

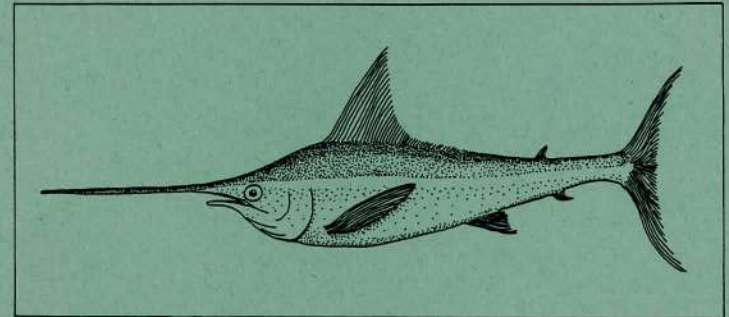
Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL.35, NO. 3

FEBRUARY 1994



The fabled swordfish, Xiphias Gladius, a large-eyed speedster.

Swordfishing From Martha's Vineyard

by CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr.

Documents: Log of the Malvina B., Edgartown Swordfisherman

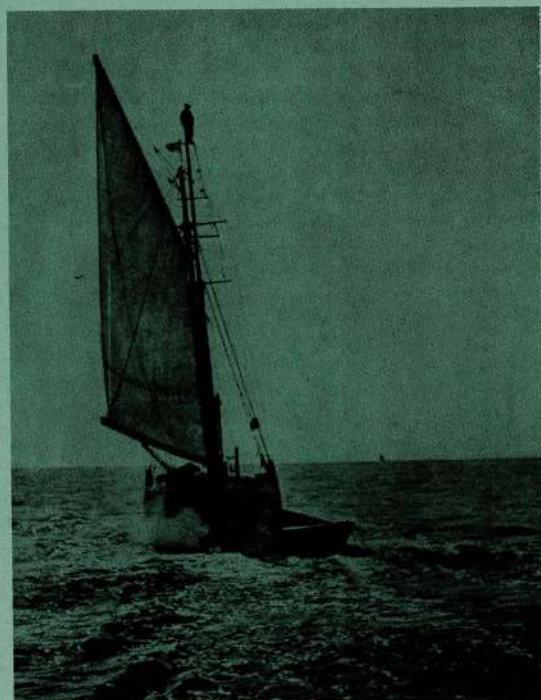
Who was Gen. Charles Grey, The Man the Vineyard Hated?

by NEIL B. YETWIN

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From The Brooklyn Museum Quarterly, October 1919.

Eliza A. Benner of Edgartown, Capt. Horace O. Hillman, on Georges Bank in July 1919.

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Vol.35, No.3 © 1994 D.C.H.S. February 1994

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Founding Editor: Gale Huntington (1902-1993)

The Dukes County *Intelligencer* is published quarterly by the Dukes County Historical Society, Inc., Cooke and School Streets, Edgartown, Massachusetts. Subscription is by membership in the Society. Back issues are available at the Society.

Memberships are solicited. Send applications to the Society at Box 827, Edgartown, MA, 02539. Telephone: 508 627-4441. Manuscripts and authors' queries should be addressed there.

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ISSN 0418 1379

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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.

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Swordfishing from Martha's Vineyard

by CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr.

The swordfish (Xiphias Gladius) for many years has been a valuable catch, eagerly sought by commercial fishermen from Edgartown and Menemsha. Harpooning the sword is exciting, could even be called a sport. Yet, that was how commercial fishermen caught them. Because ironing the swordfish was exciting and, in addition, profitable, the men who caught them often considered themselves the "princes" of the Vineyard waterfront. Sadly, for Island fishermen the days of abundant large swordfish are over. Heavy fishing has made the fish scarce and going after them with harpoons is no longer profitable.

SWORDFISH are widely distributed in all tropical, subtropical and temperate oceans. In the western Atlantic, they occur from Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia (latitude 45 degrees N) to southern Argentina (45 degrees S)! In those waters, swordfish are found in the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and north along the coast across Georges Bank and Grand Bank. During spring and summer, swordfish are believed to migrate north and east along the edge of the continental shelf and in autumn return to the south and west.²

In summer, in the eastern Atlantic, swordfish occur from South Africa northward to the Mediterranean where they were once abundant and in lesser numbers to the coast of Norway. The more northern range in the eastern Atlantic than in the western is a result of the warmer water of the Gulf Stream.

Swordfish spawn in tropical waters where surface

¹ Palko, et al., 1981. (See end of article for references.)

² Tibbo, et al., 1961.

CLYDE L. MacKENZIE, a Martha's Vineyard native, is a marine biologist in the Department of Commerce, stationed at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Highlands, New Jersey. He earned his college expenses as an Island shellfisherman. Author of nearly 50 articles on marine biology, his latest work is a book on the history of fishing in Raritan Bay.

temperatures are 68 to 72 degrees F. In the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and off Florida, spawning apparently occurs throughout the year, peaking from April through September.³ Males become reproductively active when they weigh 37 to 50 pounds (dressed, 28 to 37.5 pounds), and females at 61 to 84 pounds (dressed, 46 to 63.4 pounds).

Female swordfish increase their weight from about nine pounds at one year to 33 pounds at two years. At three years, they are 90 pounds, 155 pounds at four, and about 240 pounds after five years. Females are slightly larger than males and are also proportionately heavier at the same length.⁴ Fishermen sometimes call swordfish under 100 pounds "pups."

Adult swordfish are opportunistic feeders and forage for food from bottom to surface waters over great depths and distances. Their diet varies with location. In the northwestern Atlantic, prey include argentine (this fish resembles a herring), Atlantic herring, barracudinas, butterfish, mackerel, redfish, silver hake and squid. They frequently use their sword to attack and disable fish before ingesting them.⁵ Of the species found most frequently in swordfish stomachs, argentine, lancetfish and lanternfish are from deep water, while redfish, silver hake and squid range more or less independently of depth.⁶

Swordfish range to great depths. One was photographed from a bathosphere in the Gulf of Mexico at 2145 feet and many encounters have been made at more than 1500 feet. The fish undergo tremendous light and temperature fluctuations in their treks from 40 degrees F. in the depths to warm Gulf Stream surface waters.⁷ They do not seem to school like mackerel and pogies (menhaden), but high catch rates at specific depths and locations suggest they are concentrated.

In the northwestern Atlantic, they often bask in warm

surface waters in summer, where they can be sighted and harpooned. This basking behavior, thought to facilitate digestion by heating their bodies after they have fed in the cold depths, is rarely observed in tropical waters.

Fishermen usually catch swordfish where the water is 50 to 80 fathoms deep (fathom is six feet) off the east coast and 100 to 300 fathoms deep in the Gulf of Mexico.

Early Swordfishing

Swordfish were first sought as food in New England in the early 1800s. An early account of such use on Martha's Vineyard appeared in the *Barnstable Patriot*, June 30, 1841. It reported that fishermen of Martha's Vineyard took a considerable number of swordfish every year by harpoon. Some were pickled and salted and were used for food and lobster bait.

According to G. Brown Goode (1887), an authority on fisheries, swordfishing became of some importance between 1840 and 1855. Early swordfishing boats of southern New England were sloops and small schooners, manned by two or three fishermen, plus a cook and a boy. Many boats were employed in the fishery for successive years, but others were fitted out only for one season or even part of a season. Some boats divided the summer between looking for black sea bass and swordfish. Numerous mackerel schooners had a harpooner's stand on their bows, as did coasters and packets. In 1879, about 40 boats from ports between Gloucester and New London engaged in swordfishing with annual landings of about 6000 fish. Some harpooners were "ironing" as many as 15 a day.⁸

In the 1860s, heads, tails and fins were cut off and carcasses carried fresh to markets, where they were cut into steaks and sold like halibut. About one-third were sold that way for four cents a pound early in the season. The other two-thirds were pickled or salted for preservation throughout the year. Salted swordfish sold for \$6.00 a barrel. About 200 barrels of swordfish were captured annually at Martha's

⁸ Goode, 1887. Ironing, of course, is what the fishermen call it when the point of the harpoon is thrust into the fish.

³ Arata, 1954.

⁴ Palko, 1981.

⁵ Scott and Tibbo, 1968.

⁶ Tibbo, 1961.

⁷ Church, 1968.

Vineyard.⁹

Before 1862, the market for fresh swordfish was mostly in New Bedford, Fall River, Providence and adjoining towns, especially for fish taken off the south side of Martha's Vineyard. About 1864, a few swordfish were sent to Boston on trial and soon the market there increased.¹⁰ In time, Boston became the principal market for swordfish, including those taken by Vineyard boats.

Swordfish, until the 1960s, were harpooned from a stand, an extended bowsprit, 15 to 25 feet long. Because they are easily scared off, swordfish cannot be approached closely by a boat without a stand. By extending out beyond the hull, the stand allows the harpooner to get closer before startling the fish. The harpoon is a pole about 15 feet long and an inch and a half in diameter. In early years, it was hickory but later hard pine or oak were used. On the working end, an iron shank about two feet long was fastened to the pole. The shank held a four-inch point. Fishermen call it the "lily iron," the "swordfish iron" or "Indian dart." After it was thrust into a fish, the iron was freed from the shank and pulled back with the attached line. The pull turned it at right angles and locked it into the fish. If the iron penetrated only the skin of the swordfish, it would often pull out and the fish would escape. The line attached to the point was about 600 feet long with a keg tied to its other end.¹¹ In recent years, neoprene floats or solid PVC balls have been used instead of kegs.

Large swordfish come to the surface in northern waters when water temperature is from 55 to 70 degrees F., as in June through September. They are rarely seen at other times. July and August were the best months and three-fourths of the catch was harpooned then.

The boat's crew (spotters) looked for swordfish while standing on crosstrees high on the mast, usually encircled by metal hoops. From that height in good conditions, they could easily spot the dorsal and tail fins from as much as

one mile. Sometimes, the boat comes up on a swordfish without having seen it from a distance. Fish can be seen and harpooned underwater at depths to about ten feet.

When a swordfish was sighted, the boat headed toward it while the striker, usually the captain, in the stand readied his harpoon. With the fish six to ten feet ahead of the stand, he thrust the harpoon at a point beside its dorsal fin. When struck, the swordfish descended rapidly, hauling out the long line as a crewman, usually the cook, tossed the keg overboard. The effort of pulling the line and keg soon tired the fish. One crewman, who came down from the mast and jumped into a dory, rowed to the keg and pulled in the line bringing the fish alongside. The time required to get it alongside and pass a line around its tail varied from 15 minutes to two hours, depending on the stamina of the fish. Meanwhile, the boat kept sailing, trying to spot and harpoon other fish. Shortly before the boat returned, the man in the dory would thrust a lance into the sword's gills to bleed and kill it. If done too early, the bleeding would attract sharks. The fish was then hoisted onto the deck of the boat.¹²

The first mention of swordfishing in *The Vineyard Gazette* was on July 30, 1846:

On Tuesday last, our fishermen caught 12 to 14 very large swordfish. The fish sold for \$4-\$5 apiece. They are taken generally with a harpoon and our whalers and strangers enjoy the sport of their capture. We know of no fish that eats better.

In 1852, the *Gazette* reported:

Up to Wednesday night, August 25, 483 swordfish had been taken by the Edgartown boats generally employed in that fishery, and 70 more by transient boats. The highest number taken by a boat was 100 and the lowest number was 29.

Swordfishing seemed to diminish in interest towards the end of the 1800s. That was a period of great expansion on the Island with much money to be made as carpenters and real estate salesman. Perhaps that accounts for the falling off in the fishery.

In the early 1900s, Edgartown developed a large swordfish industry. Most of the fishermen were young. Two of the

⁹ Storer, 1867.

¹⁰ Rich, 1947.

¹¹ Goode, 1887.

¹² Goode, 1887.

best known were Horace O. Hillman and Robert L. Jackson.

Hillman's first swordfishing boat was the catboat *Thelma*, soon followed by the *Louise*. Bob Jackson also began swordfishing in a catboat, *Mildred*, which he soon replaced with a larger cat, this one sloop-rigged, the *Mildred J*. Both boats were named for his daughter.

Mildred married Samuel Bailey Norton, brother of Ike and Phil Norton, both of them swordfishermen. Thus, the Jacksons and the Nortons, two of Edgartown's great deep-water fishing families, joined forces.

In 1911, Capt. Horace Hillman, son of Judge Beriah T. Hillman, anxious to go deep-water fishing, gave up his catboat and bought the sixty-foot schooner *Eliza Benner*. She had been built in 1895 and, Hillman said, "rode like a gull," whether netting, trawling or swordfishing.¹³ She was probably the first Vineyard boat to go fishing for swords on Georges Bank.

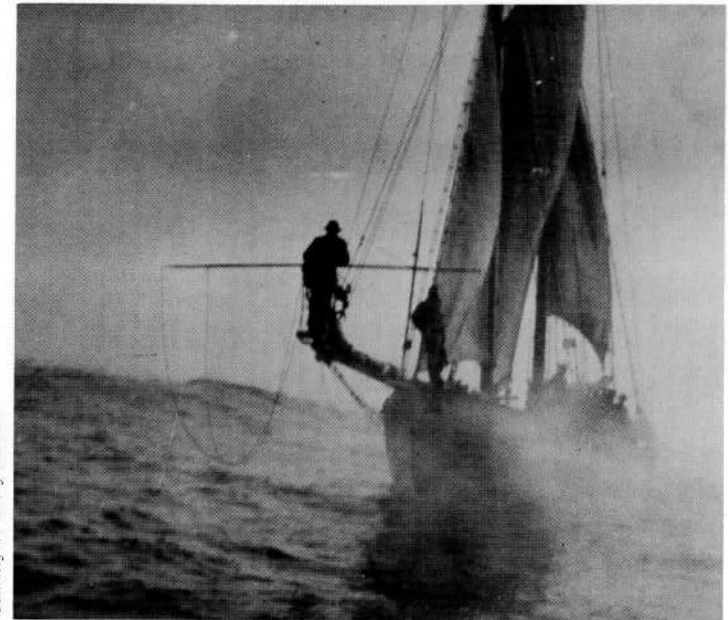
In the 1920s, he sold her to Capt. "Ted" Morgan and had a larger schooner built. She was the *B. T. Hillman*, named for his father, who, no doubt, helped finance the project. After Captain Hillman retired in the 1930s, the *Hillman* was sailed by Capt. Percy McKenna, who had been a crewman under Horace.

