

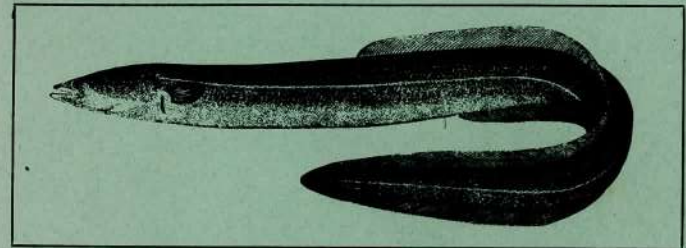
Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL 36, NO. 3

FEBRUARY 1995



Mature American eel, *Anguilla rostrata*.

The Eel Fishery of Martha's Vineyard

by CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr.

Daniel Manter and His Neshaw Eel Trap

The Island's Civil War Draft Protest: Its Moment in History

by RICHARD MILLER

Three Men Who Shook up the Commonwealth

Documents: Henry Baylies Diary

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Drafting Men with "the Implements of Norwood the Fakir"

The Draft for the First Congressional District.

The draft for the first congressional district was commenced in Pierian Hall at 11 o'clock this morning. The audience numbered about 150. The hall presented a bizarre appearance, the stage being nearly covered with the scenery, trappings and implements of Norwood the Fakir.

The orders for making the draft were read by Capt. Hatch, the full board of enrolment being present, and the business proceeded at once. The names were drawn by Deputy Marshal Sawin, and read to the spectators by Commissioner Hinckley. The following is the result:

SUBDISTRICT No. 1, EDGARTOWN.—Two hundred and two ballots were counted into the wheel. The deficiency of the town is 21, and 50 per cent. added to cover exemptions increased the number of names to be drawn to 32. The following names were drawn:

Charles H. Cleveland, Thomas E. Fordham, Henry O. Adlington, Manuel Norton, Holmes W. Smith, Roland Smith, Caleb Vincent, David Fisher, Joseph W. Donaldson, Jesse M. Penney, Caleb H. Hobart, Charles C. Smith, Henry Dunham, Stephen G. Crawford, George A. Smith, Frederic A. Smith, William H. Norton, John H. Pease, Jr., Jonathan G. Leavitt, Samuel P. Ripley, Shipley W. Crosby, Thomas N. Fisher, George F. Huxford, Leroy S. Lewis, William A. W. Marin, Samuel O. Fisher, David W. Coffin, Jethro Worth, Seth Vincent, Frederic A. Crafts, William A. Pease, Richard Holley—32.

The ballots remaining in the wheel were then taken out one by one, read, and counted. They numbered 170, showing the work to be correct.

The Light Dragoons, with band, passed the hall soon after the drawing commenced, and the crowd went out, leaving but very few persons present, probably Edgartown men. About a third of the spec-

tators subsequently returned.

SUBDISTRICT No. 2, NANTUCKET.—Quota full, with a surplus of 61. No draft.

The draft proceeded, in the same manner in which it was conducted for subdistrict No. 1, taking up next in order.

SUBDISTRICT No. 3, CHILMARK.—66 ballots. Deficiency, 14. Names drawn:

Rodolphus Tilton, Grafton Norton, John Davis, Samuel N. Tilton, Russell Hancock, George H. Davis, Frederic S. Allen, Rodney E. Reed, Charles C. Adams, Richard W. Flanders, Moses Vincent, Eddy C. Flanders, Onslow Stewart, Andrew Springer, Benjamin C. Smith, Joseph C. Allen, George Butler, James Mitchell, George Chase, Luther B. West, Franklin B. Hammett—21.

SUBDISTRICT No. 4, TRISBURY.—179 ballots. Deficiency, 28. Names drawn:

Charles W. M. Luce, John Cottle, Josiah H. Vincent, Charles C. Look, Richard L. Russell, John Dunham, Josias P. Luce, Charles Lambert, Henry C. Daggett, Francis Blish, James M. Taber, Albert O. Look, Benjamin Chase, John A. Luce, James Norton, James L. Skiff, Edward T. T. Smith, Franklin Luce, George W. Hatch, Charles P. West, Harif Smith, Warren Luce, Charles B. Hardenburg, Richard L. Norton, Horatio Norton, Presby L. Smith, Alpheus Athearn, Charles F. Cleveland, James Winslow, William F. Durgen, Foster H. Jenkins, James Weeks, David N. Look, Mayhew Look, Presbury N. Luce, Eibridge C. Athearn, David Mayhew, Cyrus Manter, Marcellus Tobey, Cornelius Clark, Mayhew Norton, Leander C. Owen—42.

At ten minutes past noon, the draft was adjourned till 11 o'clock to-morrow, when subdistrict No. 5, comprising the town of Falmouth, will be in order.

The Boston papers of this morning state that Assistant-Provost-Marshal-General Clarke has been authorized to allow still further credits for enlistments in the navy shown to be correct. By this the deficiency of some towns in the 1st congressional district will probably be materially diminished.

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Principal of Dukes County Academy*

Editor: Arthur R. Railton
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.

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Articles published in *The Intelligencer* do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Society or its officers. Every effort is made to confirm dates, names and events in published articles, but we cannot guarantee total authenticity.

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Unidentified New Bedford newspaper, May 13, 1864, reported on the drawing of names to fill the Vineyard's quota under Lincoln's February and March calls for 700,000 men.

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

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

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

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

The Island's Civil War Draft Protest: Its Moment in History

by RICHARD MILLER

THREE PROMINENT Vineyarders, on June 13, 1864, sent a remarkable document to every town in Massachusetts calling for a revolt against the State. The three men were Richard L. Pease of Edgartown, Henry L. Whiting of West Tisbury and Rev. William H. Sturtevant, Congregational minister of West Tisbury. Entitled simply "Circular," the document protested the administration of the Civil War draft and cited the experience of the Vineyard as typical:

The towns of Edgartown and Tisbury, in Dukes County, have furnished men for both the army and the navy of the United States, largely in excess of all demands made upon them, but have not yet received due credit for the same; their demands for redress have, up to the present time, been unheeded, and their citizens have been drafted to fill alleged deficiencies, when, if they had their just credits, their quotas would be more than full.

Noting that Edgartown and Tisbury were not isolated cases, the Circular continued:

All over the Commonwealth are heard voices of complaint from like sufferers. Not a few selectmen and agents of towns, desirous of information, have sedulously sought it by repeated visits to state and national officials in Boston. . . Many are still anxiously looking for relief to the constituted authorities but they will look in vain to such sources for prompt and satisfactory redress, unless they take the matter into their own hands, and uniting with all others similarly aggrieved, determine that they will not rest quietly, nor cease from agitation, until it shall be proved whether there is not power and influence in the concentrated action of whole communities seeking their just rights.

RICHARD MILLER, a Nantucket summer resident, lives in Carlisle, Massachusetts. A writer and researcher specializing in the Civil War, he is co-author, with Robert F. Mooney, of *The Civil War: The Nantucket Experience*, published by Wesco, Nantucket, 1994. We plan to include a review of the work in our next issue.

The Circular concluded with an invitation to all the other town officials:

Will your town join with us, and other towns, in a convention to be holden at the Marlboro Hotel, in Boston, the twenty-second day of June, instant, at 11 ½ o'clock A.M. . . to take such action as may be deemed most certain to result in securing for each town in the State the full credit to which it is entitled, for men heretofore furnished for the army and the navy of the United States?¹

Such a bold call from an insignificant, remote place like the Vineyard, for a statewide anti-draft rally in the midst of a Civil War could only be termed extraordinary. At stake was nothing less than the survival of the Union and the abolition of slavery. One has only to recall the bitter and sometimes violent controversies ignited by the anti-draft rallies of World War I and, more recently, the Vietnam War.

Bold as their action was, the Vineyarders struck a nerve. The Convention they called for convened as scheduled and was so swamped by delegates from 50 cities and towns that it was forced to adjourn temporarily and reassemble in the more spacious rooms of the famed Parker House.

To understand how such a public uprising could have been ignited by three Vineyarders, it is necessary to understand the way Civil War recruiting was done. The system of conscription was notorious for its gross inequities. Even today, it is considered to have been ill-conceived. In principle, the system had at least an appearance of fairness. The Federal authorities would determine manpower requirements, which were then divided among the states, based on population. State quotas could be satisfied through voluntary enlistments, by conscription or by providing substitute recruits to take the places of local men.

In Massachusetts, Governor John A. Andrew, acting through State Adjutant General William Schouler, divided the Commonwealth's quota, which was set by the Federal government, among the towns, based on their total enrollment of eligible men. The basis for a town's enrollment was its Militia List. For years, towns had been legally

required to maintain and annually update these lists which were supposed to include all eligible men between 18 and 45 years who were subject to military service.

In practice, however, the system proved unfair, riddled with loopholes, rife with corruption and cursed with inept administration. Especially unfair, and particularly devastating to seaboard communities like the Vineyard, was the fact that residents who had enlisted in the United States Navy (as seafaring men were prone to do) were not credited against the draft quota; in addition, civilian sailors at sea (often away for years) were kept on the enrollment list, as though they were available to fill the town's quota.

Maritime communities thus found themselves squeezed from both ends: No credits for naval enlistments and the inclusion of an absent population for the purpose of calculating conscription quotas. In short, because the available military-age population shrank, the percentage of remaining population liable to conscription had to increase.

The men in the Navy were doing their bit to further the cause of the Union, Vineyarders thought. Why shouldn't the Island get credit for their service? As Editor James Cooms wrote in the *Vineyard Gazette* of June 3, 1864,

about fifty of our town's brave sons were as busily engaged in harpooning of Jeff Davis' privateers or sending bombs into the very vitals of inflexible forts as they had ever been in catching whales.²

By Editor Cooms's count, Edgartown, with a quota of 58 under the latest call for manpower, should be credited with a total of 61 enlistments, giving it a surplus of three. He based this on these figures: the 50 men at sea; 9 volunteers who had enlisted under the bounty, paid by the town; plus two commutations.³ But no naval credits had been issued, although they had been authorized in March, and the state, by some unexplained calculations, was demanding 21

² James M. Cooms Jr., 23 years old, had taken over the *Gazette* from Edgar Marchant one year before. Born in Edgartown, he learned his craft from Marchant. Under his editorship, the paper was an outspoken critic of the inequity of the recruitment quota system.

³ *Vineyard Gazette*, June 3, 1864. It was also possible to buy your way out of service by paying \$300. This was a commutation.

¹ "Circular," June 13, 1864, DCHS archives.

additional men from the town. A week earlier, Cooms had put the matter plainly:

First we are told we are to have credits for men that have entered the naval service. Next we are informed that such credits cannot be obtained, conscription law to the contrary notwithstanding. Again, and worse still, we are told if a drafted man shall fail to appear, in consequence of being about his business at some distant port, that inexorable wheel must revolve until it shall gobble up every three hundred that has been laid up for the fatal hour and then take the men themselves who are at home. If going to sea (!) exempts a man, we opine all business will be run into the sea. Every man is certainly willing to do his own duty but to answer for another's is an unequal task.⁴

Although on April 1, 1864, the *Gazette* had published an "Opinion" from the War Department which said that naval enlistments after February 24 would be credited to each town, the legislation allowing such credit would not be passed by Congress until July 4, 1864. Even then, the evidence suggests that state officials were tardy in actually applying naval recruits to local quotas. The Committee of Investigation letter to Governor Andrew, dated August 16, 1864, states emphatically that

The people are looking with unparalleled interest, and almost nervous anxiety, for the declaration of credit for naval recruits, and for men hitherto furnished. . . and not heretofore duly credited.⁵

This was nearly six months after the War Department had announced that naval recruits would be counted and six weeks after Congress passed legislation requiring it. No wonder men like Pease, who apparently wrote the lengthy litany of complaints, were not satisfied with the Adjutant General's response.

Compounding this was the unrelenting pressure of conscription in 1864, the final year of the war. Voluntary

(Continued on page 105)

⁴ *Gazette*, May 27, 1864. That "inexorable wheel" was the round cage inside which names of eligible draftees were spun prior to the drawing.

⁵ Committee of Investigation letter to Gov. John Andrew, dated August 16, 1864, copy in DCHS archives. As for Pease's other major complaint, as far as can be determined, no allowance was ever made for absentee citizens, such as mariners on voyages lasting years, who were not available, yet were included in the count of eligible men.

Three Men Who Shook up the Commonwealth

WHO were those Vineyarders who took on the powerful Gov. John A. Andrew and his Adjutant General, William Schouler, in the midst of the nation's most destructive war? It was a time when the Union Army's need for recruits was enormous; battlefield losses had skyrocketed. Yet, three men from Martha's Vineyard, remote and insignificant as the Island was, sparked an anti-draft revolt by 50 of the state's cities and towns. Never before (or since) had the Island played such an important role in state policy.

They were an unlikely trio: Richard L. Pease (1814-1888) of Edgartown was a former school teacher and, at the time, Clerk of the County Court; Henry L. Whiting (1821-1897) of West Tisbury was a nationally known topographer working for the Federal coastal survey; William H. Sturtevant (1823-1890) was minister of the West Tisbury Congregational church and also was Representative to the General Court (the state House of Representatives). These three, a county clerk, an engineer and a minister, set out to change the Commonwealth's system of conscription.

Pease, a native of the Island, was clearly the leader. He had assembled data on Edgartown's enlistees, showing that nearly half had not been credited to the town, which had paid them to sign up. To be sure, many were not Edgartown men, but all had received bounties paid by Edgartown and should have been credited to it.

It is not known why Pease got so deeply involved. He and his wife had two daughters, but no sons (however,

Richard did have, it is believed, a son of draft age born to Hannah, widowed daughter of Mrs. Polly Cottle of Chilmark, but he was not called up).¹

Pease had served one year (1842) in the General Court in Boston. Other than that he seems to have left the Island rarely. He did attend Wesleyan Academy in Connecticut for one semester as a youth, but otherwise spent his entire life on the Island. He was a romantic who wrote poems of love and nature. He was also an indefatigable researcher, transcribing thousands of historical documents. At the time of the draft protest, he was 50 years old.

