informed me that it was their Wish to form a Procession, have publick Prayers & such a Discourse as I should deem suitable to the occation, rather

choosing, if agreeable to me, an Eulogy.

The Day came, the Free Masons assembled & the Principal Characters thro' the County. The Procession was formed by all Ranks & ages & all with the proper Bagge [badge?]. We entered the meeting House, where you would, I suspect, have pitied your poor old Brother to see him attempt the orator. But he had Nothing to fear, he knew his auditory were as poor Judges as he was of performing Eloquently.

On the whole the Day was spent with a greater Degree of Seriousness than is common, & I believe I gave good Satisfaction.

I hope the Business is now over. That he was a great & a good man, yet I doubt not that the same Providence which raised him up will continue to bless us with Patriots & Heroes as long, nay longer, than we are worthy of them. . . .

Your affectionate brother,  
Jos. Thaxter<sup>11</sup>

#### Prefers Aaron Burr over Jefferson

The election of 1800 had four candidates: John Adams and Charles Pinckney, Federalists, and Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, Democratic-Republicans. It was the first election in which political parties were a factor. President Adams, the Boston brahmin, was Thaxter's choice; Thaxter detested Jefferson, the Democratic-Republican and friend of France.

Voters cast ballots for Electors who elected the President and Vice President. The candidate, regardless of party, who received the most electoral votes became President, the one in second place became Vice President. Although the electors had been chosen, the Electoral College vote was not counted until Feb. 11, 1801. When Thaxter wrote this letter, it was not known who would be President and Vice President, although it was generally believed that Adams had no chance of reelection. The Treaty of Morfontaine, ending the hostilities with France, had been signed, but was not yet ratified. The letter to Caleb was written January 8, 1801:

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Thaxter Papers, Essex Institute, Feb. 23, 1800.

The Electioneering Squable is over, it has terminated contrary to the wish of many great and good men, but the bitter Pill is sweetened by the Reflection that Mr. Adams will leave the Chair without tarnishing the Honour or Intrest of our Country and should the Treaty with France be ratified every Door will be shut against the Designs of those who would draw us into too close a Connection with France or any other Nation in Europe. You must not from this conclude that I like the Treaty. I think it deficient and that the "advantages of a free Trade" is a vague Expression and may mean every thing or Nothing, just as the Rulers of the mighty Nation may see fit to construe it. Compensation ought to be made for the Losses we have sustained. At the same Time such are the Existing Circumstances in Europe that I believe it is the best Treaty that could be obtained and that good Policy requires that it should be ratified. Lest under the New Administration a Munro or some worse Character may be employed to negotiate a worse Treaty and bring us into too close a Connection with France.

Should the Treaty be ratified, I can see no Door open for the New Administration to do much mischief, as we shall stand fair with all Nations and the [sic] must be fools or mad men to disturb the Tranquility.

I see by the Papers that there is some Probability that Jefferson will fail of his Election and that Burr will be President. I cannot but hope that this will be the Case. If it should, it will form a Third Party which if Burr is Prudent and Wise (as they tell me he is) will embrace all Moderate and prudent men of both Parties, and leave the British and French Partizans to Squabble it out between themselves. If there must be Parties it is better that there should be Three or Four than but two for the more Parties there is the easier ballanced and the less Danger of Revolution.<sup>12</sup>

The Electoral College vote was a tie with Jefferson and Burr each receiving 73 votes; Adams received 65; Pinckney 64; Jay 1. The tie forced the decision into the House and after 36 ballots (lasting all night) Jefferson was chosen President, as Hamilton and some other Federalists swung their support to him, displeasing Reverend Thaxter very much. Burr was named Vice President. In 1804, after losing

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Thaxter Papers, Essex Institute, Jan. 8, 1801.



his bid to be New York governor, he killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel.