Bob Jackson and Horace were good friends, although strong competitors for "highliner," the one who brought in the most fish. Their friendly rivalry continued for many years. Captain Bob had come from Cuttyhunk with his brothers, Levi and Sam, in 1906. Bob and Levi settled in Edgartown for the rest of their lives. Sam went to Nantucket where he was captain and owner of the dragger, *Phyllis J*.

Encounter with a German U-Boat

Captain Bob's life had many highlights. One came during World War I while he was swordfishing with his 65-foot schooner *Progress* on Georges Bank, 150 miles east of Boston. They had been out more than 10 days and had more than 80 fish in the hold on ice. One afternoon, a U.S. destroyer came by to warn Bob and the other skippers on Georges

¹³ Dorothy Cottle Poole, *Vineyard Sampler*, DCHS, 1978, p.85.



Courtesy S. Bailey Norton.

Capt. Bob Jackson on the stand of the *Progress*. Photo was taken on Georges Bank the day before the schooner was blown up by a U-boat.

that a German submarine was in the area and they should head for port. Some of the skippers, including Bob, decided to chance it until the next day, hoping to pick up a few more fish.

At 4:30 a.m., the next day, the crew of the *Progress* started work as usual. There was no sign of the U-boat. At 9:30, also as usual, they shut off the engine and went below for their "noon" meal. Soon, they heard some commotion on the water and went up on deck. The German U-boat had surfaced, its guns manned. The commander told them to send over a dory, they wanted to board the boat. Bob sent a dory over and two or three Germans came aboard, took the ship's papers, her flag, some food and told Bob he had 20 minutes to abandon ship. They were going to blow her up.

Bob had heard the horror stories being circulated that Germans forced fishermen to stand on the deck of their submarines and then submerged, leaving them to drown.



Aboard the *Progress* in Edgartown. Capt. Bob, at right. others (from left) unknown, crewmen Matty and Edmund Richard, Louis Doucette.

He felt good that they were being given a chance to save themselves. They took some food and a compass and the eight men got into two dories. When they had rowed away, the Germans attached a bomb to the stern of the *Progress* and blew her up, sending her and her catch of 80 fish to the bottom.

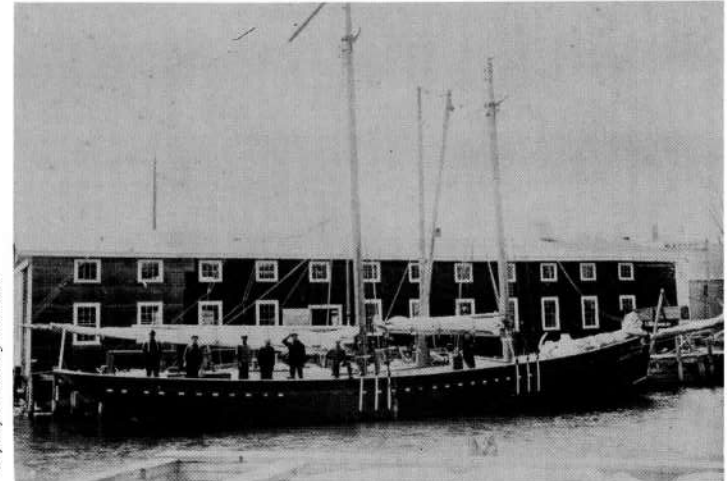
The *Progress* was not the only casualty. There were six other fishing boats that were sunk on that day and 56 men forced into dories.

Bob and his crew started to row towards land. After 29 hours, a freighter picked them up and in a day or so the men were home in Edgartown.

After the war, the owners and crew of the *Progress* were compensated for their loss, including \$2500 for the swordfish, by Germany. Captain Jackson immediately ordered a new boat. She was the *Liberty*, a 70-foot schooner built by Charles Morse in Thomaston, Maine. On May 20, 1919, she sailed into Edgartown harbor "and was gloriously greeted by the other ships around."¹⁴

But before Bob could take his new boat out fishing, another war had broken out. This was a labor war with fishermen along the northeastern coast going out on strike. Labor unrest was widespread at the time, as often happens

¹⁴ Vineyard Gazette, May 22, 1919.



Capt. Jackson's new *Liberty* after her maiden trip from Maine in May 1919. With Captain Bob are Edmund and Matty Richard, among others.

after a war. The fishermen's complaint was about wages. They demanded a guaranteed minimum, which would fluctuate with fish prices. They also insisted on being paid immediately after the catch was sold, something that seems to have been standard procedure on Vineyard boats. Cooks would be paid the same as the rest of the crew (they normally received a bonus in addition to a share).

Strikers blocked the markets in the large cities and no fish could be unloaded. Captain Bob, itching to take his new boat to Georges, persuaded a crew of Vineyard captains to go out with him. They became famous as "The Crew of Captains." All except one were captains. That was young Bob Jackson, then only a junior in high school. His dad wanted him to finish high school and go on to college, but young Bob convinced him to let him go on this trip. He never went back to school.

In July 1919, the strike-breaker *Liberty* sailed out to Georges. After three weeks of fishing, she pulled into New Bedford, where the market was still open, with a record catch of 20,000 pounds of swordfish. The largest fish was 443 pounds, cleaned, the smallest 70 pounds. The strike was making fish scarce on the market and pushed up the price

to 25 cents a pound. The gross from the sale was \$5200. After expenses, each share was over \$500. No wonder young Bob never went back to school.

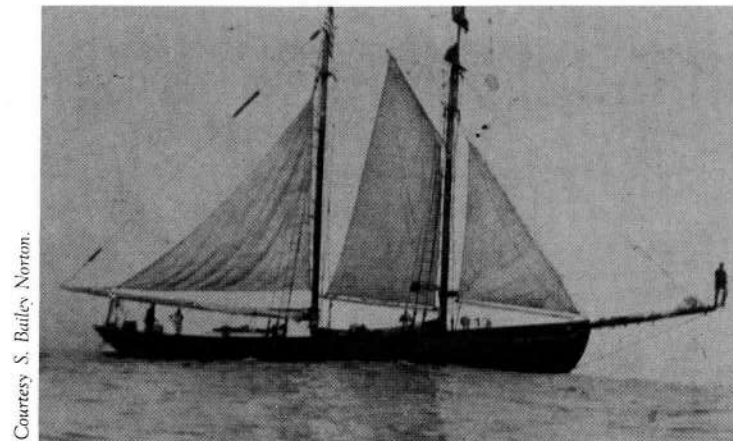
On August 10, the *Liberty* went out again with her Crew of Captains. Early in September she returned with 92 swordfish to New Bedford. This time the reception was not pleasant and, with the season nearly over, Captain Bob and crew decided to quit.

In October, he sold the brand-new *Liberty* to Claude Wagner of Edgartown, who had fished with him regularly, because, he said, nobody was going to tell him how to run his boat or pay his crew.

Edgartown's Crew of Captains were not the only fishermen on Georges Bank during the strike. When the schooner *Sunapee* unloaded 133 swordfish in Boston on July 30, her captain reported that there were 13 other boats on Georges swordfishing. On that trip, the fish sold for 28 cents a pound, a price that made strike-breaking tempting.

That winter, 1919-1920, was a bleak one on the Vineyard as no fish could be unloaded at the usual markets. Efforts were made to ship fish by train to New York, but supporting union workers saw to it that delays occurred and the fish spoiled before reaching market. Island boat owners soon formed an Association to fight the strike and sought a court injunction "to have the unions restrained from interfering with their right to fish. . . and market where they will."

It was a period of widespread labor unrest all over the nation and the fishing industry was no exception. It was not until the next year that fishing got back to somewhere near normal. That year, 1920, Captain Bob built his last schooner, the *Hazel M. Jackson*, named for his second daughter, then nine years old. He went swordfishing in her for 20 years. In April 1940, just before swordfishing season, he sold her to a man in New Bedford. At 63 years of age, Old Bob retired. After unloading his catch in New Bedford (he had been dragging), he headed for Edgartown on his last trip. "This is the hardest day I ever put in," he said, sadly.



Courtesy S. Bailey Norton.

Hazel M. Jackson on Georges in the 1920s. Capt. Bob's on the stand, harpoon ready, waiting for Ben Mayhew and others on the mast to spot a fish.

Captain Bob's success came because he knew where the fish were likely to be and, in addition, he was an excellent navigator and harpooner. He also had a good crew (it was said that a man had to be a good fisherman to get to go out with Bob). Unlike some others, he often fished until six o'clock and spent little time ashore between trips.

His son, known as "Young Bob" all his life, fished with his father until 1934, even skippering the *Hazel M. Jackson* during the 1931 season. "Old Bob" was kept ashore after being seriously burned in an accident while fitting out the boat that spring. In 1934, Young Bob quit fishing to go yachting as captain of various pleasure boats, some sail and some power, owned by well-to-do men, with names like Case, Stouffer and Forstmann. He and one crewman, Otis Cooper, rode out the 1938 hurricane on a mooring in Woods Hole aboard a luxury yacht, one of only two boats to keep their moorings through the storm. "It was a wild day. I saw two guys washed off a telephone pole and drown when Buzzards Bay broke across the land into the harbor," he said.

In 1941, "Young Bob" decided to go back fishing and had a ketch built in Maine. She was 70 feet long and was named for his mother: *Annie M. Jackson*. When World War II came along, she was equipped by the government with a

special \$3500 ship-to-shore telephone and Captain Bob was appointed a "Confidential Observer in Atlantic Waters." He had to call New York every day with a report of what he had observed while out fishing. When the war ended, he bought the telephone for \$35. He sailed the ketch for eleven years and in 1952 sold her to a man from Newfoundland and retired.

When he was asked why he quit, he said,

Everything was getting so you had to hire it done and you wasn't making the money you was before. If you had to put an eye splice in a wire [while fitting out] you had to pay the guy to do it [even though] he was one of the crew. In the old days we used to do it ourselves, the crew and us, but as things got unionized, we had to hire it done.

Many of Edgartown's schooner fleet would go gill-netting for mackerel each spring. Through the winter the crews worked on nets and other gear in the many boathouses along Edgartown harbor. Early each spring they would set the nets off New Jersey, moving north and east with the fish, ending up south of the Vineyard in time to refit for swordfishing.

Others went tub trawling for cod and haddock in the spring. Hooks on long trawl lines were baited with soft-clam meat, scallop guts and pieces of fish such as herring. The lines were anchored and payed out, resting on the bottom.

Both of these activities required a lot of advance work on shore and regular crewmen were expected to do that without pay. The union put an end to that.

After the mackerel season ended, the crews got ready for swordfishing. At its peak, Edgartown's swordfishing fleet consisted of the *B. T. Hillman* (Capt. Horace O. Hillman), *Ethel Marion* (Capt. Abe Osborn), *Hazel M. Jackson* (Capt. Bob Jackson), *Liberty* (Capt. Claude Wagner), *Malvina B.* (Capt. Ike Norton), *Edna* and later the *Mildred* (Captain Roy Willoughby) and *Josephine II* (Capt. Phil Norton). All of them, except the *Edna*, *Mildred* and *Josephine II* (they were day boats), went offshore on trips of ten to twenty days, manned by crews of eight men and powered by auxiliary diesel engines, usually Fairbanks Morse.

Gift of Carrie Osborn Seacord.



Capt. Hillman's B.T. Hillman behind the white sloop at the town dock in the 1920s. She's rigged for swordfishing, top mast up, flags a-flying.

In the 1920s and 1930s, about 300 U.S. and Canadian boats were harpooning swordfish in the northwest Atlantic every summer. The fishing pressure on large swordfish was enormous for three summer months, but the fish were left alone during the rest of the year. Small swordfish were occasionally ironed, but nearly all fish lived to mature and reproduce.

In mid-May, crews rigged for swordfishing by erecting the topmast that held the crosstrees, hoops and seats used for spotting. The bowsprit with its stand was bolted to the bow. Crews also readied about 20 kegs and lines and several harpoons. The only special personal gear needed were hats with black, extra-long visors to shield their eyes from the sun while spotting.

Swordfishermen's eyes were often strained from hours of looking over the water. A few found that laying wet, cool tea leaves over their eyes helped to soothe them in the evening as they lay in their bunks. In the early days, colored sunglasses were not used.

Captain Jackson and crew began swordfishing about Memorial Day each year, after first loading 20 to 30 tons of crushed ice into the hold of the *Hazel M. Jackson*. Their trips lasted as long as the ice held out, two to three weeks. On the first trip they would head south of Montauk, Long

Island, the next was south of Block Island and the Vineyard, and the other trips were on Georges Bank, east of Cape Cod. At the end of each trip, they went into Boston to sell the catch and restock with ice.

Before going out again, they would sail down to the Vineyard. On the way home Bob divided up the money with the crew. He kept one-fifth of the gross for the boat. Next, he took out the cost of fuel, oil, ice and food. The remainder was divided into eight equal parts for himself and the crew. The cook and engineer always got a little extra. Bob and the crew stayed in Edgartown for a day or two and then headed out again.

Nearly all the crew of the *Hazel M. Jackson* were from the Vineyard, but sometimes one or two men were Nova Scotians. In 1935, Bob's crew included a Nova Scotian, helmsman Henry Kelley, who was born in Cape Breton and moved to Edgartown in 1909, where he first crewed for Capt. Levi Jackson before joining Captain Bob. Cook on the *Hazel M. Jackson* was George Paul. "He used to bake cream of tartar biscuits, Jesus, they were good," Young Bob remembered in 1988.¹⁵ The rest of the crew were Percy McKenna and Edmund Richard from Edgartown, Ben Mayhew from Chilmark, Eric Cottle from Menemsha and Frank Manning from Gay Head.