When he left the court house in 1872, he continued his research. It was his intention to write the history of the Island. Nobody was better prepared. However, he never got past an outline, even though he lived to be 74. His notes, carefully saved by his daughters, became the foundation of Charles E. Banks's history. Alexander Graham Bell also relied on Pease's research, using his genealogical data for his study of deaf mutism. Shortly after Pease died in 1888, Bell, who had recently formed his telephone company, offered Widow Pease either \$2500 worth of stock in American Bell Telephone or \$2500 in cash for continued access to her late husband's notes. By taking the cash instead of the stock, she missed the chance to make her children multi-millionaires.

The Society, like Banks and Bell, owes a great debt to Richard L. Pease. In our archives are many of his notes

¹ See *Intelligencer*, February 1985, "Richard L. Pease's Fall of 1839," by Arthur R. Railton.

and manuscripts. Unfortunately, in none does he explain why he became involved in the anti-draft protest.

Henry L. Whiting, the engineer, bought the Old Parsonage in West Tisbury in 1852 and moved there. He was rarely at home as his survey work with the Federal government required him to travel extensively. The Civil War reduced his travels and, during those years, he was home more often. After the war, he taught topography at the Naval Academy in Annapolis and at M.I.T., in Cambridge. In his career, he produced 88 topographical sheets, the most ever produced by one engineer up until then. Clearly, he was an outstanding topographer. How he came to devote himself so totally (perhaps risking his career) to the anti-draft movement is unknown. In fact, his involvement, like that of the others, has been forgotten. In its lengthy obituary of him, the *Gazette* does not mention it (nor is it mentioned in Pease's obituary).

The third in the trio, Rev. William H. Sturtevant, was born in Barnstable and studied for the ministry in New Bedford. In 1852, he was ordained minister of the Tisbury Congregational church in Holmes Hole. The church, like many of that denomination at the time, was in decline and he became its "last settled pastor." After he was dismissed in 1856, the church survived only another year using transient ministers. He moved to South Dennis that year, serving in its Congregational church until 1860, when he was invited back to the Island to serve as minister of the West Tisbury Congregational church, which is what he was at the time of the Boston protest. Whiting was one of his parishioners and a

generous financial supporter. In 1863 and 1864, he was Representative to the General Court, which meant that he, like Pease, was familiar with State House procedures. He may have even known Governor Andrew. This may have been why he, a minister, had been chosen as one of the three men to lead the Island's protest.

He continued as the Congregational minister in West Tisbury until June 1, 1877, when, it seems, he left under unpleasant circumstances and became briefly the pastor of the South Baptist church in the same village. At the end of 1877, he left the Island to take a church in Tiverton, R.I. He died in 1890 at 67 years. At the time of his death he was pastor of the Congregational church in Pawtuxet, R.I.²

The protest these three Vineyarders sparked created much publicity. The state's major newspapers carried long accounts of the convention proceedings. In one of its articles, the *New Bedford Mercury* credited the protest to Pease: "It was called mainly upon the suggestion of Richard L. Pease, Esq., of Edgartown . . . There is undoubtedly valid reason for the remonstrances from these towns, who have been, by some hocuspocus, or carelessness, or neglect, deprived of credits for men, whom at great expense they have furnished. . . we hope its deliberations and resolves may effect such change of practice, as shall secure the full rights of every city and town."³ Not a bad tribute to three men from Martha's Vineyard.

² Data on Reverend Sturtevant courtesy Harold F. Worthley, Librarian, Congregational Historical Society, Boston.

³ *New Bedford Mercury*, June 24, 1864.

enlistments had substantially declined. Horrendous casualty lists and returning streams of sick and wounded veterans had long since sapped the volunteerism characteristic of the heady days following Fort Sumter. On Christmas Day, 1863, the *Gazette* reprinted an article from the *Gloucester Telegraph* stating that Massachusetts still "owed" 18,000 men from previous calls in addition to the new call by President Lincoln for 15,000. The quotas were passed on to towns, based on their available manpower. Bounties were offered to encourage men to volunteer to fill the town's quota. When this voluntary system stopped providing enough troops, it was proposed to draft individuals, something nobody wanted.

On February 1, 1864, President Lincoln issued a national call for another 500,000 troops; then, only six weeks later, on March 18, 1864, an additional 200,000 troops were called for under Lincoln's General Orders No. 100, which the *Gazette* published *verbatim*.⁶

In preparing to meet these calls, the towns had recourse to what was the most outrageous loophole of the conscription law: They could hire "substitutes" to take the places of local residents who were absent, shirking or otherwise unable or unwilling to enlist or be drafted. Immediately after Lincoln's February call for 500,000 men, the *Gazette* had urged a rally "to relieve our citizens from the impending draft. . . Every one must arouse themselves to a knowledge of the fact that if volunteers are not obtained those required within a limited age must go; torn from homes and family."

Such a prospect was frightening, but a solution beckoned and the *Gazette* described it bluntly: "Money in plenty we have, but men we have not, and consequently, money must buy men. . ."⁷

There was no account of the rally in the next week's paper, although it apparently spurred the Selectmen to call a special town meeting on February 27. It would take up the question of raising, "either by taxation or otherwise," the money

⁶ *Gazette*, March 18, 1864.

⁷ *Gazette*, Feb. 19, 1864.

needed to "buy men" to fill the town's quota, as Cooms had proposed. It took two more meetings before the matter was decided and on March 19, the citizens voted a sum, not to exceed \$3000, to procure "a sufficient number of men to fill this town's quota under the last three drafts."⁸ The next week, the newspaper reported that "our recruiting agent, William Bradley, Esq., . . . is now abroad on this especial business . . ."

Edgartown was not the only Island town to buy substitutes, although it may have been the only one to use tax money to do it. Two months later, July 2, 1864, a citizens' meeting (not a town meeting) was held on the subject in Tisbury. Minutes of the meeting in the West Tisbury school, called to raise money to buy substitutes, reveal just how costly buying substitutes was:

. . . it was supposed that [Massachusetts] would command the market for recruits. Each recruit would receive \$300 from the State of Mass. & \$300 from the [Federal] Government and a small addition to this large bounty would probably secure to Mass. men a personal substitute.

Twenty voluntary contributors, including Reverend Sturtevant and Mr. Whiting, donated a total of \$2000 to "secure substitutes," and Sturtevant was chosen as agent to travel to Washington and arrange for the procurement.

It turned out that \$2000 was not enough to cover the agent's expenses and to buy substitutes. On July 8, a second citizens' meeting convened at the same school house. This time, 43 residents of Tisbury each pledged an immediate \$10 contribution "as a preliminary fund to bear [the] Agent's expenses to Washington & to start operations there."⁹

Such meetings had occurred before, but the money raised had been to pay bounties to local men to encourage them to enlist, not to buy off-Island substitutes. As early as January 8, 1864, the *Gazette* reported that in Tisbury "an effort is being made by the citizens to have their quota filled, having raised by subscription, \$2300 for that purpose."

⁸ *Gazette*, March 25, 1864. The delay in voting the funding was due, no doubt, to the fact that it was not until March 18 that the state passed legislation authorizing the use of tax money to buy recruits, providing the amount did not exceed \$125 per recruit.

⁹ Minutes of meetings are in DCHS archives (see inside back cover).

The first suggestion to buy off-Island substitutes had come from Editor Cooms in the February 12, 1864 *Gazette*:

MEN OR MONEY.— Men must be had and each district and town must furnish its proportion. . . [and] they must be forthcoming by the tenth of March or a draft will be inevitable. Volunteers, to the number required, cannot be had from our island, and now the question remains, what can we do? We have sent eight of our citizens, on the last call, but this seems to be the limit of our ability. Money must do the rest. It can be done. Substitutes are being obtained throughout the state, and a dollar is worth as much here as elsewhere. . . Let all take hold at once. . .¹⁰

General Ulysses S. Grant strenuously opposed the buying of substitutes because, he believed, most of them would be Negroes who were coming across the Federal lines from the South in large numbers as the Union army advanced. Those men, he argued, "are rightfully recruits to the United States Service and should not go to benefit any particular state." If state recruiters did not "buy" them with bounties, Grant argued, they would join the Union army without cost to anybody.¹¹

As costly as this procurement was to the Island towns, it was not the major issue. The biggest concern of citizens, encouraged by the *Gazette's* editorials, was the difference between what Vineyarders believed their draft quota should be and what the "Boards of Enlistment" asserted it to be. Scarcely a week passed without Editor Cooms decrying the unfairness of the system.

The opening shot in the conflict that broke out between the towns and the state over the quota inequities was fired March 25 in the *Gazette's* editorial about Adjutant General Schouler's soon-to-be-published Annual Report for 1863. Cooms hoped it would be better than his previous which had been filled with "errors, palpable errors." In that report,

Of thirty-eight nine-months men furnished by Edgartown, the evidence of which is clear and unquestionable, the town gets credit in the report of the Adjutant-General. . . for

¹⁰ By the end of the war, Edgartown had spent \$23,325.13 (\$12.64 per capita) to obtain recruits; Chilmark, \$5151.79 (\$9.42 per capita); Tisbury, \$22,621 (\$13.31 per capita). (William Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War*, v.2, 1871, pp.164-170).

¹¹ William S. McFeely, *Grant, A Biography*, W.W.Norton, New York, 1981, pp.176-77.

fifteen only; while records in his office show that twenty-seven were received into camp, and certificates of the Selectmen, on file, that thirty-eight were furnished. Of these thirty-eight men, paid for by the town of Edgartown, the Descriptive rolls show that fourteen are passed to the credit of Boston, and six to Lowell, while some are sought for in vain.¹²

Rally, raise money and procure subs though they might, Island citizens were seeing the recruits they had paid bounties to being credited to other towns or somehow disappearing from the records. Vineyard communities, urged by Editor Cooms, complained not only of being squeezed by no credits for naval enlistments and no allowance for absent mariners, they were now subsidizing the quotas of other towns by their bounty payments.

Discrepancies in the Adjutant-General's records may have fed, but did not alone cause, the anti-draft Convention of 1864. Rather, local patience was finally exhausted by the assertion that the Vineyard had even greater deficiencies than previously claimed. After President Lincoln's February call for 500,000 men, the Vineyard's quota was officially established, stating that Edgartown now "owed" 42 more men; Chilmark 18 and Tisbury 37.¹³

The *Gazette* confidently asserted that Edgartown's quota had not only been met, but had been exceeded. The town, Cooms wrote, had a surplus of recruits over its conscription requirements. His optimism was based on an "Opinion" from the War Department's counsel (which he printed) that

A person, enlisting into the Marine Corps or Naval service of the United States who is liable to military service. . . shall be credited to the quota of the place where he is liable to military service.

This was the first such concession the Federal government had made. With it, the *Gazette* reasoned that now the town's obligation was to provide, not 42 men, but only 4. This, despite the fact that under Lincoln's 500,000-man call in

¹² *Gazette*, March 25, 1864. There were differing terms of enlistments, some were for only three months, some for nine months, others were for three years.

¹³ *Gazette*, March 25, 1864.

February, 42 men were due, and under his March call for 200,000 more, another 17 would be required, making a total of 59. But, the *Gazette* argued, the town was entitled to credit itself with 24 naval enlistments, and when additional unspecified deductions and credits were included, the town needed only to come up with 4 men. Cooms then informed his readers that, with the money the town had voted to buy substitutes, its recruiting agent, William Bradley, had "obtained the services of about 25 men which will give us a surplus for further demands."¹⁴

By late May, however, it was apparent that credit for Navy men was going to take time. The *Gazette* reported that the sailors could not be credited against the army quota until their enlistment records had been verified. That would not be completed until after the present call-up had been filled. In the same issue, under the heading, "Conscripted," Cooms brought the news to 95 Vineyarders that their names had been drawn by lot in New Bedford on May 13. Unless substitutes were found, they would be drafted. Included were 32 men from Edgartown, among whom 21 would have to serve, 21 names from Chilmark were drawn to fill 18 deficiencies, and 42 from Tisbury, 28 being required to serve.¹⁵

The *Gazette*, obviously upset that its optimism had been misplaced, went back to its earlier criticism, demanding a reduced enrollment, noting bitterly that "five-eighths [*sic*] of our citizens, liable to military duty, are at sea." This demand for a lower enrollment number was met a few weeks later and Cooms promised, again with optimism, "future quotas will be very much less."¹⁶

But despite Cooms's promise, the fact was that the ravenous wolf of conscription was now at the door. Burdened by relentless draft calls from Washington, then buoyed by calculations of a surplus before being dashed by

¹⁴ *Gazette*, April 1, 1864.

¹⁵ *Gazette*, May 20, 1864. More names were drawn than required because some men might be excused for health or other reasons, making alternates necessary. (See inside front cover for another account.)

¹⁶ *Gazette*, May 27, 1864.

news of yet more deficiencies, a whipsawed *Vineyard Gazette* exploded in frustration against the system, and its most visible administrator, Adjutant General William Schouler. In what must have been the longest and angriest editorial in the newspaper's history, Editor Cooms tore apart the system of draft quotas, as run by the state. "Two years ago," he reminded his readers, "the town raised some \$20,000 to be expended in the procurement of men to fill its supposed quota, which was done in good faith. . . It was found, after we had furnished the men and paid for them, that our quota was too large by about 15 men. Assurances were given that the surplus. . . would be credited on future calls. . . yet these credits have never been given."

He then, at length, repeated the argument that the town had furnished many men then serving as mariners, both in the Navy and in the merchant fleet. If no credits were given for men unavailable for draft because they were at sea, the town would have to vote \$3000 "for the purchase of substitutes for the navy . . . immediately and with dispatch." Editor Cooms emphasized his points with what was by now a familiar complaint:

We are thus thrice taxed. We have taxed ourselves sufficiently, in the purchase of substitutes, to satisfy any just demand on the town. . . We have been taxed with a heavy draft as if we had done nothing; and now we are to be taxed again in another draft for those at sea!