#### Bribery in House Vote?

When Jefferson was sworn in as President in March 1801, he named Albert Gallatin his Secretary of Treasury, at the time the most important Cabinet position. It soon was charged that Jefferson's election had been "bought" by promises to keep certain Federalists in important government positions in exchange for support of Jefferson. Albert Gallatin, a Swiss born in Geneva, was accused of promising to retain Allan McLane, a strongly partisan Federalist, as Collector of Customs at Wilmington if the Delaware Congressman would vote for Jefferson, which he did.

Thaxter was depressed by all this, as he wrote to his brother on November 5, 1801:

To contemplate the political State of our Country affords but a dreary Prospect. The administration of our Government has fallen into the Hands of men that appear neither to fear God nor regard Man. When the first officers of the Government trample the Constitution under Foot with Impunity it forebodes no Good. The Conduct of the Genevan Renegade [Gallatin] respecting Capt. McLane, Collect. of Wilmington is that if it passes off with Impunity I shall think that we may as well be without a Constitution & Laws as have them on Paper.

The Peace in Europe has taken Place suddenly [*sic*] & unexpected by Many. It must produce great Confusion in the Mercantile World & the Farmers will feel the Shock. It is in Mercy [?] to the poor Clergy & those Widdows & orphans that live by the Penny. I shall feel but little benefit the Present Year for I had laid in my Provisions except a little Pork that I must buy.<sup>13</sup>

#### Tom Paine: Hero or Villain?

On Oct. 30, 1802, Thomas Paine, who had been jailed in Paris by the Jacobins during the Reign of Terror, arrived in Baltimore. President Jefferson had earlier invited him to return to the United States, offering him passage on a man-

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Thaxter Papers, Essex Institute, Nov. 5, 1801.

of-war, but he didn't accept, preferring to return later on his own. Paine, the fiery pamphleteer of the American Revolution, had gone out of favor with most Americans after publishing a diatribe against George Washington in 1796. On his return, he was ostracized by the American community. The Federalists indirectly attacked Jefferson by grossly insulting Paine, whom they called "an obscene old sinner," "a drunkard," and "a buffoon," who had the "co-operation of the highest officer in the Union."<sup>14</sup>

Reverend Thaxter, after Paine arrived in the country, wrote to Caleb. It was the day before Christmas (of which he made no mention) in 1802:

Alass for my Country Tom Pain & Tom Jefferson hand & Glove. Who could have believed that any American could possibly be so much Depraved. Where will it End. What will be the Consequence.<sup>15</sup>

#### The War of 1812

In 1809, James Madison, a Jefferson favorite, was elected President. Despite their defeat in the presidential election, the Federalists doubled their seats in the House, but the Democratic-Republicans still controlled both it and the Senate. The Federalist support, mostly in the northeast, came from the popular opposition to the Embargo Act. In 1812, Congress declared war on Great Britain, but Massachusetts, strongly opposed to the embargo, refused to provide militia forces. In 1814, the embargo brought famine to Nantucket, resulting in a modification of the law. The New England states, fed up with the Democratic-Republicans, were close to seceding when Thaxter wrote to Rev. James Freeman of Boston, on December 10, 1821:

... Five Years war with Phanaticism in Democracy has not subdued my Resolution or so far lessened my Finances but that I live comfortably & pay all my Debs except the Debt of Gratitude & that is so far from giving me Pain that it gives me Courage & Pleasure. I shall never suffer for the

<sup>14</sup> Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the President*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1970, p.195. Jefferson, well known as a farmer, was said to have brought Paine back "to use him as manure." Paine died in poverty in 1809.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Thaxter Papers, Essex Institute, Dec.24,1802.

Want of the necessities of Life. My most painful Sensations are for the Difficulties which by this Wicked War has [been] brought upon many of my people. They were never affluent but their Resources from the Sea afforded them a comfortable & good living. Many are reduced to great Difficulty to obtain Bread. As to meat, Butter & Cheese, they are strangers, but are well supplied with Fish. Many are reduced to Begary & the poor on the Town have increased & must & will increase. Gloomy is the [future?]. Many are cured of the Madison or Monro — some few are incurable. Not one has gone into the army — some few have been driven into the Privateering Business which in the present mode of Conducting it is the greatest Curse that ever befell the civilized World. A — [?] will follow that abominable Practice of burning the Property of the Innocent because they cannot convert it to their own use. . . Oh, how old men love to tell their Tales — I will not torment you any longer. Only remember in a short time you will become old. . .<sup>16</sup>