Phil Norton, engineer and part owner with his brother Ike of the *Malvina B.*, said that on their boat, seven of the eight-man crew slept in narrow bunks in the forecabin. He slept in a little cabin behind the huge four-cylinder Fairbanks Morse diesel in the engine room. He told an interesting story:

After you've been out about a week and the fish have been iced down. . . the shiny stuff on the bottom of their bellies would wash off and go down in the bilge water. . . I had a lot of pennies in

¹⁵ Captains Bob Jackson and Ike Norton both had good cooks; many did not. Ike's cook was George Thomas, said to be the best chef in the fleet. Poole, p.101. Helmsman Henry Kelley, who usually crewed with his brother-in-law, Captain Ike Norton, fell from the rigging in 1938 and died some months later. He was with Capt. Levi Jackson in 1910 during the famous *Mertie B. Crowley* rescue, rowing to the wreck four times, for which he received a Carnegie medal. His brother, Patrick, who was also on that rescue mission, was later lost at sea when his fishing boat, the *Natalie*, went down.



Mystic Seaport photograph.

Typical fishing schooner forecabin of the 1920s. The bunks were narrow, the sanitary facilities primitive, but food was always good.

my pocket and they turned bright silver — that's how bad the air was [down there]. . . that's the mercury they talk about [now]. . . I don't think it's in the meat, I think it's on the outside.¹⁶

Captain Bob would be in the stand of the *Hazel M. Jackson* all day, waiting for chances to harpoon. Ben Mayhew was mastheader, on the highest spot on the mast.¹⁷ He had the best eyes and saw the most swordfish. When the swords were at the surface, as most were on southeast Georges Bank, they were spotted by sighting their dorsal fins above water. Under those conditions, each spotter had an equal chance at seeing a fish. It was different on northern Georges Bank. There, they were usually below the surface and spotted by their shape and distinctive bluish to slightly purple color. The mastheader would see nearly all the submerged fish, only a few being spotted by the others.

The helmsman steered the boat onto the fish. Ideally, he would head the boat so the sun was at the back of the harpooner, giving him the best visibility. He also headed into a fair sea so the boat did not pitch, which would make

¹⁶ The author, unlike Captain Phil, doesn't believe "the shiny stuff was mercury. That much mercury would kill thousands of people if they ate it," he argues.

¹⁷ Benjamin Mayhew was college educated and a most distinguished Vineyarder. He was the Island's State Representative at the time of his death. Two of his sons, Greg and Jonathan, went swordfishing for years and are quoted in this article.

aiming difficult. The harpooner would try to lead the fish slightly because, when they sensed an approaching boat, they would swim quickly away and the harpoon would miss its target. It took considerable skill to hit the target regularly. Swords were sometimes sought in the blue Gulf Stream water off the southeastern edge of Georges Bank. But generally they were what the fisherman call "wild" there, quick to swim away, and few of them could be harpooned.

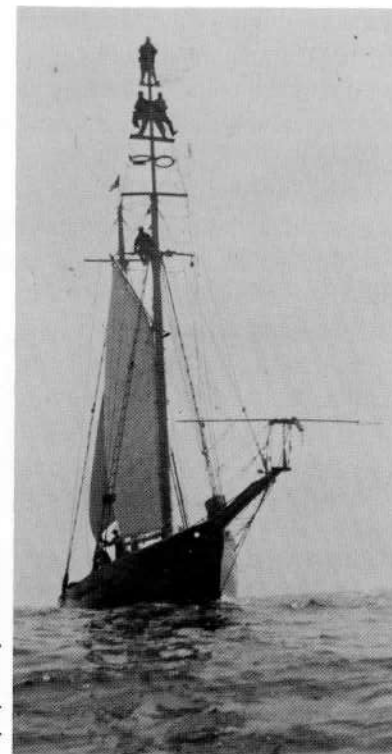
The boat, usually a two-masted schooner, "steamed" at six or seven knots (about seven or eight miles an hour) with one or two dories being towed while the men looked for swords. A flat calm day was best, allowing fish to be spotted farther away. But they could also spot swordfish in rough weather. Phil Norton explained:

We'd fish in any kind of weather. Sometimes she'd roll the rails right under on Georges. . . the fish liked to come up in the tide rips and swim off to leeward. You'd get going up through a tide rip chasing a fish and put the bowsprit right under. The feller in the bowsprit would go right under up to here [his chest] sometimes. That's bad.

In the early days, the mastheader, in a seat about two feet from the top of the forward mast, leaning over the mast tip, would holler steering instructions back to the helmsman. Later, electric horns were used (one beep to port, two to starboard) to line the boat up with the fish. Once a fish was harpooned, it was the cook's job to make sure the line was clear as it ran out and to throw the keg overboard. The man on the lowest crosstree came down quickly and got into a dory and was towed toward the keg at full speed. When close to it, he was cast free and he rowed to the keg and pulled the tiring fish in. As Bob Jackson told it:

They'd get him [the fish] pretty near up and down he goes again and then they have to let him go, they can't hold him. When he gets tired enough only to wiggle his tail, that's all, you put a fluke rope around his tail and make him fast to the dory. When the boat came back, he'd pass the fluke rope to the guys on deck, they hook on the tackle and haul him aboard. . . Sometimes there were so many fish that all four dories were out at the same time.

The crew had breakfast between 4 and 5 a.m., lunch at



Gift of Audrey W. Richard.

Hazel M. Jackson, spotters aloft, harpoon tied to the pulpit, begins a day's fishing.

10, so they would be free in mid-day when the fishing was best, and then supper about 3 p.m. The food was good. The cook was up earlier than the others, "cutting up the side of a lamb or steaks or something," Phil Norton said, "and you could mug up anytime. He always had plenty in the ice box." After supper, the crew cleaned the fish they had hauled on board, cutting off the tails, fins and heads, removing entrails, and scrubbing the body cavities clear of blood. They covered the fish with a canvas and left them on deck overnight for the animal heat to go. In the morning, they were packed in the hold and covered with ice. In hot weather, a chunk of ice was often placed in the belly. The fish remained in good condition as long as the ice held.

The men kept the best-looking swords. They would put

a line around them, and hang them off the boat in the water to rot out the flesh. After they had dried and been polished, the fishermen would fit them out with fancy wooden handles and sell them or give them away when they went ashore.

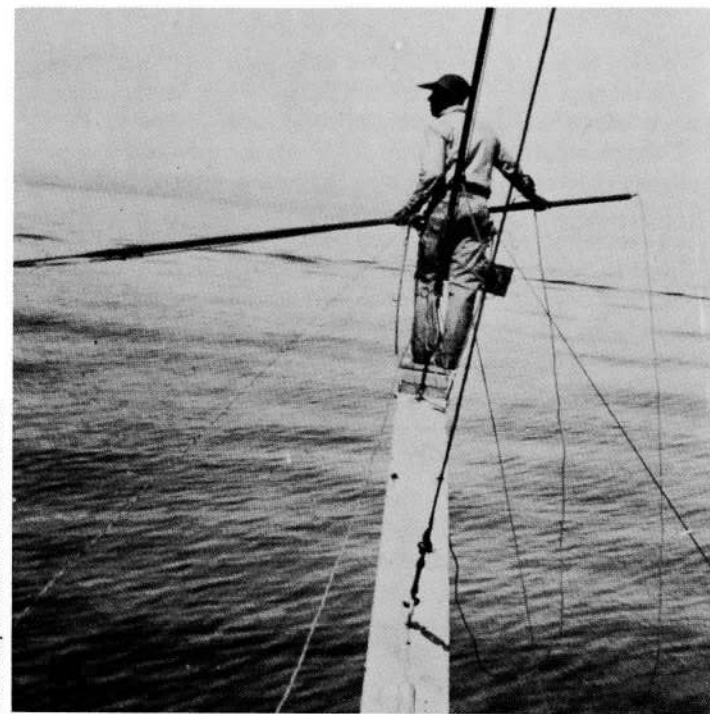
Problems with Sharks

Swordfishing crews saw many sharks, mostly blue sharks 10 to 12 feet long, but occasionally hammerheads and other types as well. Sharks would not usually eat a harpooned fish, but if a crew had harpooned four or five within an hour, some of them might be in the water for an hour or two. If one died and bled, sharks would be attracted and go into a feeding frenzy, taking bites out of the fish.

Phil Norton, who with his brother Ike owned the *Malvina B*, described such an incident:

We got a nice swordfish and I went out to haul him. I was pulling him as usual and got him maybe 30 feet from the dory and I felt this queer tugging and yanking. All of a sudden it slacked up, but I still felt something. I pulled it up and a shark had bitten him right in half. He had the tail and I had the head. I hauled [my half] up and rolled him into the dory. There were big teeth marks on the side of him. About that time, the shark came up looking for the rest of him. It was a blue shark 16 feet long and he wanted the rest of that fish. He snuck up behind me and around under the dory. He lifted his head out of the water and opened his big mouth and he was going to reach right over the side of the dory. I had a lance and I drove it right down his throat and into his gullet. He swallowed, took the whole thing, gave a slap with his tail, and filled the dory half full of water. The men in the big boat saw what was going on and came over and took me aboard. I was some scared.

One time, Huck Look, Senior, was pulling in a swordfish and it rammed its sword through the bottom of his dory. The fish was bleeding and within minutes about 15 large sharks were circling the dory. In a frenzy, they were taking bites out of the swordfish. Water was leaking into the dory and Huck, ankle deep in water and fearing for his life, tried to beat the sharks away with an oar. The main boat, off picking up another swordfish, was only a speck on the horizon. Finally, the boat came alongside and picked up a



From Capt. Donald L. Poole collection.

Norman Smalley at the ready on Donald Poole's *Dorothy C*. scared and tired Huck. He went swordfishing again, but would never go in a dory to haul another swordfish.

Swords not only rammed dories, but also rammed the hulls of the large boats. One year when the Larsen brothers of Menemsha hauled out their boat, the *Christine and Dan*, at the end of the season, they counted 14 swords snapped off in its bottom planking.

Greg Mayhew of Chilmark recalled a time when sharks ate some of his swordfish:

On Georges, we once had 40 swordfish out on kegs and 12 were eaten by mako sharks. Those 12 were concentrated in an area the size of Menemsha Harbor (about 800 feet across). We made the mistake of getting the kegs that were farthest away first as darkness came on. We were going to haul the concentrated group later. But a school of sharks got there and ate most of the swordfish.

Eric Cottle recalled his first summer swordfishing with Bob

Jackson in 1935. Eric was then 18 years old:

We went from the end of May to early September, more than three months. We each got \$900. That was a lot of money then, when men ashore were getting 25 to 35 cents an hour.

Bob was some navigator. I don't know how he did it. We went off Gay Head on the 29th of May and went southwest by Block Island. The only things we had for navigating were a compass and a sounding lead. We sounded bottom with the lead piece on a rope so we knew where we were. We put soap on the lead's bottom so it would bring up whatever sediments were there. Bob could heave a lead over anywhere and he knew just where we were. One day, he sounded and said, "Bring the dories in. We are heading in. By tomorrow morning about 6, we'll see Devil's Bridge buoy (north of Gay Head)." About 6 a.m., it was kinda hazy and if we had kept going, we'd have run the buoy right down.

Another time, we were on the southeast part of Georges and he told us we'd better go in. "About daylight tomorrow morning," he said, "we should be alongside Nantucket Lightship." When the sun was coming up, we were right alongside the lightship. I never saw anyone like him when it came to navigating. He was a crackerjack. He was able to do it without any sounding machines that fishing boats have today.

He fished hard, too. He wouldn't shut the engines off till the sun went down. The rest of the boats shut off about 4 p.m., and drifted around, figuring the fish were down for the day. Not him. Sometimes, we'd pick up another four or five swordfish while the others fellows were resting. He was top of the line as a swordfishermen.

But in his last few years, he got outclassed. The fellows from Gloucester got bigger boats, more power, and then they could beat him. But given the same type of equipment, he would beat them.

In good years, Captain Jackson would bring in 300 to 500 swordfish; his best year was said to have been 1000 fish. They averaged about 200 pounds dressed, but they often were over 300 pounds. The smallest swordfish he ever harpooned weighed 85 pounds.

His friend and rival, Capt. Horace O. Hillman of the schooner *B. T. Hillman*, is said to have the record for the largest sword ever harpooned by a Vineyarder. In 1932, he landed one weighing 925 pounds.¹⁸

¹⁸ Rich, 1947.

Capt. Ike Norton of Edgartown was another skipper who brought in plenty of fish. A log book for the schooner *Malvina B.*, Captain Ike's boat, has survived. It covers the years 1930 to 1933. The first year, 1930, from June 19 to August 30, he and his crew went on four trips, landed 317 swordfish, making an average of 79 fish per trip. They sold them at from 22 to 25 cents a pound for a season total of \$12,501. Expenses came to \$1,664, which were deducted before shares were calculated. The eight men in the crew each received \$981 as their share.

Eleven shares were distributed, but the log doesn't explain the breakdown. Usually, in addition to one share for each of the eight men, the boat got a share and the cook and engineer each got an extra half share. Perhaps on Ike's boat the captain got a second share, if so, that would add up to eleven shares.

They were out 74 days that summer, giving them an average of \$13.26 a day, plus their food, of course. In 1930, the beginning of the great depression, that was excellent pay. Shore wages were low, probably averaging 25 cents an hour for 8 hours, or \$2 a day. Ike's crew, on the best of the four trips, from June 30 to July 18, 19 days, earned \$16.02 a day. The worst trip was the last, but even then they received \$10.50 a day.

The best trip as far as fish caught was in 1932. On August 10, they brought 134 fish into Boston, net weight 24,215 pounds. Each man's share came to \$206.50. Other boats had good catches and the price per pound was low: 11 cents. But with a share of \$206 for three weeks at sea, they were making far more than workers on shore.