Despite the Editor's persuasive argument, there were some in town who disagreed. In the next issue, Cooms wrote:

As certain persons have called in question the accuracy of our editorial remarks in last week's issue, we propose to furnish such facts and statistics as will set the matter at rest. . . Fortunately, we have the proofs before us, in figures, which never lie, taken directly from the papers of the Adjutant-General's office by one of the most accurate businessmen of this town, who vouches for, and is ready to swear to their correctness. In another column of this page will be seen a brief report made to the town by R.L.Pease, Esq., who was appointed to investigate the subject and obtain the credits which were so obviously due. . .

Richard L. Pease, the Editor pointed out, had studied the

official State records and learned that the town of Edgartown had paid \$7875 in bounties to 16 local men whose enlistments had been credited to other towns. It had also paid \$2500 to off-Island substitutes who had also been credited to other towns, making a total of \$10,375, which he accused the Adjutant General of appropriating from Edgartown illegally for the use of other towns.

Continuing for nearly two columns, Cooms castigated the state's handling of the quotas, challenging anyone to contradict his conclusions. He urged the town, at the special meeting on Saturday to

be cool in its deliberations, but decided in its actions. Let it unite with . . . Tisbury. . . let the two unite with the other towns of the State which are seeking redress for the same grievances. Let the subject be agitated till in this united, concentrated effort there is strength. . . Should we fail here, we will then present them at Washington, where we shall undoubtedly obtain a candid hearing and a satisfactory adjustment. . . We simply ask for our rights. If the Governor has appointed men to any State office, which they show a want of practical ability to fill, [then] justice, humanity, and the united voices of more than 100 aggrieved towns of the Commonwealth ask their removal.¹⁷

The next day, June 11, a town meeting was held. Edgartown citizens turned out to support Pease and his colleagues in their effort to correct the injustices of the quota system. If the Boston convention being proposed by them was unable to persuade Governor Andrew to make the necessary adjustments and reforms, Edgartown (and no doubt Tisbury) was prepared to appeal to higher authority. The following resolution was passed:

Resolved — That provided, the efforts to obtain justice from the State authorities shall fail, the Selectmen are hereby authorized and empowered to employ any suitable person or persons to proceed to Washington and seek to have this town credited with the men in the military and naval service to which we are entitled for our quota or quotas.

A second resolution authorized the Edgartown selectmen to use "any funds in their hands for recruiting purposes, to pay to any men, in their discretion, who will enlist in

¹⁷ *Gazette*, June 10, 1864. Fifty "aggrieved" towns joined the cause.

the navy, and whose enlistment will aid in filling the quota of this town."

Two days later, June 13, the "Circular", no doubt written by Richard L. Pease (he, Whiting and Sturtevant signed it), was sent to every city and town in the state. Reciting the experiences of Edgartown and Tisbury with the state's failure to credit them properly for their recruits, it laid other more ominous faults at the doorstep of the Commonwealth. "Corruption and fraud has abounded," it declared, "not only among brokers and runners, and men in and around the recruiting offices and camps, but among officers entrusted with grave and responsible duties." It did not question the wisdom or aims of the war, proclaiming a "spirit of patriotism. . . [and supporting] the armies fighting the battles of freedom," but it did state that the towns "are not disposed tamely to submit to this injustice. Neither wisdom nor patriotism require such a sacrifice of their rights."¹⁸

Indeed, as if to emphasize the Island's loyalty to the war, on the same day the Circular was issued an announcement was published, signed by Henry Bradley, Charles D. Harding and Bartlett Mayhew 2nd., Tisbury selectmen, warning that "Our country is in peril, fearful peril." It pleaded with citizens to "rally to the work of enlistment and strain every nerve to furnish all the men required to fill the quota of Tisbury." The announcement noted the efforts of the Circular, but in the meantime, continued to urge enlistments for the war. Clearly, bitterness might run deep concerning the administration of the draft, but Vineyard support for the Union cause was beyond question.¹⁹

At noon, June 22, the convention, which had been moved to the Parker House when the Marlboro proved too small, was called to order by Edgartown's Richard L. Pease.²⁰ Officers of the convention were chosen and Pease was named Secretary. Delegates, including Pease, Whiting and Sturtevant, were called upon to relate anecdotes about their

towns and the draft. The stories were depressingly similar. Speakers from Barnstable, Dennis and Warren stated that their recruiting efforts should have resulted in a surplus of men but in fact left them with a deficiency. Adjutant General Schouler was frequently denounced although, significantly, Mr. Russell, agent for the town of Warren, praised him and discouraged the Convention from taking steps to investigate his office.

But that is exactly what it was determined to do. A motion was introduced calling for a committee to investigate "the whole matter" and report back. A Norwich delegate described how the quota system was handled by Rhode Island's Adjutant General, claiming that such abuses as had occurred in Massachusetts were unknown in that state. Therefore, he argued, the Federal government was not at fault, it was Schouler, charging that "There was evidently neglect on the part of State officials which could not be tacked on to the U.S. authorities."

It was on this point that any hope of consensus vanished, demonstrating just how fine a line exists between perceptions of loyalty and disloyalty during dissent in wartime. Schouler supporter Russell and a Mr. Shorey of Lynn, both members of the Committee of Investigation, now "desired to be excused from serving. . . There seemed to be a desire on the part of the convention to censure the authorities at the State House, and to this they could not subscribe," the *Boston Herald* reported. The State authorities "had done the best they could." But the Convention would not be deterred. Two others were appointed to fill their places, and the meeting was adjourned until the next day.

Overnight, the three Vineyarders in concert with others apparently put together a plan to prevent the Convention from being sidetracked. Whiting opened the morning meeting by reading a statement of grievances, insisting that recruiting by the towns had been conducted properly but that "gross mistakes have been made and gross neglect has existed somewhere, and the citizens have no where to look for explanation or redress but to the State officers. . ." He

¹⁸ Circular, June 13, 1864, Edgartown, copy in DCHS archives.

¹⁹ Announcement, June 13, 1864, copy in DCHS archives.

²⁰ The account of the Convention is taken largely from the *Boston Herald*, June 23 and 24, 1864.

noted that attempts had been made to persuade the State to rectify matters, but these were "without response from [Schouler] either by information, advice or intimation of unwillingness or intention to correct errors, however palpable, or to adjust claims due."

Whiting's complaints surely had a familiar ring to most delegates and they passed three resolutions. First, they demanded a complete explanation of the "errors which have been made and the improper practices which have existed and been allowed to continue respecting the draft." Second, the Convention insisted that "the chief recruiting officer of the State" (Schouler) be charged with correcting the abuses and identifying and charging those responsible for the abuses. Finally, the Committee of Investigation was authorized to go to Washington for redress if satisfaction could not be obtained from State authorities.

Just before the noon adjournment, Sturtevant and a Mr. Beal from Cohasset were sent to Beacon Hill to arrange a meeting between Governor Andrew and the Committee of Investigation. The Governor agreed to receive the Committee "or any communication the Convention might desire to make at 3 o'clock this afternoon."

At 4:00 p.m., the Committee of Investigation returned to report on the meeting with the Governor. They had been courteously received and had presented a "summary of facts in relation to enlistments and credits." The Governor gave his assurance, the Committee happily reported, that he would do all in his power to correct any errors, and further, that he was willing to take any suggestions the Committee might make. He had already ordered a revision of the records and promised that "any number of clerks required to make the revision would be promptly furnished." He was determined, he said, to "do all in his power . . . to secure to every city and town in the State its just and equitable rights." A satisfied Convention then passed a resolution "expressing gratitude" to Governor Andrew, and accepted his reply as "evidence of the devotion of His Excellency to the cause to which he had already given his untiring

energies." Apparently convinced, the Convention adjourned.²¹

But Adjutant General William Schouler, the man blamed for the unfairness of the draft, had not yet been heard from. After placating the Convention with soothing promises of reform, Governor Andrew on July 8 sent every major newspaper in the state a letter written to him by Schouler. It was more than a mere defense by the Adjutant General of his conduct concerning quotas and credits, it was an indictment of the inequities of the Federal system he was charged with administering. It also provided, to reasonable readers, a justifiable explanation as to why communities like those on the Vineyard had found themselves in difficulty regarding conscription.

Introducing the letter, the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, on its front page, stated that Schouler's explanation "with great clearness and unanswerable success, [pointed out] the absurdity of the frequent charges against the military authorities of the State. . ."²²

In his letter to Governor Andrew, dated June 24, the Adjutant General acknowledged receipt of the "circular signed by Richard L. Pease and others . . . I had seen this circular before, and I have read also articles in the *Vineyard Gazette* upon the subject. . ." Schouler dismissed the charges against him and his office as "utterly groundless." His clerks kept records on some 85,000 men and he conceded that some errors in credits were possible, but, he declared, "I believe [my records] to be the most correct rolls in the possession of any State."

Those "rolls," he explained, were the records of recruits as they were mustered into regiments. It was then that their residency was recorded. A copy of the rolls was turned over to Schouler's office. If blame was to be assigned for incorrect residency credits, it should be placed on the army, which was not under his jurisdiction. "The truth is," Schouler asserted, "the rolls are made out at the camp, by the officers

²¹ Unidentified newspaper clipping, DCHS archives.

²² *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 11, 1864.

in charge. . . who certify 'on honor' that they are correct."

Schouler then broached the real problem. The recruiting system was corrupted by money in the form of bounties to induce voluntary enlistment and to procure substitutes. An illegal industry had developed, as Schouler explained:

Few complaints were ever made that the rolls were incorrect until lately; and that, since the inauguration of the system of offering large State and local bounties. These bounties warmed into life a certain class of men known as recruiting or substitute brokers, who agree to furnish men to fill the quotas of towns for a specified sum. I have not a high opinion of this class; and I have no doubt that many of the selectmen and town agents have been grossly swindled by them. . . I have no doubt that in many cases, the recruit and the broker were fellow-partners in the swindle.

Schouler observed that it often took months to fill a new regiment and the recruits, many supplied by the brokers, were mustered in only as each company roster was filled. In the interim, he pointed out, "The broker's recruit goes to camp, and before the muster is made, the broker sells the man again, and he turns up at last as a recruit for a certain ward in Boston, when he originally enlisted, it may be, for the quota of Edgartown."

Recruitment brokers were not the only parties at fault. "To show how easy it is to cheat," Schouler related the tale of two recruits from Topsfield who enlisted to the credit of that town. Unbeknownst to either man, an army clerk took a bribe for \$100 and falsified the records, crediting one man to Uxbridge and the other to Tewksbury.

The Adjutant General complained that he had been "unjustly treated by the articles in the *Vineyard Gazette* and by the Convention." He was blunt in his criticism:

The *Vineyard Gazette* says that Edgartown paid local bounties to men who enlisted for the quota of that town, and were not credited to it, — the sum of \$10,375, and lays the blame upon this office

. . . I regret that any town should have expended this sum without gaining any reward; but, instead of finding fault with innocent parties, [I] respectfully submit, that the taxpayers of the town might properly ask the gentlemen, who confess that they have paid the money, why they paid it

before they had positive knowledge that the men were credited to the quota of their town? Common prudence would seem to dictate this course.

Schouler concluded his letter with this advice to towns like Edgartown and Tisbury:

The cause has been, the free use of money by trading with brokers and swindlers. And the remedy is, not to pay a cent of bounty or premium until the recruit is mustered in; and then to pay it to the recruit, and not to the broker.²³

Neither Schouler's criticism of town officials nor his advice on bounties was welcomed by the *Gazette*. In the July 29 issue, Reverend Sturtevant answered Schouler's charges in a letter headlined, "Who is to Blame?" Characterizing the Adjutant General's statement to the Governor as "by no means satisfactory," Sturtevant dismissed his suggestion that bounties be paid directly to recruits rather than to brokers as being "poor satisfaction for past losses." Sturtevant rhetorically asked, "who is responsible for a system of recruiting which has given such facilities to 'sharp practitioners' to practice such deception, and swindle the towns out of the men to whom they were justly entitled?" Predictably, he answered his own question: It was the Commonwealth. Once recruits were delivered into the hands of Massachusetts, Sturtevant argued, it was the state's responsibility to see that they were properly credited.²⁴

Despite Governor Andrew's promise of "any number of clerks" to correct the problem, no change was quickly forthcoming in the recruitment policy. On September 2, the *Gazette* stated,

Today the people of this town stand indebted to the State for twenty men when, by the condition of the law upon navy credits, you should have an excess of fourteen, and this egregious wrong exists because of the pusillanimity of those empowered to act in this matter.

Other towns in the state, Editor Cooms wrote, are getting ten percent of their quotas from the purchase of freed slaves in the South, Edgartown has obtained none. Why?

By mid-August, the Committee of Investigation had

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Gazette*, July 29, 1864.

waited long enough and it dispatched a long letter to Governor Andrew, which was published in the newspapers of the state. Probably written by Richard L. Pease, the letter's tone was conciliatory and for the first time, conceded that some responsibility for misplaced and disappearing credits might lie with local officials. The Committee admitted to the possibility, explaining it this way:

Generally destitute of any practical knowledge of the formal routine of military affairs, and, in most cases, wholly without the training necessary to fit them for the discharge of the important duties for the first time devolving upon them, it is not to be wondered at, that, in such new and untried positions, there should have been some failures, and that mistakes should have been made and errors committed, which, in retrospect, now seem not only needless but almost inexcusable.

The Committee also agreed with Schouler's assessment of the responsibility for the evils borne by the recruitment brokers. "Men of all ages become their victims," the letter declared. "Spirituuous liquors are proffered in profusion, and sensual indulgences freely proffered; assurances are given that it is an easy thing for a recruit to escape the service, after acquiring a large and liberal bounty. . . one man is known to have enlisted thirteen times."