#### Respect for Clergy

President Madison couldn't even please Thaxter when he declared fast days and days of prayer. The Reverend wanted the President to show more respect for the clergy. He ended the letter to Rev. James Freeman with some advice for President Madison:

P.S. I have always opposed of setting apart Days for Fasting & Prayer & for Thanksgiving. I have always read to my People from the Pulpit Proclamations appointing such Days when sent to me & attended to the Duties of my office at the Time appointed. But I never read a News Paper from the Pulpit to my People nor do I ever intend to be guilty of what I deem a greater Impropriety. If Mr. Madison has so low an opinion of such Days & of the Clergy as not to think it of sufficient Importance to send a Proclamation to every Clergyman I think it beneath the Dignity of a Clergyman to pay any Regards to his News Paper Proclamation. I never have, neither shall I while I entertain such views as I do at present.

I shall inform my People of the Day appointed & if they wish to set apart the Day, at their Request I shall comply with a ready mind.

<sup>16</sup> Misc. Bound, Mass. Hist. Society.

Washington & Adams treated the Clergy with more Respect. I wish some able Hand would remind Mr. Madison of his neglect.

Jos. Thaxter<sup>17</sup>

#### Patriotism and Democracy

In the early months of 1819, Leavitt Thaxter, the Reverend's son, planned to move south to teach school. Thaxter, perhaps expecting never to see his son again, wrote a long letter of advice, covering many subjects, including politics. Leavitt did not move until the next fall. Reverend Thaxter resurrected the earlier letter, which he had not sent, and mailed it, adding only a few lines. In it he had this to say about politics and government in 1819:

I knew the time when patriotism was a stable and fixed principle; when the good of our country was near the heart of every true American. This produced the most heroic exertions till our independence was established and a constitution of government formed that was the admiration of the world.

The times are now altered. The loaves and the fishes are now the objects of what is called patriotism, but falsely so called. The flood of foreigners which has flowed in upon us from the monarchical states of Europe has had the unhappy effect of producing a mixed medley of politics. Hating monarchy and declaiming against it does not constitute a true republican. You have been educated in the principles of true republicanism and must know that it is as opposite to unlimited democracy as it is to monarchy.

Party politics will sooner or later prove the overthrow of our republican government. . . Sooner or later a revolution must take place. The heterogeneous mass at the southwest of Spaniards, Frenchmen, etc., can never amalgamate with the stern morals and republicanism of the eastern states. God only knows how soon an explosion may take place and a flood of human blood be shed. . .

When I am gone, look over these [words] and remember "he being dead yet speaketh." Need I caution you against having anything to do with slaves; rather become your own boot and shoe-black than deal in human flesh.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



## Edgartown Schools in the 1830s

by HENRY BAYLIES  
(1822-1893)

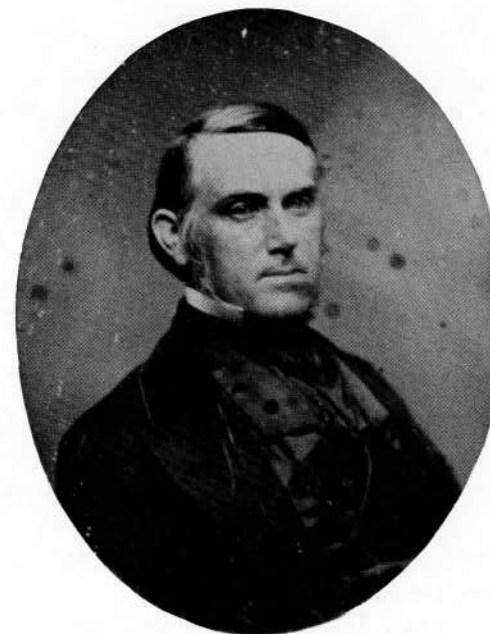
*In our archives there is a scrapbook kept by Henry Baylies (1822-1893), son of Frederick Baylies Jr., architect and builder of Edgartown's four 19th Century churches. Unlike his father, Henry led a varied life, most of it off-Island. At various times he was school principal, teacher, businessman, minister, college president, lecturer and, lastly, a lawyer. Midst all this, he married five times. He collected most of his writings in the scrapbook. He wrote with style and humor, as evidenced by this article, originally published in the Vineyard Gazette, November 3, 1876.*