By late August, the New England swordfish season was just about over, but a few crews would load on extra ice and fuel and head for Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. United States boats were not allowed to fish within three miles of the Canadian shore, but the swords were usually farther out than that so problems rarely developed. The American boats often went into a Canadian port at night. The fall swordfish were the largest of the summer. By late

September, the fish would become scarce and the boats would head for Boston, sell their catches and go back to Edgartown, ending the season. Beginning in the mid-1920s, the crews would unrig the swordfishing gear and get the boats ready for fall dragging for ground fish.

Edgartown's Day Boats

In addition to Edgartown's famed schooner fleet that went on Georges Bank, there were a number of boats, usually powered catboats, that would go out day-fishing for swords. They were rigged with a stand and pulpit and go 20 or more miles off the south shore, returning home each evening.

Capt. Roy Willoughby was one of those who went day-fishing out of Edgartown. Aboard the *Mildred* and later the *Edna*, he would go out about 25 miles southwest of Muskeget Shoal, into 23 to 30 fathom water with a crew of two besides himself. On his best days, he got three to four swordfish, usually going only on days with little wind. In a good year, he would get 40 swordfish.

Roy was known in Edgartown for claiming he felt well only when he was out of sight of land. Other Edgartown day fishermen in the 1930s included Phil Norton, brother of Ike, in the *Josephine II* and Levi Jackson, brother of Captain Bob, in a small boat owned by Gordon Shurtleff.

Frank Elliott Fisher for many years was also a day fisherman out of Edgartown on his 26-foot catboat *Skillet*. He went after mackerel, scup and swordfish, when they were around. He was always called "Dandy" on the waterfront because of the way he dressed when not working. Evenings and Sundays on the dock he was the best-dressed man in sight, always in a derby, his trademark.

For swordfishing, he sometimes had his brother, Evie C. Fisher, as crew, but more often it was Lawrence Jeffers of Chappaquiddick. Early every morning, Jeffers would row out in a dory off East Beach on Chappy and wait for Dandy to pick him up on his way out to the fishing grounds.

On a fateful July day in 1924, Jeffers wasn't along. Dandy wasn't going swordfishing so he didn't need him. The

Lathrop-powered *Skillet* was after mackerel and hauled out of Edgartown at 4 a.m., with his wife and 8-year-old son, Sandy, aboard as crew. About 25 miles south of the Vineyard near Seaweed Rip, they found a school of mackerel and before noon the boat was "full to the scuppers with fish," as Sandy remembers it. There was lots of daylight left, so Captain Fisher went aloft to spot swordfish. His wife was at the wheel. He quickly spotted a fish and directed her to steer for it. Closing in on it, as was the procedure, he grabbed the forestay to slide down to the pulpit to harpoon.

As he began his slide, the forestay wire snapped. He fell, striking his head, it is believed, on the stand. Stunned, he tumbled into the ocean and the boat passed over him. Although an excellent swimmer, he never surfaced. Mrs. Fisher swung the boat in circles, looking for him, but he was not in sight.

Near panic, she kept motoring around in the swells, which were running fairly heavy. Her son was blowing the foghorn to attract other boats. The sloop *Defiance* was nearby and Capt. Frank Prada had noticed the strange behavior of the *Skillet* and was already coming over to find out what was wrong.

By coincidence, crewing that day for Captain Prada was Lawrence Jeffers, who usually crewed on the *Skillet*. He came aboard and brought the catboat into Edgartown, while Prada and other skippers kept searching for the missing man. But his body was never found. The *Skillet* docked at about 6 p.m., bearing the tragic news. The waterfront went into mourning. The boat stayed in the family for some years, but never went swordfishing again.

The Port of Menemsha

Menemsha was the other main swordfishing port on the Vineyard. Eventually, it harbored many more swordfishing boats than Edgartown. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, it had about six boats, all catboats, 28 to 30 feet long. Each had a bow stand and sailed with two-men crews: the captain who steered; and the harpooner who was also the mastheader. From his lookout perch on the mast, the

harpooner, like Dandy Fisher, would slide down the forestay to the stand when he spotted a fish. They usually fished ten or more miles south of Nomans Land. Swordfish were common there because the water was deep, 20 to 24 fathoms. Swordfish are rare in water any shoaler than this.

At the end of the day (this was before power) the catboat would sail back to Menemsha if there was enough wind to fight the current; otherwise they stayed out, the two men bunking on board.

Occasionally, but not often, swordfish would swim into the shallower waters of Vineyard Sound. One summer, a swordfish was found in one of the many fish traps (pound nets) set off the north shore of the Vineyard between Gay Head and Lambert's Cove. The owner of the trap harpooned it and took it to market.

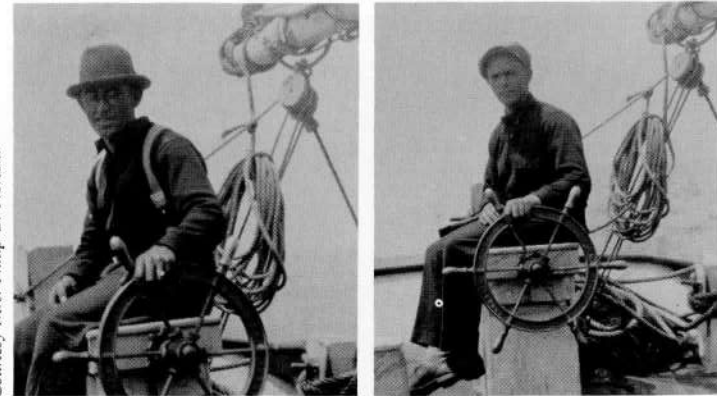
When inboard engines became available, larger power boats took over from the catboats. These boats took a three-man crew and they soon discovered it would be easier with auxiliary controls for the rudder and engine on the masthead. Louis Larsen of Chilmark recalled the setup:

All three crewmen stood on crosstrees in the mast surrounded by wooden barrel hoops, looking for fish. When we spotted one, the harpooner slid down the forestay to the stand, his hands protected by a length of split rubber hose. One man steered from the masthead with wires tied to chains attached to the tiller. He'd shut the engine off by pulling a long string that went to a knife switch that shorted the coil. On diesel engines, the string was attached to the governor, cutting off the motor.

In the 1940s, as boats got larger, they became more difficult to steer from the mast. One crewman would run on to the fish from the wheelhouse while receiving signals via a horn from the lookout on the mast.

By the 1940s, there were in Menemsha about 12 power boats, 36 to 40 feet long, rigged for swordfishing. In addition, 45 to 50 swordfishermen from Block Island and Provincetown used the port regularly. A few boats even came in from Nova Scotia. Nearly all were day boats that went out early in the morning and returned at night. Every night, Menemsha Basin was full of the boats and there was

Courtesy Mrs. Philip B. Norton.



Edgartown swordfishing brothers, Ike (left) and Phil Norton, pose for photographs on one of Ike's earlier boats, the Catherine, about 1926.

lots of talk and comraderie on shore.

Menemsha lobstermen caught an occasional swordfish while tending their traps. They set their traps on bottoms south of Nomans Land and always took harpoons along. Once in a while, they would come up on a swordfish and strike it. Some got three or four swords a summer.

In those days, the local boat crews sold most of their swordfish at the fish market owned by Brad Church in Oak Bluffs. If they could not sell them on the Island, they would run to Woods Hole and sell them to Sam Cahoon, a fish buyer. The Block Islanders usually sold their fish and took on ice in Newport on their way home.

Some harpooners rarely missed a swordfish, but Eric Cottle recalls, "over the years, harpooners made lots of holes in the ocean missing swords." Where did a harpooner learn this highly skilled art? Greg Mayhew, who has harpooned about 3000 swordfish, more than any other active fisherman today, described how he learned as a boy:

I used to practice for hours while coming and going to the swordfishing grounds with my father, Ben Mayhew. Say we were going past Nomans Land and we didn't see a swordfish until we got to the grounds. We used to bring along soda bottles and cans. As the boat was steaming along about 8 knots, my brother Jonathan and I would practice. He'd throw a bottle ahead of the boat and I would try hitting it. There was a 15-foot bib line on

A Summer Evening at Menemsha in the Glory Days of Swordfishing



Swordfishermen from mainland ports used Menemsha Basin as their base during the great years of the 1930s and 1940s.

Gift of Miss Ethel Wood.

the pole and we pulled it in after each throw. I'd get five or six shots and then switch places with Jonathan. Sometimes, we used a pie plate for a target. We tried to drive the harpoon through it. If we hit a glass gallon jug dead center, it would break. We used to practice some at home, but on shore it was impossible to simulate the motion of the boat.

Fresh swordfish meat was a favorite food. Many believed it was the best tasting fish of all, much better than bluefish and flounder, two other Island favorites. Large amounts were sold every summer. John Correia, who worked at Eldridge's Fish Market in Edgartown for many years, would give away

the swordfish napes (where the fins are attached) to friends, including Mrs. Leo Willoughby on Cooke Street. The napes had just enough meat on them for making excellent chowder.

The Lucky Larsens, Highliners from Menemsha

Island highliners after Bob Jackson and his generation retired were the Larsen brothers, Bjarne, Dagbard and Louis of Menemsha. They did so well they were known as the "Lucky Larsens." Their father had been a swordfisherman, first from a sailing catboat and then from a motor boat.



Unidentified striker gets ready to harpoon as boat closes in on a big fish.

Their boat was the *Christine and Dan*. Bjarne was captain, Dagbard the harpooner and Louis, who had excellent eyesight, the mastheader.

Usually, the *Christine and Dan* was the first to bring swordfish to market. In 1961, their first catch totalled 85 fish with an average dressed weight of 200 pounds. At the time, swordfish wholesaled for 62 cents a pound, making the catch worth about \$10,000.

On that trip, they averaged 20 fish a day for the last three days. Between 4 and 6 o'clock one day, 20 fish were caught. Dagbard, who harpooned 4000 in his decade of swordfishing, reportedly missed only 8 of the fish stalked on that whole trip.

Other crews thought the Larsens did so well because Louis had great eyesight, but Louis thinks that was only part of the reason:

We didn't quit looking in mid-afternoon when everyone else stopped. We'd go right on till dark and we'd catch fish.

The three brothers were a successful team because they all enjoyed swordfishing and they were together for so many years. Louis related, "When I'd see a fish ahead, Dagbard knew by the sound of my voice how much time he had before we'd get to it."

Spotting With Airplanes

During the 1960s, swordfishing crews found they could catch many more fish by seeking them out from airplanes.



Larsens in Boston with first catch of season. Back row: from left, Bjarne and Dagbard; far right, Louis. Front row, second from left, Hershel West.

One spotting pilot said:

When we started using planes on Georges (in 1971), it was clear that this addition to harpooning would make an immediate, dramatic difference. The first day, when three of us spotted for our boats, we each saw about 60 swordfish and all three boats used all their gear (about 15 sets apiece) twice.¹⁹

Fishermen in New Jersey and Chesapeake Bay had been using airplanes to spot schools of pogies since the late 1940s, but it was some time before it spread to swordfishing. Eventually, as many as 20 airplanes (Supercubs and Citabrias) were flying for 20 swordfishing boats on Georges Bank on any day. They flew from 200 to 800 feet above the water, remained out eight to nine hours each day, using belly fuel tanks to increase their flying time.

Vineyarders had six or seven planes flying from Martha's Vineyard Airport. Greg and Jonathan Mayhew, Ted Malley and Alfred Vanderhoop were among the pilots. Each boat's daily catches increased about fourfold, from perhaps five fish to twenty a day when planes were used. One day, Louis Larsen's airplane could not come out and by mid-day he had only one fish. Another boat with an airplane had to go in and its captain asked the pilot to spot for Louis. When

¹⁹ Kronman, 1988.

he came near Louis, he could see that Louis had just passed five swordfish without seeing them. The airplane put Louis on the five and he got them all. He also got 21 others within 1 1/2 hours after the plane arrived. It became apparent that good catches had become as dependent on a good airplane spotter as on the boat captain's knowledge.

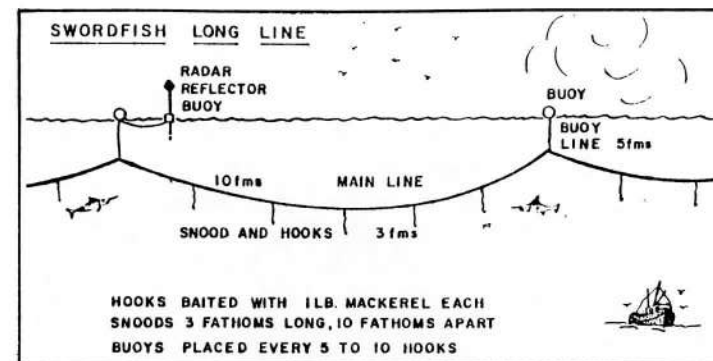
Longlining for Swords

Airplane spotting is only used for harpooning, of course. In the 1960s, another way to catch swordfish began, when fishermen started setting out longlines. It was substantially more efficient than harpooning, even with airplane spotters. The first line the Larsen brothers set was four miles long. After only three days out, they had about 130 fish. The *Christine and Dan* had no more ice to use so they came in to sell the catch.

On another trip, the biggest catch was 137 fish on a single night off Cape May, New Jersey. All were big fish. The crew had to leave 12 on deck as there was no room in the hold. Soon, the Larsens built two large steel boats for longlining, the *Chilmark Sword*, with Dagbard Larsen as captain, and the *Chilmark Voyager*, with Bjarne Larsen captain. Later, Louis captained the *E. F. Henley*.