It went on to relate how seven Edgartown men, "citizens, not men procured abroad," had enlisted, but were mustered to the credit of the town of Lynnfield. Since there were no brokers involved, the error could only be chargeable to the state, by which it clearly meant Adjutant General Schouler. As proof of the state's blunder, the letter said that when the selectmen of Lynnfield were made aware of the error, "they promptly. . . gave them up to be credited to Edgartown. . . and they had no knowledge that any such men had been accredited to them. . ."

The serious grievances which had led to the Convention, the letter continued, "whether justly chargeable to the Adjutant-General or not — and neither in the circular calling the Convention, nor in the resolutions adopted is

such charge made — still exist unmitigated, and in unabated force. In fact, in view of the recent additional calls for troops, they appear to-day more irksome and intolerable than ever."²⁵

One week later, the painful and acrimonious dispute was resolved when the *Gazette* learned from mainland newspapers that a decision would soon be made to allow the crediting of naval recruits against the state's draft quotas. The editor of the *Gazette* happily reported,

Our credits, we learn, are forty-five. . . This town will fill her quota and have a handsome surplus for any future call.²⁶

Thus, the struggle over quotas and naval enlistment credits was over. Almost over, too, was the war. In seven months, it would end and with it, the draft that had given rise to so much controversy. The Vineyard's role in leading a statewide challenge to the infamous system of conscription would soon fade from memory. The few weeks of fame that descended upon the three Vineyard men who generated the "rebellion" of 50 other towns had passed. Strangely, this episode is never mentioned in Island history, although it is the only time when this tiny community sparked a statewide protest.

One hundred and thirty years later, it is impossible not to find oneself agreeing with both the frustrated Vineyarders and Adjutant General Schouler. America had never fought a war as big as the Civil War, and the notions of limited government prevalent at the time guaranteed confusion and worse when the Federal army grew from just over 16,000 on the eve of Fort Sumter to 500,000 just a few months later. Reconciling the tyranny of conscription with ideas of individual liberty produced the system of bounties, commutation fees and substitutes that wreaked havoc with ideas of fairness and equal duties.

"We cannot escape history," Lincoln noted. The Civil War draft system was part of that history and was just as inescapable for the towns of Martha's Vineyard and the Adjutant General of the Commonwealth.

²⁵ *Gazette*, Sept. 2, 1864. Letter was credited to "Richard L. Pease, Esq., and others."

²⁶ *Gazette*, Sept. 9, 1864.

The Eel Fishery of Martha's Vineyard

by CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr.

THE ORIGINAL settlers of Martha's Vineyard, the Indians, called eels by several different names, according to Roger Williams, who visited the Island in the 1600s. Although Williams doesn't go into detail, the Algonquin names may have described various stages of development. The names that he listed for "eeles" are *Nquitteconnauog*, *Sassammauquock* and *Neeschauog*.¹ The last of these is still used today, although in a slightly different form: Neshaw. It describes eels in the final year of life, the year they spawn. At this stage, they are also called "silver eels" because their skin has lightened (they also are thinner). Among marine biologists, the scientific name for eels is *Anguilla rostrata*.

Eels were an important food for the Indians of New England. Evidence of this is found in "Mourt's Relation," the earliest account of the Pilgrim's settlement at Plymouth.² The entry was written Friday, March 23, 1621, the day after the Pilgrims and the Wampanoags, led by Chief Massasoit with Samoset and Squanto as intermediaries, agreed to a peace pact, the first treaty between the English and the Indians:

March 23. Fryday was a very faire day. Samoset and Squanto

¹ Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*, published by Gregory Dexter, London, 1643, p.113. Reprint edition, 1936, by The Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Tercentenary Committee, Inc.

² *A Relation Or Journall of the beginning and proceedings of the English Plantation settled at Plimoth in New England*, London, 1622. That lengthy title has resulted in it becoming known as "Mourt's Relation" because the preface was signed: "Thy friend, G.Mourt." Mourt (Morton) is thought to have arranged its publication. The authors were probably William Bradford and Edward Winslow.

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still remained with us. Squanto went at noone to fish for Eels, at night he came home with as many as he could well lift in one hand, which our people were glad of, they were fat & sweet, he trod them out with his feete, and so caught them with his hands, without any other Instrument.³

Eel fishing has gone on for centuries in New England and on the Vineyard. Until recently, the Island's eel population was abundant enough to support a small commercial fishery which sold most of its catch off-Island. Today, however, the population has declined so much that eels are almost solely caught as bait for striped-bass fishermen.

Back in the 1800s, they were a common family food, especially during the winter when fresh fish was not easily available. In the cold weather, the eels were dormant, bedding down in the eel grass at the bottom of the ponds. Jeremiah Pease, a young married man, wrote of going eeling eleven times in his diary in the 1820s and 1830s. All eleven were in winter: once in December, twice in February, and the other eight times in January. He mentions the place only once: "at Cape Poge" in 1836. It could have been on Sheep Shear Pond, as Shear Pen Pond was then called. Here was how he described his eeling, some times accompanied by Allen Coffin, also of Edgartown:

February 14, 1822: Went eeling. Caught 52 dozen, A. Coffin and myself.

January 9, 1823: Went eeling. Caught 40 dozen, two of us.

January 15, 1823: Went eeling. Caught _____.

January 22, 1823: Went eeling. Caught 60 dozen eels.

December 10, 1824: Went eeling with A.C. (25 doz.)

January 6, 1825: Went Eeling, caught 25 or 30 doz.

January 27, 1825: Went Eeling.

January 17, 1826: Went eeling.

January 27, 1827: Went Eeling.

January 21, 1833: Went eeling.

February 22, 1836: Went eeling at Cape Poge. Ice begins to go out of the Sound. Harbour still closed up.

Although he kept his diary until the day he died in 1857,

³ *Journal of the English Plantation at Plimoth*, Readex Microprint, 1966, p.39. This is a modern reprint of the previously cited work. Squanto was a Wampanoag, a native of Martha's Vineyard, then living near Plymouth. Samoset, who was from Maine and not a Wampanoag, was the first native-American to welcome the Pilgrims and a valuable ally (Eugene A. Stratton, *Plymouth Colony, Ancestry*, Salt Lake City, UT, 1986, p.22)

he does not mention eeling after 1836. It might have been that in his younger (and poorer) years, eels were an important free food for his family. Later, as he became more prosperous (and busier) he stopped going. It could not have been a pleasant way to spend a day, tramping out to Cape Poge in mid-winter. He doesn't tell how he caught them, but it probably was by spearing them as they lay in the grass on the bottom. The sizes of the catches indicate they were plentiful.

Fifteen years later, Rev. Henry Baylies wrote in his journal about the eels swimming up the Mattakeset herring creek on May 4, 1850:

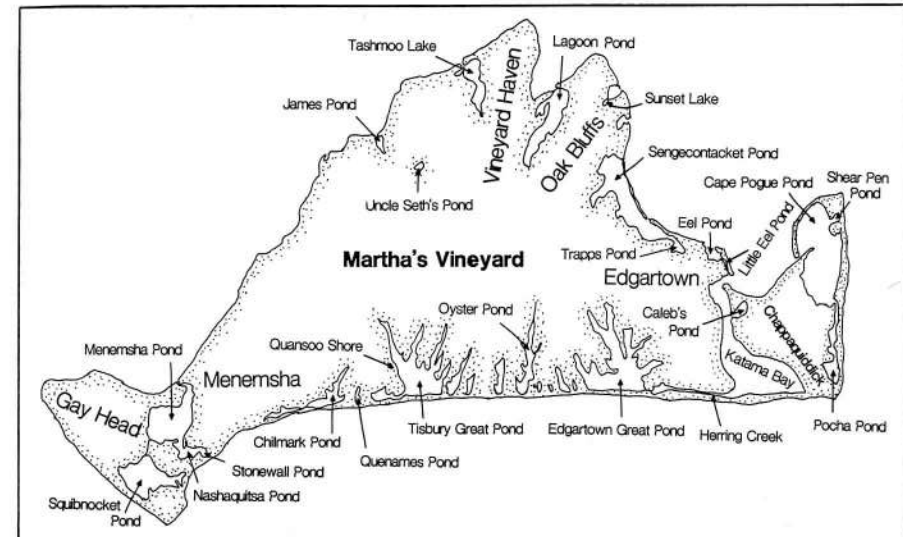
At the Creek, millions of little eels, probably just from the Spawn, attracted our curiosity. They were so thick that we first thought them sea grass closely matted. (See p. 152.)

Eels have been caught in every body of salt and brackish water on Martha's Vineyard from Squibnocket Pond on the west to Chappaquiddick's Cape Poge and Pocha Ponds on the east. Eel Pond in Edgartown was even named for them, the only body of water on the Island carrying an English name for a fish. On the Chilmark side of Tisbury Great Pond, there is a section of land called "Quansoo," an Algonquin name which, according to an article in the *Vineyard Gazette*, Feb. 16, 1941, translates into "place where the long fish is caught."⁴

Eels are found all along the continent's east coast, from Greenland and eastern Canada down to Panama. On the Vineyard, the most important eel fishing areas have been: Tisbury Great Pond (6 feet deep); Edgartown Great Pond (6 feet); and Eel Pond (7 feet). Of lesser importance are Sengekontacket, James, Menemsha, Nashaquitsa, Stonewall, Quenames, Oyster, Trapp's, Little Trapp's and Sheep Shear Ponds, plus Lake Tashmoo, Sunset Lake and Edgartown harbor.

In the 1800s and early 1900s, ponds on the south side of the Vineyard were opened every spring to lower the water

⁴ Charles E. Banks, *History of Martha's Vineyard*, v.I, p.55, says that in Algonquin "Quanaimes, [means] the long fish place."



Ponds must have a temporary or permanent opening to the sea to have an eel population.

level enough so salt hay could be harvested. Small eels, known as elvers, would swim into the ponds through those openings. After two to four weeks, ocean currents and waves closed the openings and the ponds became fresher. Some openings were permanent, like Herring Creek, dug in 1728 to provide an entry for elvers into Edgartown Great Pond (Poole, 1978).

During those years of abundance, eels were caught in pots and fyke nets in the warmer months and with spears in winter. Their abundance, of course, varied from year to year, but intense harvesting by pots in the warm weather, usually meant that fewer eels were available for spearing come winter.

Life Cycle

A review of the life cycle and behavior of eels will help explain the fishing practices. Eels are a catadromous fish, which means that although they spend most of their lives in fresh or brackish water, they spawn in salt water.⁵ In the case of Atlantic eels, they all spawn in the Sargasso Sea, a vast area northeast of the West Indies.

⁵ It is interesting that the females seem to prefer fresher water to live in, while the males tend towards the brackish.

Daniel Manter and His Neshaw Eel Trap on Tisbury Pond



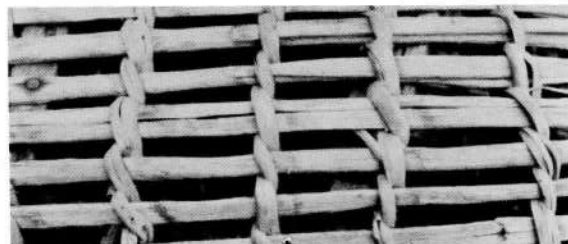
George W. Manter, Daniel's father, with a beach pot, c.1920. It is older and larger than the one his grandson, George, is holding, below. Three generations of Manters have eeled on Tisbury Great Pond.



Artist Will Huntington painted Dan Manter at his beach pot, hoe in hand. At the right are the heart and leader that guide the eels, seeking an outlet to the sea, into the pot. (See p.137.)



George Manter shows how stakes were driven to keep the beach pot from drifting with the current. Below, wooden plug, held in place by a slender stick, closed the pot's narrow end. No metal was used in the pot.



Pine-root lacing holds the slats together. Below, the leader that runs from the heart up onto the beach.



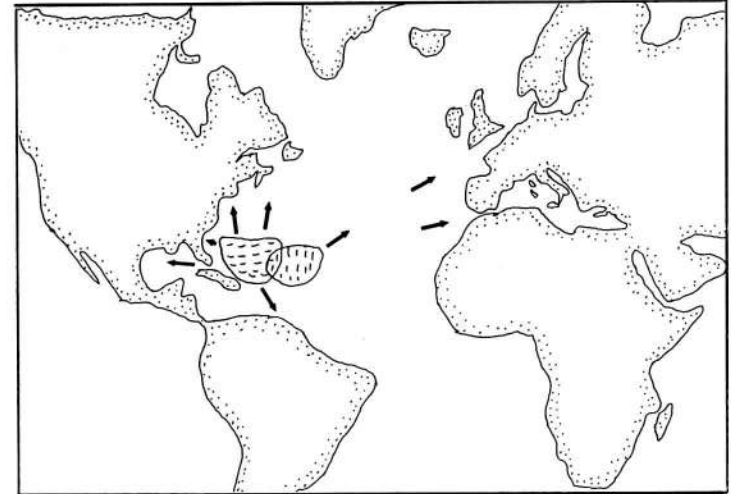
Many years ago, each spring fishermen observed swarms of small eels, about 2 1/2 inches long, leaving the sea and entering the fresh-water streams and ponds. Then in autumn full-grown eels were observed swimming downstream, leaving those ponds and disappearing into the vastness of the ocean (Fahay, 1978). It was a mystery where they went after leaving the ponds.

Solving that mystery involved years of international collaboration and disclosed an amazing life cycle. In 1763, an Englishman catching a small-headed, flat, transparent fish off Holyhead named it "leptocephalus." A century later, an American, T. N. Gill, published his suspicion that the leptocephalus was actually a larval eel. Twenty years after Gill's publication, a Frenchman proved him correct by rearing a leptocephalus to maturity. It turned out to be an eel. In the 1890s, two Italians published the theory that the breeding grounds of the eel was in the abysses of the Mediterranean Sea.

Not satisfied with that explanation, in 1904, a patient Dane, Johannes Schmidt, began to trace the eels' life cycle. He fished the entire European coast, persuading Danish vessels to slow up in mid-ocean and haul their nets for elvers and leptocephali. Correlating his data, he discovered that the farther west in the Atlantic the European eel larvae were caught, the smaller they were. Finally, he located what he believed to be the breeding ground in the Sargasso Sea. Continuing his tracking, he found that the American eel also bred there. The only difference in the life cycles was that, because of the location of the Sargasso Sea, the American eel reached fresh water within one year of hatching, while the European eel travelled for three years before doing so.