I was born at an early age in an old house on Water street. . . Miss Maria Norton and Mrs. Margarette (Arey) Vinson, and perhaps others, kept juvenile schools in a little old shop back of Capt. Chase Pease's, in the vestry of the now town hall and in the east front room, and jolly little fellows we were, who used to shoot our ideas and other things — spit balls, for instance. Then there was the old red school house, situated at the upper end of "Squire" Thaxter's lot, near the house of Barnard C. Marchant.<sup>1</sup> That red school house with its little tower and piercing bell, its unplastered entry, long unpainted wooden benches, well cut and carved, its walls written over in charcoal in letters spelling "kauphy" for coffee, its unpainted, high desk for the school master, boxwood stove, and its red rawhide, are all things of the past and would not now be tolerated by squatter sovereigns in a frontier settlement.

The sound of the bell on the school house near the windmill<sup>2</sup> seems to me like the sound of the old red school

<sup>1</sup> The old red school was near intersection of Pease's Point Way and Davis Lane, Edgartown. DCHS records show Mr. Marchant as Bernard Case Marchant (1801-1882), not Barnard.

<sup>2</sup> This school is today's Carroll Apartments, Edgartown, at Pease's Point Way and Planting Field Way.



*Richard Luce Pease as a young school teacher.*

house bell. Isn't it the same bell? The school house was moved to the hill in the Gray neighborhood and occupied as a residence by Mr. Cummings. Whether standing now, I do not know.<sup>3</sup>

The course of study in the "town school" was not very extensive and girls finished their education when they had gone through the "Rule of Three." I remember that R.L. Pease Esq., in his youthful days, introduced singing and accompanied it with the flute — a black flute with silver keys. He also introduced some experiments in philosophy and chemistry, on a limited scale. All these innovations were looked upon with disfavor by many, among whom, I presume, was the old fisherman who didn't want his boys

<sup>3</sup> It is standing even now on South Water Street, above Captain's Walk.



to study the English language as the American language was good enough for them.

Even then, colored boys were admitted to the public school, and black Beck had a bright son there by the name of George Washington Napoleon Bonapart Christopher Columbus, or something like all that, so that the teacher called him by a different name every day in the week, and he had one name left over for Sunday School which, I believe, he did not attend.<sup>4</sup>

The famous school of that day was Thaxter's Academy, kept in the house since owned by Capt. Alfred Fisher.<sup>5</sup> Boys from Nantucket used to attend this school and board at Mrs. Lydia Coffin's. How those boys used to call us "Old Town Turkeys," and how we used to call them "Nantucket Scraps." How we used to mock their manner of speech. They did not pronounce the letter R, so we used to say "Fatha has a schoolah a shoa on the Bah loaded with con and poke and flowah," to which they replied by abusing us as "Old Town Takies."<sup>6</sup>