The longline is stored on a large reel. While letting it out, the crew attaches the floats and gangions, the short lines holding the hooks that are usually baited with mackerel. Longlines are set out at dusk, left in the water all night, and retrieved in the morning. Crews usually begin hauling just before dawn and get through about 2 p.m. The swordfish are removed from the line as it is wound in, nearly all dead. A longline is somewhat similar to the trawl-line used by Vineyard fishermen in the 1800s and early 1900s for catching other fish. Both had baited hooks, but trawl-lines were laid on the bottom and were never anywhere near as long as the swordfishing lines.

The longlines were so efficient that swordfish began to become scarce. To keep up the size of their catches, Louis and the other longliners lengthened the lines. Eventually, each boat had 30-mile longlines with about 3000 hooks set



every ten fathoms. It took a boat 3 to 3 1/2 hours to set them. Longlining was profitable, catches were good, and some fishermen began wondering if they were not overfishing the stock. Others argued that the earlier fishermen had not overfished the codfish with trawl-lines so longlining for swordfish would not deplete them.

One difficulty in longlining is that most swordfish stay within a narrow depth range that varies by location. Fishermen have to determine that range when they arrive at a new spot. To do that they put hooks on the line at various depths as a test. Sometimes, it can take two to three days to determine the best depth, sometimes a week. Once they know that, they set most of their hooks at that depth.

Sharks eat or damage many of the swordfish caught by the longlines. Louis Larsen said, "Typically, if a line had 40 swordfish, there would be 20 heads, with the sharks taking the bodies. It was sad to see those big fish heads coming up on those longlines."

At first, the Larsen crew longlined on Georges Bank in the summer, in the winter going as far south as Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Their biggest trip was 760 swordfish in one week. That used to be the total caught in two seasons during the 1930s. They caught swordfish of all sizes, but even with longlining, most of them were large. The first year, the average dressed weight was about 150 pounds.

Catches continued to diminish and so boats went farther

south, even into the Gulf of Mexico. No one had sought swordfish there to any extent and they were abundant. In the Gulf, swordfish rarely surfaced and could not be harpooned. The boat's hold had to be refrigerated to keep the fish at 28 to 30 degrees F. The swordfish were, at first, shipped to Boston markets by truck, but they got too warm en route. So the Larsens began shipping them from Tampa by air in carts of 3000 pounds each. The fish left Tampa at 10 a.m., arriving in Boston at 2 p.m., in excellent condition.

Swordfishing began after Christmas in the Gulf of Mexico each year. The Larsen boat left Tampa and fished westward to just off the Rio Grande and Vera Cruz, Campeche and Cozumel, Mexico. One night, off the Rio Grande, they caught so many small swordfish, weighing only 30 to 40 pounds dressed, that they were troubled and left the area.

Whenever they would set in a new place in the Gulf, the catch was mostly untouched by sharks on the first day. The second day, bites were visible on some of the fish. They learned not to set on the third day in the same spot because shark damage would be too great. To minimize the loss, they would always begin hauling before dawn. Right after daylight, the sharks were particularly savage.

Besides swordfish, the early longliners would unintentionally take some tuna (receiving only 3 cents a pound for them at the time), plus a few dolphin and many sharks.

Eventually, boats discovered swordfish in the Straits of Florida. The first night Louis Larsen's crew set there, they got 86 large swordfish with 37 having roe in them "the size of my arm." It was the first time, Louis said, that Vineyard swordfishermen had seen so many swordfish with roe in them.

The longline fishery in the Gulf of Mexico and Florida waters began in the early 1970s with only four or five boats, but the number kept increasing as southerners joined the fishery, often in small boats. Some were only 40 feet long. Eventually, there were more than 40 longliners. As the fleet

Swordfishing, the Old-Fashioned Way



From Capt. Donald L. Poole collection.

When the fish tires itself on the keg line, the dory man hauls it in and finishes it off with a lance into the gills. He ties a rope around the flukes with which the deck crew (below) hauls the fish aboard.



increased, it kept improving its longlines to catch more fish. The heavy fishing reduced swordfish stocks throughout their range.²⁰

Louis and his crew fished there until spring and then followed the swordfish north to Georges Bank, fishing off Georgia, South and North Carolina. The fish then disappeared until showing up on Georges Bank in May and June.

During the 1974 season, Dagbard Larsen caught an average of 250 fish per trip longlining, while brother Louis averaged 350 fish per two-week trip. These fish averaged about 100 pounds each.²¹ That added up to 25,000 pounds for Dagbard's trips and 35,000 pounds for Louis's. Louis's biggest trip that year was 550 swordfish.²²

Such catches were much larger than those caught earlier in the century when the boats were harpooning. To compare, in June 1932 the schooner *Liberty* landed 40 swordfish, averaging 175 pounds dressed, or 7000 pounds for the trip. The *B. T. Hillman* landed 43 swordfish averaging 170 pounds dressed, or 7310 pounds for the trip.²³

With the larger catches that came with longlines, Louis and the other skippers contributed to the fishing pressure so much that in the late 1970s catches fell off considerably.

That forced Louis to look at reality. With fish becoming scarcer and smaller, he decided to quit the Gulf of Mexico. At that time, one boat had a catch averaging only 30 pounds per dressed fish.

Many who developed a taste for swordfish before the 1960s believe that longlined fish are inferior in taste to the harpooned. Capt. Harold "Turtle" Lawrey of Edgartown thought that the difference is due more to the size of the fish than to the method of capture. Smaller fish have less taste, he said. His son has stated that the taste difference is because the longlined swords were not as promptly hauled out of

²⁰ Cornell, 1985.

²¹ *Vineyard Gazette*, October 4, 1974.

²² *Vineyard Gazette*, October 18, 1974.

²³ *Vineyard Gazette*, June 17, 1932.

the water.²⁴ Fish caught on longlines sometimes dangle dead in the water for hours before being retrieved. This may contribute to the off taste and the sometimes rubbery texture.

Recently, swordfishermen have turned to the gill net. Made of monofilament, a typical rig is about a mile long, 100 feet deep, with 22-inch stretched mesh. Vineyarders first used the gill nets in the late 1980s. In addition to swordfish, the nets catch sharks and an occasional mammal. Some say the nets are less destructive to the swordfish population than longlining because they do not catch fish weighing under 20 pounds. But it is true that they occasionally kill whales and porpoises and most fishermen are disturbed by that.

Louis Larsen described his experience with a gill net this way:

A fellow in New Bedford told me about gill netting swordfish in the Straits of Messina, Italy. Someone got two fellows who had done it there to bring a gillnet over here. In the first set we made with one, we caught a [pilot] whale and found it dead. I said, "I'm not sure about this." I was setting out hooks [longlining], too, and getting 30 to 40 fish a night. We were pulling the gill net three times a night so we were able to set any pilot whales free alive, but after I made three sets I told the guys, "That's it as far as I'm concerned. I'll never set a net again."

I got out of longlining when I felt it did too much damage and now this gill netting is taking over. That's the bottom of the barrel. It'll be the total end of the swordfish. It will kill them all. I don't think we've seen a swordfish taken off Nomans Land since they were cleaned out of the Straits of Florida.

I gave up swordfishing right after our plane went from the peak of Brown's Bank [south of Yarmouth, N.S.] to the southeast part of Georges and didn't see a single swordfish. We came in and went harpooning outside Nantucket Lightship. The swordfish we caught all had hooks in their mouths that the boys in the Straits of Florida used. I knew then that was the end, so I came in and said, "That's it."

Another factor that hurt the Vineyard swordfishery was the boundary line imposed by the World Court in October 1984. The northern edge of Georges Bank, once a prime

²⁴ *Vineyard Gazette*, October 4, 1974.

swordfishing area for U.S. boats, was transferred to the jurisdiction of Canada along with Nova Scotian waters. Americans used to harpoon swordfish in June and July on the southern part of Georges Bank, get them on the northern edge in late July and August, and in September off Nova Scotia.

When that ruling was made, Jonathan Mayhew of Chilmark, brother of Greg, said: "This decision is killing us. At this time of year, the swordfish have migrated into an area where I normally would be fishing. But now, I can't fish there."²⁵

Longline fishing substantially modified the swordfish stocks. Between 1978 and 1990, the fishing mortality on one-year-old swords increased eight times, on two- to five-year-olds by two times. As a result, the spawning biomass of swordfish declined 40 percent during those years.²⁶ Furthermore, swordfish have become increasingly smaller. In 1978, when 53,226 swordfish from the Atlantic Ocean were landed at U.S. ports, their average dressed weight was 115 pounds; in 1980, it dropped to 83 pounds; in 1986, to 69 pounds; in 1987, to 64 pounds; and in 1988, when 168,692 swordfish were landed, it was down to only 60 pounds, about half that of 1978. In the seven years from 1978 to 1984, the percentage of small fish (under 50 pounds, dressed) in the overall catch increased from 40 to 48 percent.²⁷

Increasingly, fewer swordfish are mature when caught. Per spawning, the youngest mature females produce far fewer eggs than the oldest (one million compared with about 29 million). But despite the resultant decline in stocks, swordfish landings have remained fairly stable, from 6.6 to 8.1 million pounds. This is because the fishing pressure has increased considerably.²⁸

In summary, the swordfishery has changed in these ways:

1. The traditional Georges Bank harpoon fishery has nearly

²⁵ *Boston Globe*, February 8, 1987.

²⁶ Drumm, 1991.

²⁷ Pollack, 1988; Drumm, 1991.

²⁸ Division of Statistics, National Marine Fisheries Service, Washington, D.C.

disappeared; 2. The swordfish are caught year round by more fishermen using longlines; 3. The longliners are staying out longer and using lines that are more efficient (lines are now up to 40 miles long with lights added to attract the fish); 4. The sportsman rod-and-reel fishery has disappeared.

Greg Mayhew talked about the loss of Vineyard swordfishing and the way of life that went with it:

There used to be a lot of boats swordfishing out of Menemsha. The fellows from Nova Scotia would begin off Long Island around Memorial Day and come into Menemsha. Later in the season, when the fish had migrated north, our fishermen would go into Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. I went in there a few times during storms.

One time, a storm drove 15 American boats and a bunch of Canadian boats into Yarmouth. One fellow had a 200-pound swordfish get in his propeller and get cut up. The captain donated the fish to a big cookout on one of the boats. We all had charcoaled swordfish. We bought sodas and beers and had a day-long party, swapping tales of swordfishing and tales of our fathers and grandfathers using sailpower in the 1800s and early 1900s. There was much more *esprit de corps* among the fishermen then. They all recognized one another. They sometimes got together while out fishing. Maybe a boat that just came out would bring news of what had happened back home or in the evenings they got together for story telling.

Sometimes, progress is not well served. Nowadays, fishermen don't enjoy fishing as much as their ancestors. They had a harder time years ago, but many went out only for a day. There were little shacks in Menemsha. In the winter, they worked in them fixing lobster gear and telling stories. Often they all congregated in one shack to exchange stories and play cards. They had a lot of fun doing it. Now they are forced to fish night and day [to pay the bills] and our great swordfishery has just about ended.

S. Bailey Norton of Edgartown, who assisted the author greatly in the preparation of this article, is a grandson of the highliner, Capt. Bob Jackson, and nephew of Captains Ike and Phil Norton. He remembers that era well and commented in a saddened voice:

It is tragic that the great days of harpooning swordfish are over. Swordfishing helped to provide a comfortable living for many Vineyard families, including mine. The end of swordfishing is the direct result of longlines and gill nets taking the small fish before they mature and reproduce.

During those years, few fishermen were able to make themselves believe that would happen. At least, not with the speed and to the extent it did. Swordfish are another fish that followed "The Tragedy of the Commons."²⁹ When their earnings went up as airplane spotting and later longlines came into use, many more boats entered the fishery to share those higher incomes. That was especially true in Florida and the Gulf of Mexico. The result was over-exploitation.

The sword population would rebound if fishing ceased for about five years, but that is difficult to accomplish. Fishermen must keep going out to pay off the loans they took on to purchase their boats. Furthermore, the public demand for swordfish continues to be high and as long as demand continues, the stocks of large fish will never recover.

²⁹ Hardin, G., *Science*, 162:1-6, p.20, 1968.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the following men who shared with him their personal experiences and knowledge about swordfishing: Franklin Benson, Eric Cottle, John Correia, Bob Jackson Jr., Louis Larsen, Christopher S. Look, Clyde L. MacKenzie, Sr., Frank Manning, Gregory Mayhew, S. Bailey Norton and Alfred Vanderhoop.

In addition, Phil Norton (1988), Robert Jackson Jr., (1988) and Francis E. (Sandy) Fisher (1993) were also interviewed by S. Bailey Norton and Arthur R. Railton in collecting data for this article.

Sadly, a number of these fishermen are no longer living and will not see this article, to which they contributed so much.

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Log of Schooner Malvina B., Edgartown Swordfisherman

There are many whaling logs in existence. The Society's collection, a relatively small one, contains about one hundred. But logs of swordfishing voyages are much less common.

We are fortunate to have access to one such log. It covers the trips from 1930 to 1933 by the Malvina B., a swordfishing schooner from Edgartown. She was owned by two brothers, Ike and Phil Norton. Phil, the boat's engineer, owned one-eighth; Ike, the captain, owned the rest.

Those were the great years of the swordfishery. All swords were caught by harpooning, the old-fashioned way. Spotting was done from atop the mast, no spotters flew in airplanes. There were no long lines with dangling hooks, no gill nets to trap other fish and mammals. Most swordfishermen, including the Malvina B., were wooden two-masted schooners, with diesel engines providing auxiliary power.

They fished for two weeks or more on Georges Bank, near the North Atlantic shipping lane and on foggy nights that could be nerve-wracking. These were also the glory days of the fast trans-Atlantic liners, setting speed records as they sliced through the water at full throttle. Without radar, of course.

These were also the days of prohibition. Supply ships, loaded with cases of liquor, waited far offshore among the swordfishermen for the fleets of speedy rumrunners to arrive each night and haul the spirits ashore.

The log, from which these extracts were taken, has been made available to the

Society through the courtesy of the family of Capt. Isaac (Ike) C. Norton, who died in 1971. Capt. Phil Norton died in 1988.