This eel pilgrimage remains a major enigma for marine scientists. Every year, hundreds of millions of tiny eels rise toward the surface of the ocean off Bermuda and then, mysteriously, obey some impulse which bids some of them to swim to America, others to Europe.

About a year later, the American eels arrive off the coast



Circles mark the Sargasso Sea, spawning ground for all Atlantic eels. Horizontal hatched area is for American eels; vertical, for European.

of North America and wriggle their way, always by daylight, up rivers and into inlets, including the fresh-water ponds of the Vineyard. They use tidal currents to move upstream, often settling to the bottom during ebb flows. Most spend the rest of their lives (5 to 20 years) in the sluggish fresh or brackish pond water until another mysterious impulse drives them to swim downstream into the ocean and head for the distant Sargasso Sea. It is an impressive odyssey.

While in the fresh or brackish water, they are active only during the warm months. In winter, they lie dormant on the bottom, usually in areas covered by live grass on which to bed. Their food consists of worms, various clams, crustaceans, insects and small fish (Fahay, 1978).

As eels approach maturity, they acquire silvery sides, become flattened, and apparently in preparation for travel in the dark ocean depths their eyes enlarge. Strangely, they cease feeding at this time. Some mature female eels are as long as 36 inches and weigh up to 4 pounds; males are smaller. These are the neshaws, or silver eels, that are ready to spawn. Although closer than for European eels, the American eel spawning area is still far away. Moving only

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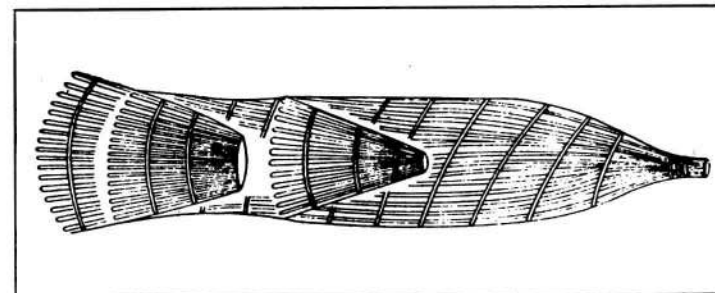
in darkness, the American eels travel for up to two months to reach the Sargasso Sea, where the ocean is about three miles deep.⁶ They probably spawn at depths between 1000 and 1300 feet and die soon after. No adult eels have ever been known to run upstream from the ocean, returning to the fresh-water ponds (Fahay, 1978).

Constructing Eel Pots

The first English settlers may have been taught how to build and use eel pots by the Indians, whose name for an "Eele-pot," Roger Williams wrote, was "Mihtuckquashep."⁷ Pots were commonly used in Europe so they may have brought the skill with them and not have needed help from the natives. Wooden pots and traps are common through history. There is evidence that the eel pot was in use in Massachusetts Colony in the 1630s. In 1634, William Wood described how eels were caught and compared their taste with those caught in England:

There be a great store of salt-water eels, especially in places where grass grows. To take these there be certain eel pots made of osier (strips of wood), which must be baited with a piece of lobster, into which the eels entering cannot return back again. Some take a bushel in a night in this manner, eating as many as they have need of for the present and salt up the rest against winter. These eels be not of so luscious a taste as they be in England, neither are they so aguish, but are both wholesome for the body and delightful for the taste.⁸

The craft of making eel pots has been handed down from generation to generation. Logs were selected that were straight-grained. These were soaked in water so they would split easily along the grain to form slats, which were smoothed with a drawing knife. The pot for catching yellow eels (young through middle age) was about three feet long and barely ten inches in diameter at its widest point. It was formed by attaching the slats to hoops of the same wood, securing them by lacing made from split pine roots, which,



Sketch of a woven eel pot, showing location of its two funnels. This design dates back for centuries, both in Europe and in America.

when well soaked in water, were as pliable as string of similar size.

Long roots of pine trees used for this purpose grew near the surface of the ground and were taken up in sections several feet long. These roots were found where pines grew along the side of ponds. They were not found in up-land stands of the tree. After being soaked, the roots were carefully split with a knife worked gently from end to end. A single root might yield as many as eight strings.

The pot was shaped like a round bottle with the funnel set in what would be the bottom of the bottle, which, of course, was open for the eels to enter. Sometimes, a second funnel was placed inside, behind the first. A door, four inches square, was placed on one side for the insertion of bait. The end of the trap (the narrow neck of the bottle) was closed by a large wooden plug secured by a wooden pin. No metal was used in the pots.

A slightly different and larger pot, called a beach pot, was used to catch silver eels (neshaws) in the fall as they attempted to start their long swim to the Sargasso Sea. Made of similar but longer slats and tied with pine roots in the same way, these pots were 5 to 6 feet long and 18 to 24 inches in diameter. They did not have a door for inserting bait as they were not baited.

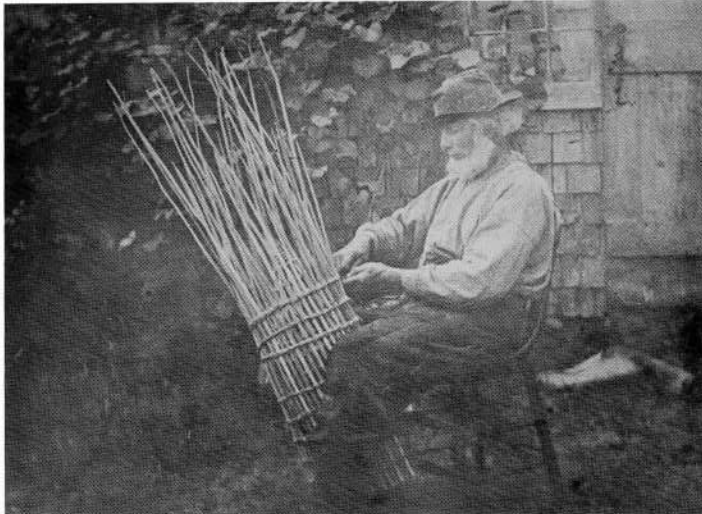
The work of making eel pots was done often in a fisherman's spare hours during winter evenings or stormy days. The time required to gather and prepare the material

⁶ The elvers or young eels travel only in daylight; the mature, only during darkness.

⁷ Williams, p.116.

⁸ Wood, William, *New England Prospect*, printed in *Publications of the Prince Society*, London, England, 1634, vol.1, pp.35-36, 37-40.

Photograph donated by Nancy Hill Payne, 1990.



Capt. Josiah Cleveland of Paul's Point, making a beach pot, c.1900.

was considerable. Assembling them also took a lot of time. Capt. Josiah Cleveland, who ran a coasting schooner in the early 1900s, carried the material for making beach pots aboard his vessel and worked on them when becalmed or when forced to lie at anchor by storms or fog. Some pot makers, Captain Cleveland being one, were considered experts. Others, less skilled, made pots that were not so effective.

Because they are so labor intensive to make, eel pots were very valuable and were stored carefully to preserve them when not in use. First, they were washed to remove any fragments of bait that would attract gnawing rodents. After drying in the sun, they were placed in a dry building for the winter. Before being used the next year, they were soaked in water. Well-made wooden eel pots taken care of this way lasted at least 75 years and were highly prized.⁹

Beginning about 1900, wooden pots (except for the beach pots) were replaced with pots made of wire mesh. Wrapped around three iron rings, the wire-mesh cylinder contained two funnels of cloth or wire netting and a drawstring at the

⁹ Vineyard Gazette, July 25, 1941.

end. The metal was tarred for preservation. They were 36 inches long, 9 inches in diameter. Pots with white-netting funnels caught the most eels, but were a problem because mice often got into them during winter storage and destroyed the cloth netting.

Potting Eels

Except for the mature neshaws, Vineyard eels were potted (caught by pots) in September and October. The neshaws were not attracted to baited traps during those months because they were not eating, as they prepared for their spawning trip to Sargasso Sea. Eels can be caught during May and June, but few fishermen set pots then, probably for marketing reasons. In July and August pots are not set because the water is so warm that the eels die when held in cars, the large submerged boxes where they are held until sold.

Pots were identified, like lobster pots, with cork buoys, composed of three seine buoys tied together and painted white, or, more simply, a block of wood, tied to an eight-foot line. The major potting areas were Tisbury and Edgartown Great Ponds. In Tisbury Great Pond, Eric Cottle and Ben Mayhew worked together and set out 50 pots, using a small outboard boat. They set their pots on the Chilmark side of the pond, while Norman Benson and his son, Franklin, set 36 pots on the West Tisbury side. Franklin also set pots in the Lagoon and James Pond.

Bait was taken with seines about 150 feet long and 6 feet deep. In the early years seining was from a rowboat, but after World War II outboard motors came into general use. Eric and Ben seined for shiners and sand eels in Menemsha Creek. The Bensons seined pogies (menhaden) in Tisbury Great Pond and in Vineyard Haven Harbor. They also caught horseshoe crabs at Lobsterville to use for bait; the crabs were cut into quarters. Various other fish were used, as were blue claw crabs, quahaugs and squid. Each pot took about a quart of bait. Small alewives and large smashed pogies were not good for bait, nor was decaying flesh of any kind.

It was the practice to hold the eels in cars until late fall when the market price was best. Eric and Ben kept their cars in Squibnocket Pond and Norman and Franklin did the same in Uncle Seth's Pond. The holding cars were constructed of slats 1/2 inch apart, close enough to confine the eels yet wide enough to allow water to circulate. While in the cars, the eels were not fed by the fishermen and lost weight if held too long.

Eeling required little capital, but a lot of time and labor. The Bensons drove about 38 miles a day when they were setting pots in Tisbury Great Pond. It took two hours to haul their 32 pots ashore, a boatload (16) at a time. Each pot usually had from 3 to 12 eels, which were placed first in a wash tub and then in a barrel with a hole in it to allow the slime the eels produced to drain off. If this was not done, the slime would coat the eels' gills and they died. Small eels were usually taken home and sold as striped-bass bait. The large ones were put in the submerged car anchored just offshore. Every few days, they would take the eels out of the Great Pond car and haul them to Uncle Seth's Pond on Lambert's Cove Road where they had a larger car. The eels were kept there until sold. The empty pots had been left on the beach to dry. Later in the day, they returned to the pond, baited the pots, and re-set them.¹⁰

In the early 1900s, eel fishermen shipped the eels off-Island in barrels or boxes packed with ice, but later, sometime before World War II, a tank truck started to come from the mainland to buy them when the market was right. Each Vineyard crew would sell as many as 5000 to 7000 pounds of eels in the good years.

Chris Murphy also potted in Tisbury Great Pond and had his keeper car there. His small eels could escape from the car through small holes, while the larger ones, trapped in it, purged food from their guts. Each day, he bailed out the keeper car, removing the previous day's catch and replacing it with his new catch. He then took yesterday's eels to

Photograph courtesy Franklin Benson.



Norman Benson, with wire-mesh pots in Tisbury Great Pond, c.1950.

another car he kept in a fresh-water pond.

In the early 1930s, Edwin Athearn eeled for a couple of years at the head of the Lagoon, off Oklahoma, in Vineyard Haven.¹¹ He was encouraged to do so by Norman Benson, who sold him a dozen pots. He says he'll never forget his first harvest. Soon after Labor Day he set out the twelve pots. Early the next morning, about daylight, he went out to tend them. He couldn't believe it. Hauling each pot was like lifting a bag of cement. Every pot was completely filled with eels. So tightly had they jammed themselves into the pot that some had the imprint of the wire mesh on their bodies. Like the Bensons, he had a keeper car in Seth's Pond. He carried the eels there in an old wash tub on a trailer behind his ancient air-cooled Franklin. His keeper car was about 8 feet square and 4 feet deep. The space between the slats was only a quarter-inch, Edwin explains, "because if an eel can get its tail out, the whole animal will slip through."

He potted them in large numbers until the first hard frost. Then, almost overnight, the bonanza ended. One morning after that first frost, he went out and there wasn't an eel

¹⁰ Peltz, William L., *Saltwater in My Veins, Tales by Capt. Norman G. Benson*, The Vineyard Press, West Tisbury.

¹¹ Also eeling in the Lagoon at the time was an elderly man named Hamilton who lived in an abandoned boat, *Letter B*, that was on the beach in Vineyard Haven. A disabled mariner, he had been a patient in the Marine Hospital until it closed.

in any of his pots. All had gone dormant for the winter and were no longer interested in the bait.

Just before Christmas, Athearn remembers, a dealer from East Boston came with a tank truck to buy the eels the fishermen had been storing in their cars. Edwin doesn't remember exactly how many pounds he sold that first year, but he does recall that he was paid more than \$1000. "A lot of money in the depression," he said. "It was probably the most profitable fishing I ever did." There was only a small demand on the Vineyard for eels. John Conroy's fish market on Union Street in Vineyard Haven would buy some, but not many.¹²

The leading eel potter in Edgartown Great Pond was Manuel Ferreira. Winthrop "Sonny" Norton was another. Both set 50 to 75 pots and kept their eels in cars in the pond. Manuel, along with Joe and Gene Benefit, also set pots in Sengekontacket Pond, while "Wid" Norton and others set theirs in the harbor off North Water Street as well as in Katama Bay, and in Eel, Little Eel and Caleb's Ponds. They held their eels in cars in Sengekontacket Pond, Katama Bay ("great fishing place" in the Algonquin language), and Edgartown Great Pond. Frank L. Norton, who had a camp at Oyster Pond from the 1920s through the 1940s, set out several pots every summer to trap eels for his family.¹³

A good place to seine for bait was off the bathing beach at Chappaquiddick. The fishermen rowed over, often enlisting help hauling in the nets from boys who happened to be there. They got from a half bushel to a bushel of bait a day. Seining was usually done in the afternoons, according to Athearn, who did his in the Vineyard Haven harbor off Owens Park. Pogies, an inch or two long, were what was netted.