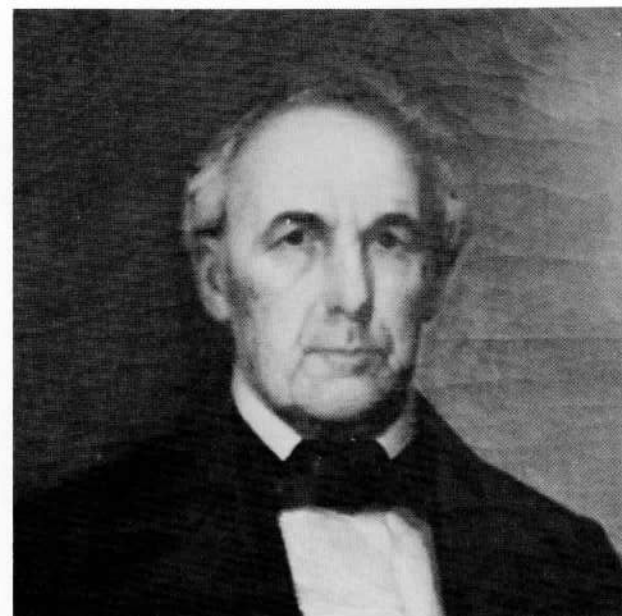
Squire [Leavitt] Thaxter kept a very good school but, according to my recollection, he was rather a severe disciplinarian. Under him boys could prepare for college and some were put into the study of Latin Grammar at the age of 6 and 7, as I remember to my sorrow. Those were the days of quill pens—real goose quills. Steel pens were not known. Squire Thaxter used sometimes to amuse himself, as was evident by the peculiar twinkle of the eye and twitch of the mouth, while at the same time he punished some disobedient youthful by straddling the tip of his—the youthful's—ear with a split quill, which as I remember, was made to pinch vigorously and spitefully by the increased pressure of the Squire's thumb and finger.

The Squire was dignified in his bearing, neat in person

<sup>4</sup> A most unlikely story, but evidence of the type of humor whites used in talking about blacks.

<sup>5</sup> On the corner of Davis Lane and School St., now the home of Mrs. Gertrude Goff. Lydia Coffin lived two houses away on School St.

<sup>6</sup> Is it a fact that Edgartown folks were called "turkies" because the Mattakeset herring, a favorite Edgartown food, were also known as turkies?



Leavitt Thaxter, schoolmaster and son of the Reverend.

and well dressed, though, after he abandoned teaching, he appeared on the street in a garb which did not become the former village Academy principal.

David Davis afterward taught in Thaxter's Academy, [then] in the old Court House, and lastly in the lower part of his residence.<sup>7</sup> Those were lively times for unstudious and roguish boys. Whew! how the "ruler" would whang on the back or bottom of the unmatchful victim. Standing out on the floor, holding out a book till the arm almost fell from the socket, and other tortures imported from "way down East," were practiced *con amore*. . . .

Then there was the Academy near the Congregationalist Church, which was burnt down 30 or 40 years ago. When that was burnt it was said there had not been a building burnt in Edgartown for about 100 years, and that

<sup>7</sup> As Baylies will mention later, the Davis Academy burned down in 1836, but was rebuilt on the corner of Davis Lane and School St., and is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. James Reston.



North School on Pease's Point Way (now an apartment house) was built about 1850. Grist mill, for which Mill Street was named, is behind it.

building [also] was a School House. Remarkable fact, if a fact. I have a sort of impression the new academy which I have just named was built by the Congregationalists as an opposition school, but, in opposition to what, I disremember.<sup>8</sup>

I remember attending school in the gallery of the Congregational Church, and the names of Mr. Clarke and Mr. Bailey, are associated in my mind with two very excellent teachers there and in the Academy. I think the school was moved to the Congregational gallery after the fire.

The Congregational Academy was a classical school, as well as a school of general instruction, and, after the abandonment of his school by Mr. Thaxter, was the only school affording classical education.

<sup>8</sup> His memory may be playing tricks. This could have been the first Davis Academy.



Original Thaxter Academy building. It later became, as here, an art school. Today it is a private home at School St. and Davis Lane.

... the boys of the Town School and the boys of Thaxter's Academy were often bitter belligerents (*sic*) in snow-ball battle. Both sides were armed in part with barrel-head shields and snow-balls of ordinary weight and snow-balls, soaked and frozen, of extraordinary weight and hardness. Black eyes and bruised shins were no uncommon results of these unsanguinary battles . . .