FIRST TRIP, 1930

June 12. Left home at 9:30 a.m. Thick all day. . . Got Sharkey-Schmeling fight [on radio].

June 14. Got our first fish at 6:30 a.m. Got 23 during the day.

June 17. Got 11 [swordfish] today. . . Spoke Hazel Jackson¹ with 51 [swordfish]. . . A lot of wild fish here so they say, but we did not find any. Liberty² in today with 81. Good weath[er]. Gave "Bob J," a cake tonight that will need some chawing.³

June 18. Only got 2. Could not see any. . . We are thinking about going back where we got our first one. . .⁴

June 22. [Got] 5 today. . . Saw a big whale right near.

June 24. [Got] 6. Quite a few fish here. . . Saw one of the new German liners going east today.

¹ Hazel M. Jackson was owned by Capt. Bob Jackson of Edgartown.

² Liberty was owned by Capt. Claude Wagner of Edgartown. Over the fisherman's news on the radio, Ike had learned she was in Boston with 81 swords, a good trip.

³ Capt. Bob Jackson. There were practical jokers among the fishermen. Captain Bob's cook, excellent in most dishes, was not good at pastry. Captain Ike's cook, George Thomas, was famous for his pies and cakes. This "cake" was actually a piece of wood beautifully frosted to look genuine. The joke became a much-told tale on the waterfront, according to Bailey Norton, Ike's nephew.

⁴ On June 30, the log keeper added to this entry: "Too bad we didn't."

June 26. Arr. Boston 3.30 p.m. Got 22 cents [a pound for 40 fish]. \$2454.56 stock. \$471.30 expense. \$175.57 a share.⁵

June 28. Arr. Edgartown, 12:30 a.m. Daylight saving.

SECOND TRIP 1930.

June 30. Left home at 2 a.m. Lost 2 in the wheel, one awfull nice one. . . Got two.⁶

July 2. . . Got 7 today. A fine day but we are still having hard luck on seeing them. Leon got a bad punch this even., right up through keg. Made some ice cream, it was fine. . .⁷

July 4. Got 7 today. Don't know where we are today. Sun didn't come out. Made ice cream. Made a lot of "Nize" [noise?] tonight. Also made a bonfire adrift. Fine eve. Spoke B.T.H., 28 and Mary A., 72.⁸ John & Jim came aboard & cleaned up our ice cream. Would rather be in Oak Bluffs tonight. Engine running fine today.

July 5. Got 6 today. Saw 13 and lots [of] breachers. . . Saw Europa going east today. We were near and it was quite a sight. She was pushing some water!⁹ A fine day for the race.¹⁰

⁵ Stock was the total received for the catch. After expenses, the remainder was divided into shares. Each man got one share.

⁶ The fish were lost when the warp (line) was cut by the wheel (propeller) after they had been ironed.

⁷ The fish punched its sword right through the keg while Leon Doucette was hauling it in to the dory.

⁸ B.T.H., with 28 fish, was the B. T. Hillman, owned by Capt. Horace O. Hillman of Edgartown; Mary A. was not an Island boat. John and Jim are not identified, but one may be Jim Porter. This was the Fourth of July, hence the celebration at sea. This was written by Engineer Phil.

⁹ Europa with her sister ship, Bremen, were new 50,000-ton liners of the North German Lloyd

July 7. Only 1 [fish] today. . . Picked up a crate of good lemons this P.M. July 8. Got 3 today. Pulled iron out on another¹¹. . . Met Jo. Warner coming west from S.E. part, 38 [fish], 2 weeks. No fish down that way yet so we are going back west. . . We have 42 aboard tonite.

July 9. . . Nailed 10 today. Extra well for us. . . shot a shark and got some skin to dry. . .

July 12 Did not get one today . . . couldn't find anything but sharks. . . Lots of liners. . .

July 14. [Got] 9 today, all big fish. . . Seems to be a lot of nice fish here. . . had to stop engine today, about 20 minutes, the first time in two trips.

July 16. Got 14 today. All big ones. . .

July 17. Came in this morning¹² and stayed a while home then started for Boston. 26 cents today. . . Saw a "white whale" in Boston Bay.

July 18. Took out our fish this morning for 25 cents a pound [for 91 fish]. . . Largest fish 374 pounds. Had four jellies. Share \$304.40. . . Left for home at 1:40 p.m., had it thick after nearing cannal [sic].

July 19. Laid in all day. Did not do much. Spent 1 pleasant evening on

Line, holders of the Blue Riband for speed, making weekly crossings of the Atlantic. She must have been a fearsome sight, passing close to the small schooners. Many fishing boats carried 12-gauge shotguns to fire as warning when large vessels were heard approaching in the fog or at night.

¹⁰ Indianapolis-type cars raced every July 4th at the Rockingham Board Track in Salem, N.H. This may have been the race mentioned.

¹¹ Pulling an iron out means losing the fish. The iron is the tip of the harpoon with the keg line attached.

¹² They stopped in at Edgartown on way to Boston.

land after 19 days.

THIRD TRIP 1930

July 20. Left home at 5:45 a.m. . . Wish I was home.

July 21. Got 6. Saw 9. Got a Skilly-gillie, thought [it] would weigh about 800. Had awfull work handling him.¹³ Saw *Europa* going west this a.m. Came quite near us. Started handle for sword.¹⁴

July 22. Only got 1. Saw 1 more. . . A big 4-stacker came across our quarter this morning at 1:30 and nearly wrecked us. The wash from her made us roll so we broke our throat block on foresail and unshipped the jaws. She was going awfull fast and seemed to get mixed up on our lights¹⁵. . .

July 23. Got 13 today. . . Think I'm going to have a bad hand again.

July 24. Got 4 today. Saw 10. . . Saw a whale jump clean out 10 or 15 times. . . My hand is O.K. I guess.

July 25. 8 today, nice ones. . . Guess my hand will be O.K., but don't know for sure yet.

July 26. Got 6 today. Saw 5 more but they were wild. . . Another dory punched.

July 28. Got 3 today. Too cold for them, I guess. . . Saw a fine motor liner going west.

July 30. 4 today. 1 extra large. . . Looks like we are going to look a while this evening for them as it's time to light

the side lights and we have not stopped yet. . . Will clean ports sometime tonite if we ever stop!!!!¹⁶

Aug. 1. 9 today. Lots of shooting last nite in to the N'ard of us.¹⁷ A big whale around us too. 70 aboard tonite. Got every one we saw these [6] days past.

Aug. 3. 6 today. . . Spoke B.T.H. today with 85. . . Sunk another today.

Aug. 7. Took out our fish [in Boston] for 22 1/4 cents a pound [for 86 fish]. We have some fine big fish this time. Done fairly well. . . Share \$289.95. Left for home at 2:30 p.m.

FOURTH TRIP 1930

Aug. 11. Left home at 6 a.m. and got 1.

Aug. 13. . . found some fish. Struck 7, got 5 and saw 5 more wild ones. . .

Aug. 14. Got 9 today. Ironed 1 more. Seems to be a few here. . . Capsized a dory.

Aug. 15. Got 11 today. Saw all the boats get some. Spoke *Vandal* and got a mess of Haddock & lemon sole. Was going to speak *Friendship*, but he made a fish just then so we didn't. He lost the fish. We saw him but did not try for him. We were in near the sea scallopers then. A fleet of big draggers came from the east'rd this p.m. They all seem to be trying around here. Got a dory stove up bad today. . . Cap't has a bad hand tonite. Don't look good.¹⁸

¹⁶ This and some previous entries were written by Engineer Phil, although the log doesn't indicate that. He was eager to quit for the day so he could work on his engine, but brother Ike (who had the injured hand) wanted more fish. And Ike was captain.

¹⁷ Naval vessels may have been having gunnery practice to the north.

¹⁸ Clearly, this was written by Phil. The handwriting of the two men is so similar it's not clear who is making the entry.

Aug. 16. 11 today. A good day again. Spoke *Friendship* and *Robert E.* Got a mess of scallops from L. Doucette.¹⁹ Had 3 dorys out for the first time since June 14. . . Fish are not very large. Ike's hand still in bad shape.

Aug. 21. Too much wind to fish today. . . Saw a four-master and two steamers. . . First day this year we never looked for one.

Aug. 26. Got 2 today. Saw 4 more but they were wild. Lots of mackerel around and we caught a lot tonite. Some Navy boats around us today.

Aug. 27. Got 2. Tried to come through the channel but couldn't on account of the swell and it was dark when we got there. Had to run off and heave to. . .

Aug. 28. Went up west from can buoy and got one. Looked around a while and then started for Boston. Had a good run. 12 hours. . . Saw *Madam X* in the Cannal [sic]²⁰. . . *Liberty* in today with 13.

Aug. 29. Took out our fish for 23 cents [for 67 fish]. 3 trips besides ours in, and 160 from Cape shore [Nova Scotia]. . . Share: \$211.

Aug. 30. Came home, all through [for 1930]. Totals: Stock, \$12,501; Expense, \$1664; Share, \$981; Fish, 317.

FIRST TRIP 1931

June 14. Sunday. Left home at 9:30. Fine day. Ran 8 1/2 hr. S. from gas buoy. Hove to in 52 fathoms. . .

June 17. Thick fog all day. Took a look

¹⁹ Louis Doucette, a Nova Scotian, was captain of the *Robert E.*, a sea scalloper from New Bedford. She was a converted 110-foot World War I submarine chaser.

²⁰ *Madam X* was a famous rum runner, operating out of the New Bedford area. Many of these McGinnis-designed boats were powered with World War I Liberty airplane engines.

at noon, saw two wild. . . at 3 o'clock cleared up, saw 7 boats. High 38 cents in Boston.

June 18. . . saw two more wild, 15 boats here today. Spoke B.T.H. got 3. . . Charlie has a bad kink in his neck. . . fine radio. . . I lost my watch today.²¹

June 21. . . saw one more and wounded him bad. . . only 3 boats with us tonight. . .

June 22. . . fish scarce. Saw one more. 21 boats here today. . . *Liberty* is back. Got 5 tilefish on my bulltaw. . .

June 23. Rain with east wind. Saw only 1 fish caught today. . . went aboard *Old Dave*, he has 28. . . *Liberty* has 12. Nasty tonight. . .

June 25. [Got] 15. . . A real swordfish day, a nice day's work. Fish all iced down tonight. . .

June 30. Left for Boston. Stopped in Canal 1 hour. In Boston 6:30. Went up and saw a good show.

July 1. Sold fish for 26 1/2 cents [a pound for 47 fish]. . . share \$120. Left for home 1, arr. 11:30. *Liberty* in with 38. B.T.H., 50, in New Bedford.

SECOND TRIP 1931

July 4. Left at 7:30 . . . hope it soon clears.

July 5. Fog again. . . ironed 1 small one, lost him.

July 6. Still fog. Rum boat *Salma* spoke us. Gave him some grub.²² Took a look but saw none.

July 7. Fog and lots of rain. Sure is bad.

²¹ Charlie was another Doucette from Nova Scotia. Called "Charley Pop," he lived in the last house on the right, upper Main Street, Edgartown.

²² Rumrunners were often on Georges Bank. The "mother" boats would lay offshore outside the legal limit. Fishermen would "give" them food, but failed to mention what they received in exchange!

¹³ This was probably a marlin.

¹⁴ The fishermen cleaned and polished the best looking swords and attached wooden handles to simulate a real sword. They sold them or, more often, gave them away to friends.

¹⁵ Phil Norton, part-owner and engineer, told of this incident in an interview with Bailey Norton and Arthur Railton. The four stacker was probably the new British Cunard liner, the *Mauretania*.

Never made a move.

July 9. [Got] one. First blood today. . . fog has gone.

July 10. Sunk two more, saw 4. Sure having hard luck. . .

July 16. Fine day. Fish scarce. I ironed a dead swordfish today. A shark ate his head and tail off but part of him is good . . . We got one at 6 o'clock . . . fish some slow this trip. Hope we get 23 more. Will try to stay out another week. Saw the *Mauretania* today going W. . .

July 17. . . saw one but did not get on him. I have an awful toothache tonight. My face is in bad pain.

July 18. Fine today. Sunk a small one, saw two more large ones but very wild. . . fish scarce. Still in bad shape with my face.

July 23. Came to Boston. . . had a pleasant night on shore after 3 weeks out.

July 24. Sold fish for 17 cents and 24 cents. 20 fish, weighed 4100 pounds. . . Share \$48. One long, hard trip. . . July 25. . . went to Oak Bluffs to the movies. Our cook and Wording [?] are feeling extra good.²³

THIRD TRIP 1931

July 26. Started out at 10 o'clock. Sure did hate to go out and leave Ursula.²⁴ . . . Saw 6 big steamers in a row, a seiner spoke us tonight. If we don't get any tomorrow will go to Eastward. . .

July 27. Saw two more. . . fish are some scarce.

July 28. Saw two more. . . fish seem to

²³ Probably were intoxicated. After all, the cook had given the rum runner some food! It had been a poor trip. Caught only 20 fish, each man got only \$48 for 21 days at sea.

²⁴ Ursula was his infant daughter.

be wild.

August 2. Saw one more. Shark drove him down. . . fish are scarce. . . hope we can get 20 next week. Radio is good tonight.

August 3. . . . Saw 5, cut one off, could not find the other two. . . I was aboard B.T.H. and had dinner. They have 6 aboard.

August 4. . . Got a fish at 6 o'clock . . . saw the *Ile de France*.²⁵

August 6. . . Thick fog tonight. *Mauretania* went by us close this morning.

August 7. . . Got 3 in 1/2 hour then saw no more, near got run down by beam trawler last night . . . all large fish here.

August 8. . . Got one soon as we started, look until noon saw no more. . . Anna with us, also a rum runner and a C.G.2.²⁶ Maybe we will make up 50 round here yet.

August 9. . . we have 39 aboard tonight.

August 11, 12, 13. [They went into Edgartown, strong northeaster.]