¹² At Christmas, eels were in big demand among Italians and other Europeans in Boston. Today, the domestic market is small, but the European market continues strong. Maurice Bosse, a Virginia seafood wholesaler, ships "as much as 35,000 pounds of [live] eels a week by air to Europe . . . in waxed cardboard boxes." (NYTimes, Sunday Magazine, Nov. 27, 1994)

¹³ This is the pond on the shore of which Pres. Bill Clinton and family vacationed in 1993 and 1994.



A night's catch of eels, being emptied from the pot by Capt. Benson.

Neshaw Eels

Since neshaw (silver) eels were not attracted by baited pots in September and October, as they were not eating during this period, a different method was needed to catch them. A larger pot, called a beach pot, was set on the bottom along the beach to snare them as they sought an outlet to the sea to begin their long swim to the Sargasso. These beach pots were always made of wooden slats, never of iron-wire mesh. It is believed that the Indians taught Vineyarders how to catch these neshaw.¹⁴

The neshaw are silver-colored, as their alternate name indicates, and larger than yellow eels, being 20 to 36 inches

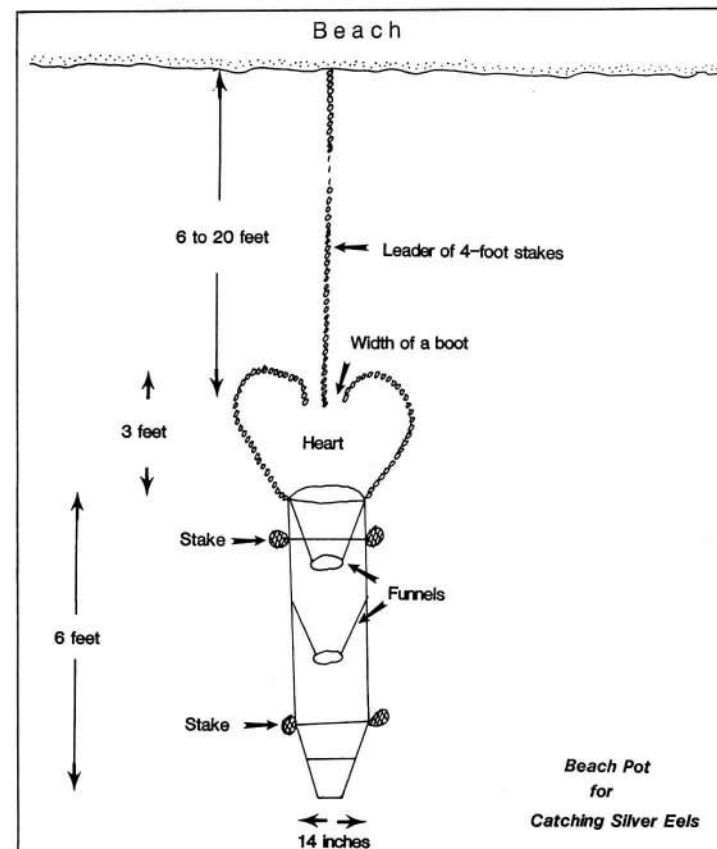
¹⁴ Catching neshaw (silver) eels in beach pots along the pond side of barrier beaches may have been unique to the Vineyard. Telephone calls to informed persons in Rhode Island and Nantucket revealed that such a method was not practiced in either place. Nevertheless, a similar wooden pot has been and still is used in Europe to catch eels (Tesch, 1977)

long and weighing 1 to 4 pounds. In the fall, the neshaws were able to leave those Island ponds that were permanently open to the ocean. But in Chilmark, Tisbury Great and Oyster Ponds their exit was blocked by the barrier beach, the openings in which had been closed by tidal currents. If not caught either by pots or spears, the eels had to remain in the ponds all winter, presumably leaving in spring when the towns re-opened them to the ocean. Many may have died before they could spawn because of the disruption of their natural life cycle.

Not every fisherman was allowed to set a beach pot, only those with shore rights. The towns gave out permits. In the early 1900s, the names of the various places suitable for setting beach pots were written on slips of paper. The slips were placed in a hat and each eligible man drew one, thus getting his location. In this manner, the division was made as fair as possible.

Because it was heavy work, the fishermen worked in pairs installing and tending the large beach pots. In setting them, the fishermen used hoes to shape a trench about 10 or 20 feet off the beach. The trench was made large enough to bury part of the pot in the sand, leaving a half to two-thirds of its diameter above it. Heavy stakes were driven criss-cross over the pot at each end to hold it (see drawing, opp.). The pot's heart, fastened to the mouth, and leader, which led to the beach, then were installed. These were light, flexible fences, formed of hard pine sticks, three to five feet long and the diameter of a man's finger, fastened together by ropes twisted around them. The sticks were no more than half to three-quarters inch apart and their ends were sharpened so the fence could be driven into the bottom about a foot. The end of the leader was set on the beach to keep the eels from swimming around it. When the water level in the closed ponds rose in the fall, the leaders had to be lengthened to continue to be effective. Two men could install one or two beach pots, with hearts and leaders, in a day.

When their instinct told them it was spawning time, the



Beach-pot setup guides neshaws, seeking opening to the sea, into pot.

neshaws swam back and forth in a frenzy along the barrier beaches, seeking an opening to the sea. In most ponds, the openings had closed and no exit was available. Occasionally, during a southerly storm that washed the ocean over the beach, they were able to slither across the wet sand into open water. During such times, fishermen caught many by hand or with spears, sometimes getting enough to fill a barrel in a night.

John Bassett and John Hilton set beach pots in Chilmark Pond. Norman and Franklin Benson, George and Carl Magneson and Daniel Manter set them in Tisbury Great Pond. Sonny Norton set them in Oyster Pond from the

1920s through the 1940s. Each usually set 15 or 20 beach pots, some as many as 30.

Because the newshaw eels ran only at night (presumably to avoid predation by water fowl), the fishermen liked to lift their pots at dawn. If that was not possible, they were lifted after the fishermen finished their regular day jobs. A small kerosene lantern was used to light the area. Faint though the light was, it was a vast improvement over the smoking pine knots and the candle-burning tin lanterns that had preceded it.¹⁵

Most neshaws were caught within a two-week period, the time their instinct moved them. Warm rainy nights were best; moonlit nights were poor, as they preferred darkness. When eeling was good, each pot would catch 25 to 100 pounds of neshaws; some pots would be filled to capacity. To remove the eels, the pot was hauled out of the water, the wooden plug pulled from its offshore end and the catch dumped into a fine mesh bag.

Each pot was then re-set, the trench having been hoed again so the pot could be seated. The eels were taken to fresh-water ponds and stored in cars. Some fishermen had tried to keep them in salt-water ponds, but the eels died when the first ice formed on the ponds. In the 1940s and 1950s, an average crew caught 1500 to 2000 pounds.

Beach pots were occasionally lost when a southerly storm would blow layers of beach sand over them, forcing the fishermen to abandon them. By the end of the season, some beach pots might be embedded in ice and were also abandoned. Once it was cold enough to form ice, no eels could be potted as they went to the bottom to bed.

In those ponds that remained permanently open, neshaw eels leaving for the Sargasso Sea were caught in fyke nets. From the 1920s through the 1940s, Franklin Benson and his father, Norman, set a fyke at Lambert's Cove at the mouth of James Pond and got about 400 pounds of eels every fall. In the same period, Henry Smith set two fykes for neshaws in the southeast corner of Edgartown Great Pond

where it emptied into the Herring Creek. The eels went into the fykes only at night and did not run when the moon was full. Henry caught as many as two or three barrels of neshaws each night with his two fykes. His best night ever was 38 barrels. Another silver-eel fisherman was David Pease who set a fyke every fall at Dike Bridge at the entrance to Pocha Pond. David also set 25 to 40 eel pots for yellow eels.

The only fisherman who has set neshaw pots in recent years is Chris Murphy of Chilmark. In both regular and neshaw (beach) pots, he was landing 3000 to 5000 pounds of eels a year until 10 years ago. Also, Cooper Gilkes and Louis Hathaway in Edgartown and others were setting large strings of regular pots for smaller eels. But in the past decade, as eels have become scarce, little, if any, potting had been done except for bait.

Spearing Eels

Another popular way to catch eels was by spearing in winter, after bay scalloping ended and the ponds froze. Fishermen chopped through the ice, making holes slightly more than a foot across to drop their spears through.

There was an element of fun and sport in spearing and that helped make it attractive despite the discomfort of standing for hours on ice in freezing temperatures. Another incentive was that many Vineyarders liked to eat fresh eels. Spearing was rarely a commercial endeavor as rarely were enough caught to make it worth the time and effort. Also, spearing damaged the eels, making it difficult to sell them. However, when catches were large, eels were shipped off-Island. In February 1929, the *Gazette* said that Sylvester Luce, W. Henry Luce, Raymond Searle and Wilbur Pease "speared 576 pounds of eels on Great Pond. . . fishing has continued good each day since, and the fish sell at a good price." A total of 1600 pounds was taken, with as many as 30 men at a time eeling on the ice at Great Pond, the paper reported.

Ever since European settlers introduced iron to the Vineyard, men have fashioned metal eel spears. Before that, Indians made spears of bone and wood. As in every craft,

¹⁵ *Vineyard Gazette*, Nov. 14, 1931.

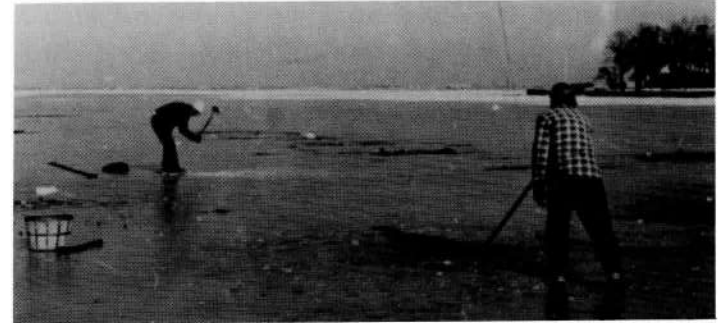
there always have been some craftsmen whose forged-iron spear heads were prized above all others. The iron eel spear consists of a spatula-shaped center prong with three tines on either side, each tine having a long barb on its inner edge. The slender tines are about 8 inches long, fanning out at the tips to an 8-inch width. The heavier center tine takes the brunt of the strain when the spear strikes the bottom where sticks and rocks might break the more fragile barbed tines. Through most of the first half of the 1900s, most Island eel spears were made by Orin Norton in his blacksmith shop in Edgartown.

Eels bed down each winter in about the same places so knowledgeable fishermen did not spend much time searching for locations. For their beds, eels prefer live eel grass (which explains the name), avoiding dead grass and mud smelling of hydrogen sulfide. Bedding in large groups as they do, they are easy targets for fishermen who know where they are. Spearing is done by thrusting the spear head into the bottom systematically, in ever-decreasing circles.

The spear point was mounted on a long, slender pole that, in the early years, fishermen had to find in the woods and trim by hand. There was no mill that would cut one to specifications. The fisherman also needed a keg or tub with a lid because there are other predators who like eels. Many an eeler has left his catch on the ice only to find that hungry gulls have slipped up noiselessly to rob him of his catch. A covered tub, often a keg, was essential. A small hole in the cover allowed him to drop his catch safely inside. This was not difficult because the dormant eel is sluggish and easy to handle. Not all eelers used such kegs, some simply put them in burlap bags.

A sled, also built at home, was used to carry the keg, the axe and the eeler's lunch. It was not unusual for a man to walk many miles to the pond, pulling his loaded sled and carrying the spear, its end dragging on the ground behind him.

When the ice was extremely thick, after a long, cold spell, only true hunger or a strong desire for fresh eel would drive



Spearing the dormant eels through the ice is hard on the back.

the fishermen to go on the ice to spear eels. Thinner ice, meaning about three inches thick, made it more attractive; five or six inches of ice required too much chopping. The holes were made as small as possible to minimize the work. The chips of ice were never lifted out, but were thrust under the ice, out of the way. That left no ice chips on the surface to freeze hard and over which someone might stumble.

No form of fishing presented a greater gamble than spearing eels. The skill was mostly in location selection. The spearer simply jabbed; aiming was out of the question. If the eels were plentiful under his hole, he was in luck. If they were scattered or if he was not directly over a bed, he would jab for some time before finding any. He may, indeed, never find any, but before leaving the hole he would jab every square foot of bottom within a circle twenty or more feet in diameter.

It was tiring work, interrupted only when an eel was speared, to lift and plunge a spear into the bottom, hour after hour. When raised out of the water, the eel was shaken off the spear point and with his wet, cold hands, the fisherman bagged or tubbed it.¹⁶

Some fishermen speared eels from a boat, but most preferred to do it on the ice, where they could select the spot better and remain over a bed with greater certainty. One exception was Tommy Walker Pease of Edgartown, who did not like spearing on ice "because other fishermen

¹⁶ Gazette, Jan. 24, 1964.

would cut holes and spear all round you."

In the 1920s and 1930s, many fishermen were spearing eels in Island ponds, occasionally getting a stray winter flounder as well. Ten to fifteen Gay Headers, three or four in any one day, speared in Long Point Cove off Menemsha Pond. Each might get 10 to 12 dozen a day when eels were abundant. A dozen or so Menemsha fishermen speared eels in Nashaquitsa and Stonewall Ponds. In James Pond, someone once got two barrels of eels from a single hole at a spot where spring water was coming through the mud. A few fishermen speared in Tisbury Great Pond. Ham Luce and a few others from Oak Bluffs speared in the head of Lagoon Pond and in Sengekontacket Pond. In Edgartown, Sam Jackson, Hiram (Hy) Jackson, Lowell and Milton Jeffers, Cyrus Norton, Bill Pease, Herb Simpson, Stanley Smith and others speared eels in Sengekontacket, Edgartown Great Pond and Eel Pond. In the early 1900s, Edgartown Great Pond was considered a good location. On a good day, fishermen got about two dozen eels each.