A word more about schools and teachers. Elihu P. Norton kept the Town School and also had an evening class and schools for adults in which he taught English Grammar. I warrant he used old Lindley Murray's Grammar, for that was in use then . . . Mr. Norton was a gentleman, fairly educated, radical in his views, especially on political questions, and the first abolitionist that I ever saw. Though radical, he was genial and kindly and as ready to hear as to be heard.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Elihu Pease Norton (1796-1848), was married to Julia Butler, daughter of William Butler who owned the land on which the Wesleyan Grove campground was laid out.

Mr. Crane also taught the Town School, but I never got under his instructions. He afterwards kept a dry goods store where Robinson of the full-rigged-ship advertisement now keeps. He was dark, stooping, thin-faced and keen-eyed, and a very pleasant gentleman. Rev. Franklin Fish was at one time a teacher in what I have styled the Congregationalist Academy. He was a very clear, nice, smooth-faced, gentlemanly man, and a good teacher. I met him a few years ago at his country home, an old man, retired from active work and enjoying the quiet of his pleasant fireside, and he spoke of his stay at Edgartown, so many years ago, with almost boyish pleasure.

Those were the happy days of singing schools, where the boys and girls, old and young, met frequently, if not oftener, to learn new pieces and new loves, and to rehearse old pieces and old loves. . . . we had good times and every year learned over again what we forgot from the year before. Col. Crane [mentioned above] was a former singing master of earlier date, I believe . . . he was a man of fine proportions and good mind. Whether it was he who used to sing "come, bow-wow-wow befo-o-ore" etc., I leave [for] those who know to say.



Robinson's store on Main Street ran this full-rigged-ship ad for years.

## Documents

### Jeremiah Pease Diary

This, like most goodbyes, is not a pleasant task. It introduces the final installment of Jeremiah Pease's diary, a series that has been published in virtually every issue since November 1974.

Jeremiah's diary provides the best record of daily life on Martha's Vineyard from November 16, 1819, until June 5, 1857, the day Jeremiah died. The only period in those 38 years when Jeremiah did not maintain his journal was from September 19, 1829, to December 31, 1832. However, the record continued as his oldest son, Joseph Thaxter Pease, took over, writing the daily entries as though written by Jeremiah. When Jeremiah did resume on January 1, 1832, he explained tersely that "My former Journal . . . has been kept by my Son, J. T. Pease, owing to my peculiar circumstances."

We don't know any more than that. Jeremiah was not one to share his inner thoughts.

There may be some confusion in members' minds because our publication of the diary has not been altogether chronological. When we began to serialize it, we had only one small volume covering the period from November 1819 to December 1820. While that was being published, Mr. and Mrs. Julien Weston of Boston, members of the Society, gave us five volumes of Jeremiah's diary, dating from September 1829 to Jeremiah's death in 1857. Mr. Weston is a descendant of Jeremiah. We published those five volumes chronologically, ending in February 1987.

Missing at the time was the journal from 1823 to 1829, critical years in Jeremiah's

life, as it was immediately after he left the Congregational church to become a born-again Methodist. This, it turned out, was a most important event in Vineyard history. He convinced the Edgartown Methodists to set up a campground on East Chop (now Oak Bluffs). That campground, soon called Wesleyan Grove, attracted thousands of Methodists from the mainland, starting the Island on the way to becoming what it is today, a famous summer resort.

Fortunately for all of us, the missing journal was discovered in an Edgartown attic in 1988 and was presented to us. We began its publication in November 1988 and it is this volume that is ending in this issue, bringing the entire series to a conclusion.

The Society and all Islanders are greatly indebted to Mr. Weston for his gift of five volumes and to the anonymous person who gave us the missing volume. We have no record of how we acquired, many years ago, the first volume, an unbound collection of dog-eared pages, the publication of which began this saga. Incidentally, those pages, are stitched together with what appears to be shoemaker's thread (Jeremiah was a cordwainer). At the top of the first page is this: "Journal Continued 1819," so there was an earlier volume. If it is ever found, we hope it will be given to the Society to complete the work.

Finally, a personal note. It is with sadness that the Editor says goodbye to Jeremiah, whose handwriting has become as familiar as his own. I have shared his personal life for nearly 14 years. I will miss you, Jeremiah. You have been a good friend.