August 14. Left home at 6 o'clock. . . got 3 in one bunch, saw 25 large whales. . .

August 15. Fog most all day, rained hard at night. Guess we will go in tomorrow. 44 fish.

August 16. Started in at 6 o'clock. Got in Boston at 7. . .

August 17. Sold our fish for 23 cents [a

²⁵ The French liner, *Ile de France*, launched in 1927, was the most luxurious of the North Atlantic fleet.

²⁶ Coast Guard could not board a vessel outside the legal limit, but would hang around to hamper the movements of the speedy rum runners from shore when they arrived, usually after dark. The Coast Guard cutters were too slow to overtake them once they headed for shore with the liquor.

pound]. . . share \$141.35. 43 fish, 8787 pounds, took one home to eat. Horace in with 116.²⁷

FOURTH TRIP 1931

August 19. Left home at 9.30. . .

August 21. . . 6 [fish] . . . Saw 12 fish, cut two off, rest wild. . .

August 22. . . 6 [fish] quite a few fish here. Looks like a rough night. . .

August 25. . . saw 3 or 4 fish today but got no chance at them. . . hope we soon get some fish and get out of this place.

August 27. . . 3 [fish]. . . saw 5, sunk one, pulled iron out of one. . . have a bad cold.

August 29. . . 9 [fish] Big day. Sunk one, cut one off, all the boats got fish today. Fish small.

August 30. . . 2 [fish] Hard luck today. Sunk one. Pulled iron out of one, saw one more. Looks hard to get 50 this trip.

August 31. 8 [fish] Done good today, all good fish. Saw two more we could not get on to. . .

September 1. 8 [fish]. One extra fine day. Saw one more. All good fish . . . had to fix up our lights. 42 [fish] aboard. Guess now we will get our 50. Think we are good for one more week. Sept. 2. 8 [fish]. Done fine today. . . Saw one more, 2 small fish and 6 good ones. . . quite rough tonight. 50 fathoms.

Sept. 3. 2 [fish]. . . rough. Saw one more. hope it soon gets fine again. Think we will be going in next Tuesday night.

Sept. 4. 3 [fish] One very rough day. . . saw 2 more we could not get on. . .

Sept. 5. 4 [fish] Thick fog all day. Was

²⁷ Horace was Capt. Horace O. Hillman of the B. T. Hillman.

lucky to run into 4 good fish. . . 59 fish aboard. 3 more days to make 60.

Sept. 6. 1 [fish]. Fine day but no fish. . .

Sept. 7. . . am going in tomorrow. Hope we nail 5 tomorrow. . . A great day for Urs. wedding.²⁸

Sept. 9. Fine day. Made Boston lightship. Got in at 3 o'clock. . . Spent one night on land.

Sept. 10. Sold [our 61] fish for 20 and 25 cents. Had small fish. Big one, 448 pounds, was a jellie.²⁹ . . Share \$150. . . B.T.H. in 53 [fish], *Liberty* in 19 [fish].

FIFTH TRIP 1931

Sept. 13. 2 [fish]. . Quite a good day but shut in thick tonight.

Sept. 14. . . . went in home. . .

There are only four daily entries, Sept. 13 through 19, on this fifth trip. Only 3 fish were ironed. The log simply breaks off, as though the trip was cut short because of poor fishing.

FIRST TRIP 1932.

June 11. Tanks full. 18 tons ice and a new Radio. Left home at 2 o'clock in the morning. . . Got 5 fish 60 miles off, struck the first one at 11 o'clock, one big fish.

June 12. Ran west 25 miles. Got 3. . .

June 18. Strong NE wind, jogged all day. When we jibed at daylight we tore our foresail. Had to put in a reef. Radio comes in handy.

June 21. Fine today. Never got a fish until 12:30, then saw 3 at one time. Saw 3 more wild ones. [Got] 7. . . hope we get 25 more.

²⁸ Urs., (Ursula) was the sister of his wife (Joanna Doyle) for whom their daughter was named.

²⁹ Occasionally, the meat would be soft, like jelly. Buyers would take such fish only at a greatly reduced price, although some folks thought it tasted even better than the firm meat. Large fish brought a premium price per pound, in this case 5 cents more than the normal-size fish.

June 24. [Got] 1 fish. Rough day, had a squall last night. Tore our foresail again. . .

June 25. Got 2, saw one more. . .

June 28. . . hard night. Thick and rough. Got in Bost 6 p.m.

June 29. Took out fish for 21 cents, big fish 24 cents.

SECOND TRIP 1932

No log was kept on this trip.

THIRD TRIP 1932

July 25. Tanks full. 21 tons ice & lots of candy. Left home at 6 o'clock. . [got] 9 fish. . . Liberty 87 fish.

July 26. [Got] 8 fish. . . saw 17 fish, sunk 4, rest wild. Had a hard day on the bow. Changed poles tonight. . .³⁰
July 28. [Got] 8 fish. . . had great luck today in finding fish. . .

July 30. [Got] 13 fish. . . Got one very big fish, saw one more. Got one at 4:15 p.m. Big fleet tonight, 45 small boats . . .

July 31. [Got] 11 fish. . . Saw 4 more wild. . . 55 aboard tonight. Have done well this week.

August 1. [Got] 3 fish. Fine day. Fish scarce. Lost one, saw 2 more wild. . . A rum boat came to ship tonight.³¹ Will make a move tomor[ow].

August 2. [Got] 9 fish. Fine day. Came down E from ship 20 miles.

August 3. [Got] 13 fish. Fine again today. Lost one, ironed a 20 pound swordfish, lost him. Quite a few fish here. 80 fish aboard tonight. . .

August 5. [Got] 17 fish. . . saw 2 more wild, cut one pup, fish fair size. Hope we can get 30 more. 100 on board. . .

August 6. [Got] 10 fish. . . saw 4 or 5

³⁰ Unhappy with his day on the stand, Ike was fitting a new pole on the harpoon.

³¹ The "ship" he often mentions was the South Shoal lightship marking Nantucket Shoals.

more, real wild.

August 7. [Got] 7 fish. Thick fog today. . . we are down in South channel, 50 fathoms.

August 8. [Got] 17 fish. Big day today. Lots of fish here. Started in tonight, ran until 3 o'clock. Shut off, fog. 134 [fish] aboard.

August 9. Stopped in home for an hour. . . Got in Boston at 9:30.

August 10. Sold [our 134] fish for 7. x 11.³² Big fish 471 [pounds]. Net weight 24,215. Stock \$2600, Expenses \$317.91. Boat share \$620. Men's share \$206.50. A fine trip. Left for home at 10 p.m.

FOURTH TRIP 1932

August 13. [Got] 1 fish. 21 tons of ice. Tanks all full. Left home August 12 at 12:30 p.m. Went by ship 8 a.m., met fleet at 10 o'clock. Fish seem to be gone. . . .

August 14. [Got] 3 fish. . . fish scarce.
August 15. [Got] 6 fish. Fish scarce. . . H.M.J. is here, 12 boats also.³³

August 16. [Got] 7 fish. Ran up WSW and found a few fish. Hope the weather holds fine. . .

August 17. [Got] 11 fish. . . quite a few fish here, saw one more wild one. H.M.J. got 4. Charlotte went in.

August 18. [Got] 10 fish. . . sunk one, saw one more. . . 38 aboard tonight. Maybe we will get 75 or 80 yet. . .

August 21. [Got] 10 fish. . . Got a big fish today. Spoke Liberty, got 9 fish. H.M.J. went in. Fog tonight. Pulled iron out of one. . .

³² Can this mean only 7 and 11 cents a pound? Very low price, if so. Dividing total weight into \$2600 stock shows average price of 10.7 cents a pound. With the large catch, 134 fish, the crew share is high, even with a low price per pound.

³³ H.M.J. is the Hazel M. Jackson, Captain Bob Jackson, Edgartown.

August 22. [Got] 5 fish. . . fish scarce. Sunk one, lost one. Hard streak today. Liberty got 9. Alpar in, 67 [fish].³⁴ Price 7 x 10 1/2. A real fine night tonight. Made ice cream. 67 fish aboard. . . small fleet 4 boats left.

August 24. [Got] 1 fish. Fish scarce. . . Liberty's gang aboard tonight. . .

August 25. [Got] 5 fish. Ran back to ship. Got 4 in morning, then left. Should of stayed. . .

August 26. [Got] 2. . . 80 fish aboard tonight.

August 27. [Got] 1 fish. . . saw 6, all wild. Lost one. . .

August 28. . . Spoke H.M.J. from Northern edge. Fish are scarce. . . will soon be going in. . .

There are no more entries for this trip. They had, as of last entry, 81 fish, a successful trip, but no financial details are given. It was the last trip of 1932 apparently.

FIRST TRIP 1933.

June 6. Left home 9 o'clock. East wind, rain, ran off 75 miles SSW. Tanks full. 20 tons ice. . .

³⁴ Alpar was a large Boston schooner which always did well.

June 7. [Got] 3 fish. . . Saw 7 fish wild. Spoke Liberty, 10 on board. . . Big fleet here. . .

June 8. [Got] 1 fish. Fish scarce. . . only saw 5 caught, spoke B.T.H., 7 fish on board, 13 days out. . .³⁵

June 10. [Got] 2 fish. Spoke H.M.J. this morning, 15 days out, 27 fish. Some of the boats struck fish today. Addie Mae got 5.

June 11. [Got] 3 fish. . . fish some scarce. Saw two more, very wild. Some of the boats got 4 & 5.

June 13. [Got] 1 fish. . . Spoke Liberty, just out. . . H.M.J. in [with] 32. Price 25 x 31. Charlie's birthday, 57 years.³⁶

June 16. [Got] 1 fish. . . no fish here. Spoke Alpar, also H.M.J., just out. C.T. has a baby.³⁷

Log continues for five more days. Not one fish taken. They have on board only 14 fish. The log ends here.

³⁵ B.T.H., as mentioned, is the B.T.Hillman.

³⁶ Charlie "Pop" Doucette was probably the crewman celebrating his birthday at sea.

³⁷ C.T. may be Charles Teller of Edgartown, a regular crewman in the fleet.



Courtesy S. Bailey Norton.

Schooner at end of Norton's pier is the Malvina B., whose log is excerpted here. The pier is on No. Water St., near Cottage St., in Edgartown.

Who Was General Charles Grey, The Man the Vineyard Hated?

by NEIL B. YETWIN

GREY'S RAID in September 1778 has been described as "the greatest event of the Revolution as affecting the Vineyard." Grey's sudden and unexpected foray resulted in Islanders being mired in negotiations for compensation from England that went on until 1787.¹

For Island residents, it was a sobering and financially devastating ordeal. For Gen. Charles Grey, commander of the British force, it was simply a foraging expedition, a brief, relatively unimportant interruption in a full and active military career, a career charged with zealous devotion to his King and country.

General Grey had a reputation as an "icy-eyed, war-scarred general" who combined tactical cunning with a ruthlessness that confounded opponents in battle and caused hundreds of casualties in two wars.

His fearsome reputation may have encouraged Island residents to cooperate fully and peacefully with his demands for livestock, supplies, arms and tax monies. As historian Charles E. Banks has pointed out, he

was designed for an army career. . . an intrepid officer, of whom it may be said that, if he had been charged with the military policy of the war, the results might have been different.²

Who was this man, who gave the Vineyard its closest brush with the American Revolution?

¹ Charles Edward Banks, *The History of Martha's Vineyard*, DCHS, Edgartown, 1966, v.I, p.367ff. Also Arthur R. Railton, "Islanders and the Revolution: Grey's Raid, 1778," *Intelligencer*, August 1983.

² Banks, v.I, p.370.

NEIL B. YETWIN, a history teacher at Schenectady, New York, High School, was the 1989 recipient of the Louis B. Yavner Award of the New York State Regents for his writings and lectures on the Holocaust and human rights violations. His American Revolution interest emphasizes the activities of the Loyalists. He has had his historical writing widely published. This is his first article in this journal.

Charles Grey was born at Howick, Northumberland, on October 23, 1729, the second surviving son of Sir Henry Grey, who was Howick's high sheriff and first baronet of Northumberland.³ Charles became an ensign in a foot regiment in 1748 at age 19. In four years, he was promoted to lieutenant in the 6th Foot Regiment at Gibraltar. By 1755, he was captain of an independent company he had recruited himself, it being absorbed into the 20th Foot under Lt. Col. James Wolfe.⁴

During the Seven Years' War (better known as the French and Indian War, 1754-1763), Grey was aide-de-camp of Prince Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick, who commanded the Anglo-Prussian army against the French. In the summer of 1759, while serving with the British 20th Foot Regiment, he was one of the 1270 men wounded when the British infantry, aided by heavy storms and gales, defeated the entire French cavalry.

By 1762, his leadership qualities had earned him the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and commander of the 98th Foot, which he led in the successful siege and occupation of Belle Isle, an island in the Bay of Biscayne. Clearly, he was a soldier's soldier.

He did well in his personal life. In 1762, he married Elizabeth Grey (no relation), with whom he had five sons and two daughters. One son became Bishop of Hereford; another, a prominent statesman who, in 1807, helped pass the act abolishing the African slave trade.

But it was the army that was his life. Just twelve days after his wedding, he and his 98th Foot Regiment were at sea, sailing toward Cuba, to lay siege to Havana for 40 days, ending in the Spanish surrender of the port, along with \$15 million in cash and merchandise. In the peace treaty, Havana was returned to Spain in exchange for the Floridas. The 98th Foot was disbanded and Grey retired from active

³ No full-length biography of Grey exists, but a brief sketch of his life appears in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, London, 1882, v.III, pp.615-6. It was written by Henry Manners Chichester and is summarized in Banks, v.I, pp.369-70.

⁴ Wolfe was killed in 1759 while leading the decisive victory over the French at the Plains of Abraham which gave the British control of Canada.

duty at half pay with the rank of Colonel, becoming an aide-de-camp to King George III.