Until Eel Pond was opened wide on its north side in about 1943, it was good eeling. Milton and Lowell Jeffers once got 150 eels there in a day. Shear Pen Cove and Caleb's Pond, both on Chappaquiddick, also were good spearing spots. Lawrence Jeffers and his son, Milton, and Henry and Jim Jones speared eels there. Milton remembers once getting 52 eels from one hole in Caleb's Pond.

But spearing eels was not a money-making activity. One year, Lawrence shipped a catch of 62 pounds of eels to Fulton Market, New York. They brought 10 cents a pound, the freight bill was \$6 and so he got a check for 20 cents for his trouble.

Eeling in Recent Years

After World War II, only 8 to 10 men were setting eel pots and the number who speared them in winter was no greater.¹⁷ More recently, eeling has virtually disappeared. There are few eels to catch. Spearing has been abandoned. The only potting done is for eels used as striped-bass bait.

¹⁷ Gazette, Feb. 16, 1941.

This decline is not limited to the Island, it has occurred all over the state. In 1928, Massachusetts fishermen landed 365,132 pounds of eels, 65,450 pounds of which (18 percent) were from Dukes County. By 1974, Massachusetts fishermen landed only half as many, 176,000 pounds, and in 1992, only a tenth, 35,798 pounds.

We can only speculate why eels have become scarcer. It may be a long-term natural cycle. Or habitats may have become degraded. Heavy predation and fishing may be the causes. It isn't totally degradation of habitats. On the Vineyard, while some habitats, such as Eel Pond, may have been degraded, others have not. Today, the opening to Eel Pond is so wide that it is more a cove than a pond. Before 1943, its opening was only a few yards wide, ideal for eels. Herring Creek, up which eels once swam into Edgartown Great Pond, is now closed. But most of the other areas where eels were found seem unaltered.

On the mainland, much eel habitat has been degraded as people have built along the shores of streams, ponds and lakes. Also, acid rain covers much of the eel range. Cormorants, voracious fish eaters, have become abundant on Vineyard ponds, both salt and fresh. The white-perch population, like the eel, has also declined sharply. Some naturalists blame the decline on cormorant predation.

So it isn't clear what caused the decline of the eel fishery. Here on the Vineyard, it certainly wasn't caused by over-fishing. Perhaps it is a natural cycle that will eventually bottom out and the eels will return to the numbers they once had. In the meantime, those Vineyarders, and there are many, who love to eat eels can only wait and hope.

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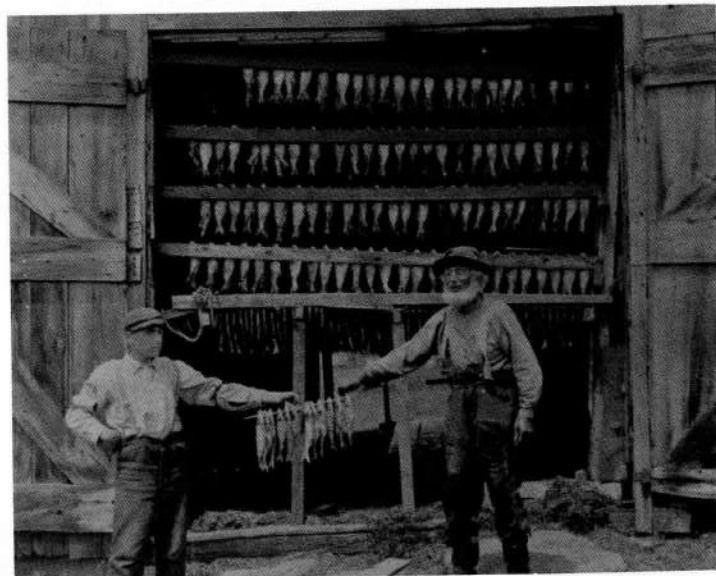
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Capt. Cleveland, right, with helper, hangs a winter's supply of fish (including eels) in his barn on Paul's Point, Lambert's Cove, c.1900.

Documents

A Running Account Of Matter & Things

by Rev. HENRY BAYLIES

It's fashionable these days to decry the state of education. We are being told that children are learning nothing and that we should return to those good old days of the three R's — and a fear of God. Were those really "good old days"?

Certainly not in 1850 at the time Henry Baylies, our diarist, was headmaster of the Dukes County Academy in West Tisbury. It was, at the time, the only "high" school on the Island. The Thaxter Academy in Edgartown had closed, replaced by the Davis Academy, which had also closed, presumably due to lack of pupils. Edgartown was only this year, 1850, planning to open its first public high school, as we shall see.

Only Henry's West Tisbury academy was providing education beyond grammar school on the Island. Although Headmaster Baylies is never specific, we believe that there were only three teachers: two young women, plus himself. There were about 25 pupils.

At the time of this installment, Henry has just returned from the Methodist convention in Providence. He seems more enamored of his interrupted ministerial career than of education. Although he does not have a church at the time, he took an active part in the convention. It is clear that teaching is only an unimportant interruption in his life's work of saving souls. He is on temporary leave from the ministry because a throat ailment prevents him from preaching for more than a few minutes at a time. Strangely, that does not interfere with teaching, which, it would seem, requires a greater use of his voice.

His sick wife, Harriette, is still at her parents' home in Providence. He is busy getting their newly rented room in the Asa Johnson boarding house ready for her return. The installment opens with a touching account of the return of Asa Johnson's son, a mariner who had been shipwrecked. The house is in the center of West Tisbury, within view from the Academy, making it possible for him to watch Harriette get out of the carriage of Asa Johnson, who had picked her up at the steamer. Henry couldn't meet her because of his school duties. The young girls in school thought it unromantic that he didn't rush home immediately. It is obvious that Henry inspired the girls more than the boys in his school.

Thursday, April 18, 1850. Another cold wintry day, but moderated somewhat toward evening. My school is progressing without anything remarkable occurring. I enjoy the season of prayer with the school very much. May these prayers be answered.

As I was about to engage in Secret prayer this morning, Sister Davis' little girl, 5 yrs. old, came in as she frequently does. I asked her if she would kneel with me while I prayed. She did so, but I could not make any serious impression on her mind. I asked her to pray, i.e., say her prayers, but she refused. Whenever I have attempted to converse with her on the subject of Religion she always manages to turn the subject.¹

Some of the [Johnson] family went to H. Hole today, expecting to meet Miles, the eldest son of Bro. & Sister

¹ Five-year-old Adeline lived in the Asa Johnson boarding house with her parents, Shubael and Matilda Davis. Shubael was a cooper. There were ten persons living in the house.

Johnson, who has been absent from home about 5 years. They returned disappointed, but just as I sat down to Tea, he came in lead [*sic*] by his sister who saw him in the street.

I have heard of scenes of meeting after long separation in which feelings could only be expressed by loud cries, etc., but I never before witnessed one. Sister Johnson, who is naturally very still, rather noted for her quiet, uttered her overwhelming joy in loud shrieks of laughter & clapping her hands while the other members of the family expressed their emotions variously. Bro. J. was called in, only shook hands with his late returning son & turned away apparently to restrain his tears.

As for myself, I hardly knew whether to laugh or weep — had I not been seated at the table I should have left the room.

This son has suffered greatly at sea & by shipwreck on a desert island, but the God of the Sailor has preserved him & returned him safely. My mind at once revolved the changes which have taken place within that long period.²

My large box of Books, etc., arrived about 6 o'clock & in 3 hours I had it unpacked, my bookcase put together & my books arranged. It is my folly to do whatever I undertake as if there was only the present hour & consequently suffer for it.

Tired & sleepy I must rest, comfort myself in oblivion. Where is Hattie dear? How I would rejoice to see her. Heaven protect & bless her.

[He does not write in his diary for

² Son Miles was 33 years old. The *Gazette* published nothing about his return from being shipwrecked on a deserted island. It reported little about happenings outside Edgartown.

several days, during a weekend trip to Edgartown.]

Monday, April 22, 1850. Friday P.M. after school I mounted my hired horse & rode to Edgartown to visit my dear parents. I was happy to find them in usual health as are all my friends. In the evening called with mother upon Rev. Bro. Titus, the new preacher with whom I have for some time enjoyed a very pleasing acquaintance. Bro. T.'s family consists of wife, two children & mother. Likewise called on Uncle Joseph Mayhew's, where I found quite a consendom.³

Saturday was spent variously. Sat. even. attended prayer meeting in Vestry. Nothing especial occurred. Bro. Titus preached two excellent discourses on Sabbath: A.M. from "Put in thy Strength O Tyron [?];" P.M. from "As the Eagle _____[?] up her nest fluttereth," etc. The evening prayer meeting was as usual fully attended & was very interesting. I took part in the exercises. I need a great deal of grace to keep me from pride while I hear so many flattering commendations of me & my performances. Lord, make & keep me humble. Satan, by his suggestions, is a greater enemy to me than these adulatory remarks of friends prove. I often console myself, mortify pride & disappoint the Devil by repeating to myself the remark of another, "I know more evil of myself than others know good of me."

I was spoken to on Saturday by J.T. Pease, Esq., to take the new High School about to be opened.⁴ I

³ An unfamiliar expression. Perhaps he is saying that his uncle's family also liked the new minister, Brother Titus.

⁴ Just a month later, Henry did become the first

understand considerable anxiety is expressed by many that I take it. I shall consult duty & do what seems best. Perhaps they may yet choose another teacher, as I am a boy of their own raising — "A prophet, etc."

This (Monday) morning I made my first purchase of my father. For more than twenty seven years my dear father has kindly & cheerfully supplied my every want & although I have often, since majority, offered to pay for articles taken from the store, he has uniformly refused it. Now I am receiving a larger income than he is & am not in debt while he is actually in debt for or to the amount of cost of my education. I am now worth \$100, of which \$90 is on note of Father & I'll pay for my purchases. I never paid for a purchase with so much pleasure as for this of Father of a bottle of "Holman's Nature's Good Restorative." This is an epoch when I am able to pay for all the necessities, even of life. The Lord's Shepherd shall _____[?].⁵

I wrote to dearest Hattie last evening — letter mailed at E. this morning. I am disappointed in not receiving one from her this morning. The irregularity of the Steamer's the cause, doubtless.

At little past 7 this morning I again mounted the old white horse & rode to this place [West Tisbury] in about

principal of the Edgartown Higher Grammar School in the South School building at School and High Streets. The building was new and housed lower grades as well. His was the first public "high" school on the Island. The Dukes County Academy was closed for a while after Henry went to Edgartown, as we shall see.

⁵ Father Baylies, though remembered as builder and architect of churches, had a modest income from his general store on Main Street, Edgartown. The first "necessity" Henry paid for was a patent medicine.

1 1/4 hours. I never rode as far before [on] horseback, yet do not suffer from it. Was trifle lame Sat., but have not felt it at all today.

School still remains small. Have this evening been reviewing some of the former days, which is quite different, solving some knotty sentences in Greek.

Quite a change in Bro. Johnson on Friday morning & since. He came out of his glooms at once & is now quite on the other extreme. His is a strange case. He is talking confidently of going to California.⁶

Thursday, April 25, 1850. Since Monday little has occurred requiring especial note. The monotonous routine of the School room affords little incident. I ~~have~~ [crossed out] held School [religious] meetings on Tuesday and Thursday evening immediately at the close of the afternoon Session. There is evidently some seriousness, but much less than last term. There are a few very gay girls whose influence I fear is not beneficial. 'Less there appeared great relevance to engage in the religious exercises I doubted the expediency of appointing any more meetings, but on putting it to vote nearly all voted a request to have them continued.

Rec'd a letter from my dear wife on Tuesday after a long delay of the mail. I am happy to know she is gradually improving. I have today engaged Capt. Mayhew's carriage to bring her up from the boat on Saturday. The Lord preserve her, restore her & return her to — [?] for his glory. I feel very lonely without Hattie, my darling Hattie.

⁶ Meaning, of course, to join the Gold Rush. He seems not to have gone.

Have not felt very well for a day or two, took some cold; ate hulled corn & milk, all which disarranged me. After school thought to sweat off some of my bad feelings & Sawed and planed out a mineral case, my old one being too small. Succeeded very well.

My reading at present is very small as most of my time has been employed in arranging & rearranging books, minerals, etc., & in Studying some Greek, some Latin & other studies connected with my school. Some evenings I have had company or have been to meetings. Last Evening listened to a discussion which was very good from a young man who is totally blind. I was much astonished at his production in which much scripture & several remarks from the ancients & references were quoted very accurately. I expected little, for beside being blind his personal appearance was rather idiotic.

Only one day more and the Lord willing my lovely & much loved darling little wife will be in my arms! I must retire — 'tis after 10. I am quite fatigued.

Saturday 27 April 1850. A spring-like day. A fine drizzly rain betokened an unpleasant day & gave rise to many fears that my anticipated meeting with dearest Hattie must be longer deferred. Eager to meet her, I procured my engaged horse & rode down to Holmes Hole, first having completed the arrangement of my minerals in their case & put my room in order. Stopped at Bro. Talbot's & where, as usual, I was hospitably entertained. I anxiously awaited the Boat. She came & no Hattie! No wife! I felt much disappointed for the moment, but

remembered I had promised before starting if she did not come I would give it all up knowing it would be for the best. I stopped at the P. Office thinking perhaps she might have written, according to conditional directions. Just as I stepped into the office, Mr. Bradley Jr., took out a letter for me, which I hastily read. "Sewall will accompany me part of the way on my return to W. Tisbury next Tuesday." With this, not one word of explanation why the delay. Returning to W. Tisbury, the mail brought me a letter written last Tuesday assigning the reason. So much for irregularity or infrequency of mail communication.⁷

I am very much rejoiced to learn my "darling little wife" is very much improved in health so that last Sab. morning she attended church. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Well, Tuesday will soon be here & Hattie, I hope, with it.