## May 1829

2nd. SW. Ship *Congress* comes down from H. Hole.<sup>1</sup>

3rd. E, Gail with rain.

5th. ENE, rain. Engaged in moveing my things into Father's Shop.<sup>2</sup>

6th. WNW. Set out for Brig *Diamond*. Ship *Congress* sails for Nantucket.<sup>3</sup>

7th. S. Engaged in planting corn. Returned at evening. [He planted corn for the following two days.]

10th. SSW, rainy. Rev. Wm. Bowin preaches his Farewel Sermon.<sup>4</sup>

11th. SW. Set out for brig *Diamond*.

12th. W. Returned home at about 7 o'clock this Evening.

13th. SW, Pleasant. Ship *John Adams* arrives with 1600 bbls. of Oil.<sup>5</sup>

18th. SW, Pleasant. Ship *John Adams* sails for Nantucket. Court C. Please sets to Day.<sup>6</sup>

21st. E. foggy. Court of Common Please rises this day. Mr. Timothy Coffin's house is raised today. Brig

<sup>1</sup> Owned by Philip Folger of Nantucket, ship *Congress* was returning from Pacific whaling; her master, Benjamin Worth 2nd, lived in Edgartown. This seems to have been her maiden voyage. She brought home 2507 barrels of sperm oil.

<sup>2</sup> He had just sold his own shop to Thomas Cathcart.

<sup>3</sup> Brig *Diamond* had been cast ashore at Penikese Island in February. The next day's entry is confusing. Perhaps the WNW wind caused him to abort the trip. He surely didn't plant corn after returning from Penikese in the evening. Was his cornfield far enough away so that he usually remained overnight?

<sup>4</sup> Reverend Bowen was the Baptist minister in Edgartown. Jeremiah was Methodist.

<sup>5</sup> Another Nantucket whaler. Starbuck says she brought 1517 bbls. of whale oil; had been off Brazil for less than a year.

<sup>6</sup> Court of Common Pleas.

Planter hauls off into the stream.<sup>7</sup>

22nd. SW. Rev. Thomas C. Pierce leaves town to-day for Conference.<sup>8</sup>

24th. SW, fresh breeze. Brig *Planter* Sails for a Whaling Voyage.

25th. SW, freeze breeze. Ship *Mary Ann* arrives from Boston. She having been bought here.<sup>9</sup>

27th. SW, foggy. Engaged in harrowing Corn.

30th. NE. Rec'd. of Cornelius Grinnell Jr., & Co., 110 Gals. Winter Oil, 119 Summer Oil, 51 short, 25 Long tube Glasses, 15 Yards Cotton Cloath, from Schooner *William* of N. Bedford, Capt. Howland.<sup>10</sup> Rec'd. information by Schr. *Newson*, Capt. Ferguson, that Capt. W. Lewis has contracted to finish the Pier.

## June 1829

2nd. SE. News of the Death of Capt. Rickard Holley, who was lost at Sea.<sup>11</sup>

3rd. S. Rainy. Went to H. Hole.

11th. E. Fresh breeze. Schooner *Dart* arrives with Lumber to build the Causeway.

12th. E. Schooner *Dart* commences Discharging. Capt. Lasurces.

13th. E. Bewkir [Bewkier] arrives, ditto.

15th. SW to N. Schonner *Dart* Finnishes unloading and sails.

<sup>7</sup> Coffin's house is 30 South Water Street. What does it mean "hauls off into the stream?" Certainly not the Gulf Stream.

<sup>8</sup> Reverend Pierce was Jeremiah's minister, a Methodist.

<sup>9</sup> Her master was Captain Worth. She made a one-year whaling voyage off Brazil, returning in June 1830, and was sold. We don't know who owned her or who bought her.

<sup>10</sup> These, of course, were lighthouse supplies.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Holley, 29, of Edgartown was husband of Patience Nye Tilton.