When it became clear in 1776 that the armed rebellion in the American colonies must be put down by force, Grey sailed to New York with General Richard Howe, commander of the North American station. After Howe's victory over the Americans at Brandywine in September 1777, General Washington sent Gen. Anthony Wayne with 1500 men to attack the British rear guard as they pursued the Americans northward. When Wayne's position was revealed to the British by Loyalists, Howe ordered an attack.

Grey, now a Major General commanding a large force, marched his infantry toward Paoli, Pennsylvania, to surprise Wayne's troops. He ordered his men "on no account to fire." To prevent any accidental discharge that would give away their presence, he had his men remove the flints from their muskets and affix bayonets, adding the ominous message: "Prisoners were only a burden."⁵

Shortly after midnight, September 21, Grey's silent troops emerged from the darkness, surprising the Americans, killing the pickets with their bayonets. Four of the rebel sentries were able to fire before running for cover in the woods.

Major John Andre, who was Grey's adjutant in the 1778 Martha's Vineyard raid, recorded what happened next:

On approaching the right of the camp we perceived the line of fires and the Light Infantry being ordered to form in the front, rushed along the line putting to the bayonet all they came up with, and overtaking the main herd of the fugitives, stabbed great numbers and pressed on their rear till it was thought prudent to order them to desist.⁶

The Americans were easy targets. Those able to form for battle "were in many instances shot down as they were silhouetted against the campfires. The shadows seemed haunted by redcoats with their merciless bayonets."⁷ Maj.

⁵ A. J. Langguth, *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1988, p.475.

⁶ John Andre, *Major Andre's Journal*, William Abbott, Tarrytown, N.Y., 1930, pp.49-50.

⁷ Page Smith, *A New Age Now Begins: A People's History of the American Revolution*, McGraw Hill, N.Y., 1976, v.II, p.960.

Samuel Hay of the Continental Army reported later that "the enemy rushed on with fixed bayonets and made the use of them they intended."⁸

Reports varied, but about 150 Americans were killed; 71 were taken prisoner, 40 of them so badly injured that they were left to die. Grey lost only six men killed and twenty two wounded. At dawn, local residents coming upon the mutilated soldiers named it "the Paoli massacre." General Wayne was court martialed, but exonerated "with the highest honors." As word of the massacre spread, Grey became known as "the villain of Paoli."⁹ He also had earned a name that stuck with him through the war and beyond, "No Flint Grey," referring to his order to remove the musket flints. The defeat of Wayne enabled Lord Howe to march triumphantly into Philadelphia five days later.

Washington quickly launched an attack at Germantown at daybreak, October 4. It was the first attack by the Americans on a major part of the British army and the first time British troops retreated in open battle. Wayne was wounded as he led the right wing of the Americans, driving back advance units of Howe's 9000-man force. Among that force were three battalions led by General Grey.¹⁰

But the rebel success was short-lived. Fog brought poor visibility and the disoriented Americans began firing at each other, killing 673 of their own troops, along with 535 British. Washington again retreated, this time to Whitemarsh.

A month or so later, Grey was leading a column of Hessians near Whitemarsh when he was pursued by American light infantry, but successfully drove them off, after losing 56 men. Early in December, Howe withdrew his troops to Philadelphia. Washington, with his 9000 soldiers, settled into rude shelters at Valley Forge to endure the harsh Pennsylvania winter and, in the process, creating

⁸ Samuel Hay, "Letter to Col. William Irvine," *Pennsylvania Archives*, 2nd Series, I (1879), 598-9, quoted in Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, editors, *The Spirit of Seventy-Six*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1975, pp.622-3.

⁹ Smith, v.II, p.993.

¹⁰ Christopher Ward, *The War of the Revolution*, Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1952, v.I, pp.362-371.

a heroic legend in American history.¹¹

In the spring, General Grey led a column of 2000 grenadiers and dragoons at Germantown against General Lafayette's flank. He was supposed to be reinforced by Clinton and Howe, but the other troops did not arrive on schedule, allowing Lafayette to make an orderly retreat to Valley Forge.¹²

All this fighting had preceded the raid on Martha's Vineyard which occurred in the fall of 1778. General Grey, serving under General Clinton, sailed from New York in August to assist the British garrison at Newport, R.I., in repelling an expected attack by the rebels under General Sullivan. Before Clinton's forces arrived, General Sullivan withdrew, leaving the British troops without a mission.

The Newport garrison was running low on provisions, due largely to the activities of rebel privateers. Newport depended for its supplies on boats from nearby islands as the Americans blocked access to the mainland. With winter approaching, Clinton ordered General Grey with 4000 men in 40 vessels "to harass the southeastern coast of Massachusetts and Rhode Island," from which privateers attacked British supply vessels. In addition, Grey was ordered to forage for food for the Newport garrison. He took with him "a Tory captain, an inhabitant of Newport, as a pilot."

After a devastating two-day raid on New Bedford and Fairhaven, two the most active privateering ports, the British sailed through Quick's Hole to Holmes Hole where Grey planned to split off one squadron which would raid Nantucket.

At Holmes Hole, September 10, "the transports with the light infantry and Third Regiment were anchored without the harbor." This was the force General Grey was planning to send to raid Nantucket, but, as he wrote, "contrary winds [obliged me] to relinquish my design."

¹¹ Ward, v.I, pp.380-81.

¹² Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution*, Harper & Bros., N.Y., 1860, v.II, pp.163-167.

Col. Beriah Norton, commander of the Island militia, went on board the flagship *Carysfort* to inquire of Grey's intentions. He was ordered to deliver 10,000 sheep, 300 cattle, the arms of the militia, plus the public money from each town, by daylight the following day, "in failure of which the Troops will March at that hour to Collect them."¹³

That threat, backed, no doubt, by General Grey's reputation, brought about the desired result. By nightfall, September 14, Vineyarders had brought to the landing at Holmes Hole the sheep, cattle, muskets, swords, pistols and cartridges of the militia, plus about £1000 sterling "in paper." Forty-nine bayonets, whose effectiveness Grey knew all too well, were also confiscated.

The raiding party sailed away on September 15, heading for Newport and New York. Nantucket had been spared by the contrary winds. On September 18, General Grey reported his success to General Clinton, stating his gratitude "to the commanding officers of corps and to the troops in general for the alacrity with which every service was performed."¹⁴

Back in New York, General Grey was called upon by General von Knyphausen, who was engaged, along with Lord Cornwallis, in fighting off the American forces, which were harassing the British foraging parties along the Hudson River. Knyphausen turned to "No Flint" Grey as the officer best suited to lead a sneak attack upon Colonel George Baylor's 3rd Continental Dragoons at Old Tappan, N.Y.

Assisted by local Loyalists after dark on September 27th, Grey's troops fell upon and bayoneted the surprised twelve-man rebel outpost who were guarding three barns inside which 100 Americans lay asleep "in a state of. . . unsoldierly insecurity." On Grey's signal, the British charged with fixed bayonets. The Americans, powerless and unarmed, begged for mercy, but Grey had already given a special order not to grant quarter. Thirty men were bayoneted to death and

¹³ Banks, v.I, p.373. Among the units under Grey were the 42nd and 44th Regiments of Foot, who had participated in the Paoli Massacre.

¹⁴ Banks, v.I, p.383.

fifty were captured, including nine officers and Colonel Baylor. Only a score escaped.

Grey ordered 70 captured horses butchered. The attack came to be called the "Tappan Massacre."¹⁵ Affidavits taken from both British and American soldiers after the incident indicate that had several of his junior officers not intervened, Grey would have massacred Baylor's entire command. Once again, the "villain of Paoli" had led "a text-book model of the surprise of a detachment."¹⁶ And once again, Grey's ruthlessness had echoed the cry of so many British soldiers during the Revolution: "Vengeance with the bayonet to the Sons of Rebellion!"¹⁷

In 1782, Grey was promoted to Lieutenant-General, made a Knight of the Bath and Commander of British forces in America, but the Revolution ended before he could take over. When England and France went to war in 1794, he was commander of land forces and ordered "to reduce the West Indies [a French colony] to submission." When that war ended, he was raised to the peerage as the 1st Earl Grey and made governor of Guernsey Island. After his death in 1807, at 77 years, he was remembered with pride by a grateful England for his heroics.

But to many Americans he was the villain of Paoli and Tappan. To folks in New Bedford and the Vineyard, he is the man who brought the cruel reality of war to their shores.

¹⁵ Mark M. Boatner, *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, David McKay Company, N.Y., 1966, pp.1199-1200.

¹⁶ Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, Charles Scribners Sons, N.Y., 1952, v.V, p.77n.

¹⁷ Quoted in George F. Scheer and Hugh R. Rankin, *Rebels & Redcoats: The American Revolution Through the Eyes of Those Who Fought and Lived It*, DaCapo Press, Inc., N.Y., 1957, p.388.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Diana Bristol Jones for first introducing him to Martha's Vineyard nearly a quarter century ago.

In Memoriam

E. Gale Huntington, 1902 - 1993

It will be a long time, a very long time, before reminders of Gale Huntington disappear from the Society. And not because his name is on the Library building. There is much more evidence of his work than that.

Gale's handwriting, sometimes close to unreadable, is on thousands of envelopes inside the hundreds of archival boxes he organized after he came here as Librarian on his retirement from teaching. His organizational work became the foundation of the Society's archives.

And he did much more. In August 1959, he was the founding editor of this journal and, with the exception of one year when he thought he would again enjoy teaching on the mainland (he was wrong, his love of the Island brought him back in a year), he was the journal's editor during its first 19 years.

There are many other reminders. In our photographic archives we have scores of photographs with his inimitable captions attached. An example, on a photograph of Rev. "Pop" Chase, who performed the wedding ceremony for Gale and Mildred in 1933: "He didn't seem to enjoy the ceremony. He evidently felt that he was throwing one of his pet lambs to the wolves." Another, on a photograph taken in 1945 in the kitchen of their apartment in New Hampshire, where Gale was teaching: "Gale, as usual, is washing the dishes."

Those of us who knew the Huntington life style remember Gale's insistence on presiding at the sink after every meal, "washing the dishes." It was a task he enjoyed.

But he enjoyed much more than washing the dishes of life. There were few areas of knowledge that he did not savor. An accomplished musician, folk singer, amateur archeologist, teacher, fisherman, gardener, researcher, historian and author, Gale Huntington got everything possible out of life. Except money, that is. As he wrote on a photograph of him at Pinewoods folk music camp in 1979: "It was the only time my music made me much money."

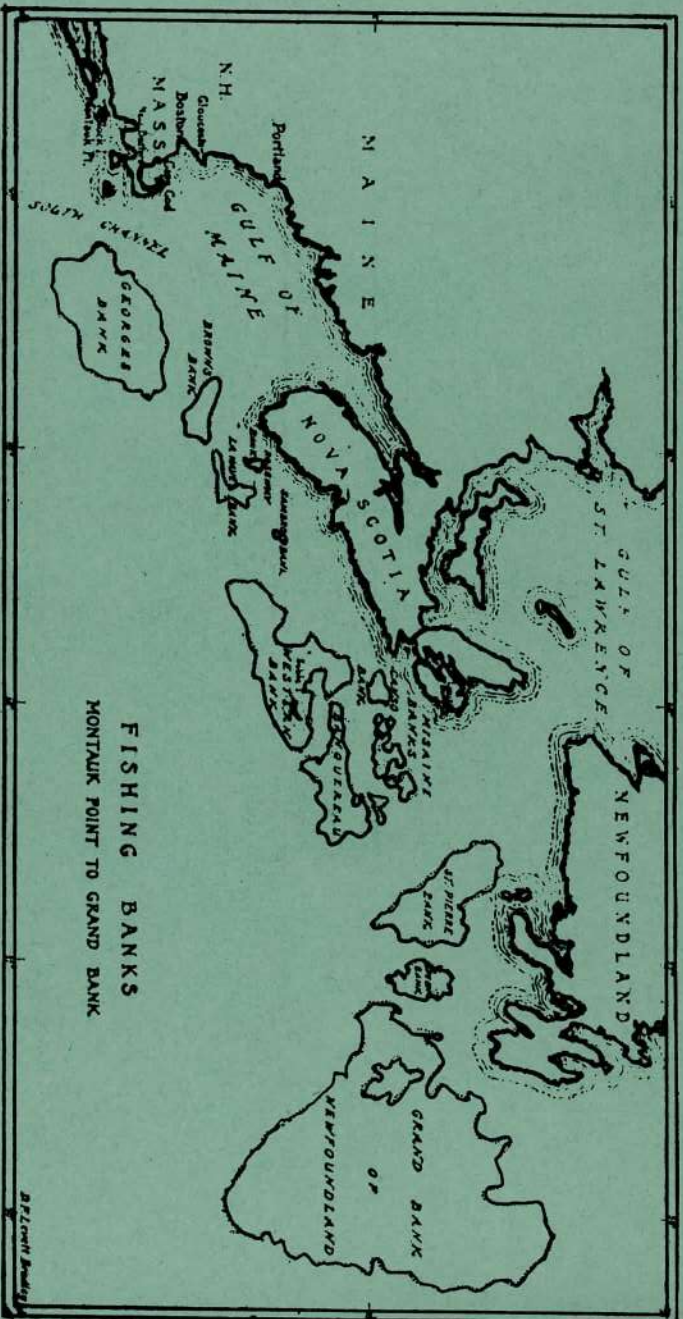
And he passed his love of life along to many others, helping and encouraging hundreds of students, researchers, musicians. His associates at the Society will remember him with affection, gratitude and respect.

Sadly, during his final years he was debilitated by illness, many times being near death. But his body, like his determination, was strong and he held on until December 26, 1993, when he died at 91 years.

Thank you, Gale, thank you.

Fishing Banks of the Northwestern Atlantic

From the Scientific Monthly, May 1942.



Copied from a chart published in 1942 in the Scientific Monthly showing the fishing grounds of the northwestern Atlantic. Georges Bank, where Vineyarders went, is at bottom left.