Read this P.M., Gov. Seward's speech on "California Union and Freedom" delivered in the Senate of the U.S. March 11, 1850. It is a noble, independent exposition of Northern sentiment upon these topics. This speech has placed Gov. S. in no unviable [?] position for the Presidency of the same States whose Union & Freedom he has so ably advocated & defended. "God speed the right!"⁸

⁷ The Holmes Hole postoffice was at Church and Main Streets in the home of Postmaster George Dunham. Bradley must have worked there at the time.

⁸ William H. Seward, former Governor of N.Y. and now Senator, was the strongest anti-slavery Whig at the time. Ten years later, he lost the 1860 presidential nomination to Lincoln, who, when elected, named him Secretary of State. This is Henry's first mention of the national crisis that was bringing on the Civil War.

After tea, called at Mrs. Smith's & Mrs. Allen's. Prayer & conference meeting this evening. Rev. Mr. Goodnow [Goodenow], Cong. preacher from Edgartown, attended & lead [sic] the exercises. I engaged, by request, in prayers. Did not enjoy much freedom — unction.⁹ In speaking, the Spirit gave me much enlargement & the word seemed to have effect. This people seem to require an Earthquake to awaketh & Thunder & Lightning to keep them awake! The Lord bless them abundantly with the outpouring of his gracious Spirit. Saturday evening — the Sabbath is upon me.

"So may my heart in time be found
Like David's harp of solemn
sound."

Sabbath, April 28, 1850. This day like yesterday has been quite springlike with a fine mist much of the time. The Lord has blessed me today with some manifestations of favor. This has not, I trust, been a lost day with my soul. The morning devotions in private & with the family were attended with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

I walked over to the North Baptist Church at what is sometimes called Middletown this morning & heard a Mr. Dennison of Groton, Conn. I suspect he is looking for a call. His discussion upon "lean not to thine own understanding, etc.," was was [sic] hardly of medium quality. There was great lack of digestion & arrangement & point. Yet his remarks might do good, much good, for he is evidently a good man. I sincerely pray that the

⁹ Uction had not yet come to mean, as it does today, a certain pretense of righteousness. Here, it means true spiritual fervor, something he suggests the congregation lacked.

preachers who may come to this part of the Island may be of the right stamp — such are much needed.

The Baptist church is a very neat & for the location rather an elegant building [crossed out] edifice.¹⁰ During intermission I walked back as far as the Cong. Chu. Rec'd a very kind invitation to dine with Mr. Luce in company with Mr. Dennison & Mr. Hillman Jr. of Brown University but thought best to refuse & hasten on.

Service this P.M. did not commence till after 1 o'clock so that the services of the day were protracted much beyond the usual time. This has made the day appear rather more like Sabbath than any day since I came to W.T.

Rev. Mr. Goodnow of Edgartown preached a very fine discussion from "Behold the Lamb of God, etc." It however lacked unction. Have been reading a portion of Allen & Wise's "Methodism in Earnest," consisting of compilations from Coughy's letters, etc. I have no very great objections to any part of the work I have read & to the most none, but I have a great objection to the name. It should have been more properly "Coughy in Earnest." The successes of Mr. Coughy are stuck [?] the mind with peculiar emotions. If such success is the legitimate fruit of faithful ministerial labor then the Christian ministry are fit subjects of condemnation — of the Malediction of Angels, Men & Deity. There was but one Luther, one Wesley, etc., and perhaps there is but one

¹⁰ The North Tisbury Baptist church. The building, which he admired, was taken down many years later by Erfurt Burt, hauled to Vineyard Haven, where it became the main building of Burt's (now Maciel's) Boatyard.

Coughey. Especial means are required to especial ends & perhaps this is one of God's appointments. The Lord bless Bro. C. My dearest Hattie was converted during his labors at Chestnut St., Prov., a year [ago] last winter. To him, under God, I shall be eternally obliged.¹¹

By request I attended the Prayer Meeting at the School house this eve & conducted the exercises. The Lord assisted me graciously, especially in speaking to the young persons present. There was great solemnity upon all minds. Those who spoke & prayed seemed to feel intensely for the salvation of those present. At the close of the services, according to previous announcement, I called upon such as "dare do right" & were resolved to try to go to Heaven to rise. Two young women — one, Miss Jane Mingo, one of my pupils last Term, & the other, Miss Love P. Smith, my assistant last Term, arose.¹² I have seldom felt the solemnity I felt at that hour. I was not able to talk as much as I desired by reason of the local difficulty in my throat.

Lately more than usual my throat has troubled me so that I can scarcely sing a single verse or speak five minutes without suffering in consequence. Talk tonight tired my lungs very much, especially across the top of my lungs. Nothing however worthy of the notice

¹¹ Who was Coughey? A well-known evangelist?

¹² Jane Mingo is listed in the 1850 Census as Black, age 20, born in Westport, Mass. She has been mentioned earlier by Henry, being a servant in the home of Mrs. Hannah Look, West Tisbury mill owner. She died in 1861 in the Look home. Love P. Smith, 20, daughter of Gilbert Smith of Edgartown, taught at the Academy and was acting principal when Henry was away.

I give it, if I can save souls by the Sacrifice of my body — My body for Souls!

"Now I lay me down to sleep

I pray the Lord my soul to Keep
And if I should die before I wake
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

Monday, April 29, 1850. The morning brought with it a violent storm of rain & wind. Having attended to devotions I commenced writing a letter to Mrs. Mark S. Palmer, lately cousin Rebecca P. Wilcox. During the meeting last evening, my recollection of former days especially of the last days of my dear Hannah were very pungent. I spoke of them & among other things spoke of this young lady, thoughtless & gay, having lived in folly & sin, now dieing [*sic*] of consumption. I thought last evening I would write to her. During the night I dreamed of her — her thoughtlessness of Religion & her necessity of a preparation to die. I likewise dreamed of beloved Hannah, seemed to see her & throw my arms around her as she sat by my side. The peculiar emotions of that moment are quite inexpressible. I have had this once or twice before in dreams.¹³

So strongly was my mind impressed that I awoke — my Hannah was not there — But I was speaking about Rebecca. I wrote her a letter of four pages, transcribed it & mailed it this evening. May the Holy Spirit attend that faithful message & seal it to her conversion.

In consequence of the severe storm I had no school. The academy was opened however at the time, AM and PM, the fire made, bell rung, etc., but

¹³ The "young lady, thoughtless and gay," was the cousin of the late Hannah, Henry's first wife.

no pupils came save one living close by. I however heard the recitations of Mr. Chase at my room in Greek & Latin. Thus I have gained a day. The clouds broke away during the PM & the Sun shown out brightly, adding fresh greenness to the springing grass. It seems we can almost see the grass grow.

Had some conversation with Mr. Chase, [about] the peculiar doctrines of Calvinists.¹⁴ Last evening he said however I presented my peculiar views more strongly. I did not understand to what he referred. He replied I usually made great references to the influence of the Spirit & dwelt upon this point emphatically — this was the point. If I did not last night, Lord forgive me for I never would lose sight of the Holy Spirit without which I can do nothing.

I was somewhat surprized at his views of Arminianism & felt called upon especially by his first remark to show my colours. I took the old Cambridge Platform, 150 years old, & read him the doctrines of his church & expressed to him the points of difference. I like such discussions very much as exercises in argumentation, but exceedingly dislike them when considered in their moral & spiritual bearing. Calvinists nowadays do not know what they believe or what anybody else believes.

Made a call or two after ten & mailed a letter to Rand of the *Herald*.¹⁵ [It is] Monday night & tomorrow, if the Lord spares me, is Tuesday and I hope most anxiously to

¹⁴ Rev. Ebenezer Chase was the West Tisbury Congregational minister. His son, Edward, 15, was the Master Chase, a student, whose recitations Henry had heard earlier in the day.

¹⁵ No doubt, *Zion's Herald*, the Methodist publication.

see my "darling little wife, Hattie M. Baylies." I don't know but I love her, dear girl, too much. She is an extraordinary woman, as near perfection as anybody I know of on earth. As well as I love her I believe I hold her at the all-wise disposal of my Heavenly Father. Twice have I been called to give her up — entirely to give her up for this world & the Lord gave me grace to say "not my will but thine be done," & then that same Father kindly gave her back to me. Blessed be His name. How holy & how humble, how obedient ought I to be, who receive such great mercies. May our lives long be spared to each other if it shall be best.

Thursday, May 2, 1850. So busy have I been since my last entry that I have been quite neglectful of my diary.¹⁶ My dear wife, "little Hattie Baylies," arrived in the Boat on Tuesday & through the favor of Bro. Johnson was soon in the pleasant village of West Tisbury. Being detained by the duties of my school, I could not ~~embrace~~ [crossed out] see her till nearly two hours after her arrival. I acknowledge I ~~was~~ [crossed out] felt of little service in the school room after I saw her step out at the door. My attention was perfectly distracted. I however stayed & concluded the exercises at the normal hour & to the no small disappointment of some of the young ladies walked home very leisurely.

To embrace my dear wife after so long an absence in apparently improved health gave me joy, the record of which is among the heart's

¹⁶ There has been a gap in his journal.

most happy recollections. The journey of about 90 miles was rather fatiguing & exhausting, which together with want of sleep on the night of her return caused her to feel quite unwell yesterday. Indeed she had towards night & during the evening a severe sick headache. I administered medicine which soon relieved her & she slept well last night. Today she has felt the effects of the journey, but towards evening was feeling very well after a walk down to the mill brook.¹⁷

I think perhaps her health is improved from what it has been since our marriage, yet I fear she will not be able to remain in the bracing atmosphere of the Island. She has felt increased pain in her lungs since her return & yesterday raised some blood. The Lord must direct, for I know not what course to pursue at any time unless He says this is the way, walk ye in it. Oh, 'tis happiness to feel one's dependence solely upon Jehovah for strength, for direction, for all things. He has directed, He still directs & He will direct. "Glory, honor, praise & power be with His name forever."¹⁸

Have been quite busy in assisting Hattie pack away her goods, etc., of which she has a super abundance. Her parents have abundantly furnished her with whatever is or may be necessary or convenient & more. She speaks of the great anxiety of her parents to have her remain with them to the middle of May, etc., etc., all which shows a great change of feeling toward her. The

course she took was right — her parents now see she was right & all things work together for good to her.¹⁹

Wednesday, May 8, 1850. Nothing of notable interest has occurred since my last entry, yet for the sake of keeping up with time I must briefly number the days & the deeds. Friday last, immediately on close of school, procured Mr. H. Look's Horse & Capt. James Mayhew's Carryall & took Hattie & Velina B. Pease & went to Edgartown. The travelling (wheeling) was very hard & sympathy with the poor horse rendered H. quite weary long before her arrival at E. Was very sad at finding dear Mother sick on her bed several days. She improved after our arrival & seemed quite comfortable before we left.

Learned on arrival at E. the sudden death of Benjamin C. Collins. Mr. C. was thought to experience a change of heart two or three hours before death! It is possible, but who would dare the risk of eternal happiness on so short security? A life of usefulness is to surviving friends the best guarantee of eternal life.

Saturday was spent in sundry visits, odd jobs, etc., including a ride with Harriette to the south beach & creeks & a ride with Aunt Jane two-thirds the way to the creeks. At the Creek, millions of little eels, probably just from the Spawn, attracted our curiosity. They were so thick that we first thought them sea grass closely matted.

¹⁹ Her parents had objected to their marriage.

²⁰ Benjamin Collins, 25 and unmarried, was a son of Palfrey and Dorcas Worth Collins, and brother of Grafton N., who became a leading businessman. Collins Beach in Edgartown is named for this family.

A citizens meeting was called at the Town School house in West Tisbury on Saturday evening July 2^d.

Rev. Clarendon, in stating the objects of the meeting, said, that the Government had authorized recruiting in the District & rebel states that as the Mass. ^{state} ~~territory~~ was larger than that of any other state, it was supposed that she would command the market for recruits.

The following names were handed in

Capt. Edmund Mather	100
H. L. Whiting	100
Capt. James (Cleveland)	100
Mr. John Davis	100
Mr. Allen Cook	100
B. E. A. Cleveland	100
Mr. F. F. Baxter	100
Mr. Constant D. Lee	100
Mr. John W. Allen	100
Rev. W. H. Sturtevant	100
Mr. E. H. Gosham	100
Mr. Benj. Atkins Esq.	100
Wm. H. Vincent	50
James H. Vincent	50
Leiah H. Vincent	50
Capt. P. M. Lee	100
Gov. Cyrus Mather	100
H. M. Smith	100
Rick ^d Thompson	100
Mayhew Cook	100

Chas. Whiting
Secretary
Citizens Meeting

West Tisbury Mass.
July 2^d 1864

Minutes of the meeting at which 20 West Tisbury men agreed to hire freed slaves as substitutes in Civil War draft (see Miller article, p.99).

¹⁷ West Tisbury's mill pond, about 100 yards from their house. He doesn't tell us what Hattie thought of their new home at Asa Johnson's.

¹⁸ They will leave the Island for a warmer climate within a year or so.



PATRIOTIC RALLY

AT THE TOWN HALL, Wednesday, Nov. 6.

The ladies of Edgartown who have undertaken to supply articles for the necessities and comforts of our gallant soldiers, request that the patriotic men of the town will assemble and meet them at the Town Hall, this evening, at 6 3-4 o'clock, to hear the doings of the meeting on Friday evening last, and to add their contributions to those heretofore so generously bestowed. Every father, husband, or son, who claims to be a patriot in the esteem of the gentler sex, should be present on this occasion.

Every dictate of gratitude, every sentiment of humanity, and every prompting of the angel quality of charity, call for a hearty and liberal response to the appeal of the ladies.

Actively, tirelessly, though silently, woman is at work, giving her best energies to her self-imposed task. To-night we have a PATRIOTIC FAIR; and he who contributes, according to his means, will receive the sweet reward of female thanks, and a far greater consolation in the consciousness of having nobly performed a patriot's duty.

Doors open at 6 1-4 o'clock.

Admission, ten cents.