16th. E. to SW. Capt. Bewkier's men arrive to build the Causeway. David Henshaw, Esq., arrives to See the Light House in the Revenue Cutter, Capt. Trivett, from Boston. Capt. Winslow Lewis arrives from Boston via N. Bedford.<sup>12</sup>

22nd. NW. Capt. Lewis commences setting Piles for the Causeway. Ships *John* and *Mary-Ann* hawl into the Stream.

23rd. Ship *John* Sails. Returns at Night.<sup>13</sup>

25th. NW. Ships *John* & *Mary Ann* Sail for the Brazil Banks.

27th. SW. Schr. *Dart* arrives with Lumber for the Cause-way.

28th. S. Rainy. Elder Linzey arrived yesterday and Charles G. Chase, Elder, preaches today.

30th. SW. Rainy. Schr. *Dart* sails. Launched the Revenue Boat.

## July 1829

1st. SW. Rec'd. a letter from David Henshaw Esqr.<sup>14</sup>

4th. SE. Gail at Night. Independence [day].

6th. SW. Pleasant. P.M. Sloop *Thomas* Sails for Boston.

9th. SSW. Rev'd. Thomas C. Pierce arrives with his family.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The lighthouse establishment had come to inspect the new lighthouse and watch Winslow Lewis build the bridge, connecting it to shore. Henshaw was the Collector of Customs at Boston and responsible for the lighthouses of the Second District. Lewis was the lighthouse establishment's favorite builder. Bewkier must have worked for him.

<sup>13</sup> Captain Pease of the *John* must have forgotten something.

<sup>14</sup> Too bad he didn't tell us what Henshaw had to say after he inspected the new lighthouse.

<sup>15</sup> Apparently Reverend Pierce had been in

13th. SW. Went to New-town. Carried I. W. Pease. Returned same day.<sup>16</sup>

14th. SW, fresh breeze. Capt. Gustavus Baylies arrives from Cape Horn. He sailed from New Bedford.

17th. SW. Went to H. Hole, East Side.

22nd. SW. Pleasant. Engaged in making hay.

23rd. SW to NE, rainy P.M. ditto. Carting ditto.

28th. SW, cloudy. Went to New-Town.

30th. SSW, pleasant. Bought [unfinished entry]

## August 1829

5th. SE. rainy. Schr. *Three Sisters* arrives with Lumber for the brige. They commence unloading.

6th. SW, foggy. Schr. *Three Sisters* finishes unloading & Sails.

11th. NW to SW, fresh breeze. Went to Chilmark.

17th. SE. This Day the workmen finishe the brige & Sail for Boston in Sloop *Hero*.

21st. SW, pleasant. Lieut. Prescott arrives from Nantucket.<sup>17</sup>

23rd. SW. About 3 o'clock this Morning Sister Damris Marchant dies in a deranged State of mind.<sup>18</sup>

24th. SW, fresh breeze. Funerael of Sister Marchant. Service by Rev'd.

Edgartown without his family and now had been stationed there for the coming year by the Methodist Conference, which he had just attended.

<sup>16</sup> New Town was (West) Tisbury. We have no record of I. W. Pease. He may have meant Sheriff I. D. Pease, his brother.

<sup>17</sup> Prescott must have been part of the lighthouse service. Jeremiah had first written "Gen'l. Prescott."

<sup>18</sup> Damaris Marchant, 62, was the unmarried daughter of Gamaliel and Lydia Ripley Marchant of Edgartown.





*Wm. Thomas Dr. Tension*  
*from the Author*

AN  
**ORATION,**

DELIVERED AT THE  
**DEDICATION**

OF  
**THAXTER'S ACADEMY,**

IN  
**EDGARTON, MARTHA'S VINEYARD,**

**NOVEMBER, 29th, 1825.**

**HYMN**

COMPOSED FOR THE OCCASION.

**LEAVITT THAXTER,**

**NEW-BEDFORD:**

**BENJAMIN HANDSEY, PRINTER.**

**1825.**

Leavitt Thaxter delivered an oration and composed a hymn when he opened his academy in 1825. New Bedford printer misspelled Edgartown, which must have been a mistake.