

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



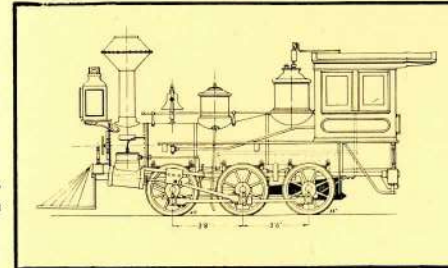
THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 37, NO. 2

NOVEMBER 1995

One Hundred Years Later

Drawing by Ed Gebhardt



Courtesy Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette.

The Martha's Vineyard Railroad 1874—1895

by HERMAN PAGE

Katama: Why the Railroad Came to Be and Not to Be

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

Investors and Incorporators, Martha's Vineyard Railroad

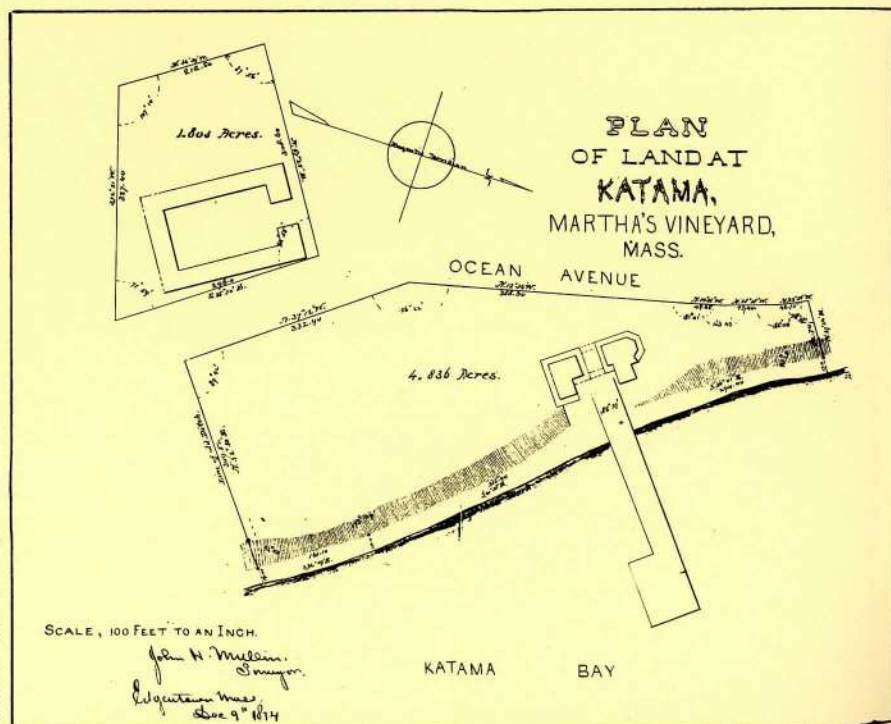
Documents: A Running Account Of Matter & Things

by HENRY BAYLIES

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Mattakeset Lodge and the Clam House at Katama



Mattakeset Lodge and wharf were built in 1873. Once the railroad came, a Clam House was added to serve clam bakes. An open-ended quadrangle, it also had a bowling alley.

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Editor: Arthur R. Railton

Founding Editor: Gale Huntington (1902-1993)

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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.

One Hundred Years Later

The Martha's Vineyard Railroad 1874 — 1895

by HERMAN PAGE

WITH 1995 nearly over, a reflection on the Martha's Vineyard Railroad is in order. It seems hard to believe it has been gone for a century, 1895 having been its final year. Seeking new information on such an old story, one finds the trail very cold. Even so, I shall try to convey something of the character of the line: where it went, what its buildings and equipment were like, how it ran, and above all, to provide a feeling for what it must have been like to ride on the Martha's Vineyard Railroad in the 19th century.

The railroad began operation in 1874 at a time when Cottage City (now Oak Bluffs) was booming. The camp meetings were drawing huge crowds and many visitors discovered the Vineyard to be a fine place for a vacation. It was the era of the great hotels. There were several in Cottage City, but the most popular were those on the water: the Wesley House, on Lake Anthony; the Seaview House and the Highland House, both right on the Sound; and the Mattakeset Lodge on Katama Bay in Edgartown. The other large Cottage City hotels, like the Pawnee House, the Metropolitan Hotel and the Island House, were on Circuit Avenue and well patronized, but the trend was to the newer hotels right on the water.

New Englanders, discovering the joys of salt-water bathing, came to the Island in huge numbers. Transportation to the Vineyard had greatly improved. The Old Colony Railroad ran from Boston right onto the wharf in Woods Hole and onto the wharf in New Bedford.

HERMAN PAGE, a long-time summer resident and member of the Society, is an Episcopal pastor in Topeka, Kansas. His hobby is railroad history and he is editor of *Sparks*, the newsletter of the Topeka chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

60 RAILROAD

Through trains from various cities carried crowds directly to sidewheel steamers that took them to the Island.

But with all this progress on the mainland, getting from one Island village to another was mostly on foot or over sandy roads on horseback or wagon. Roads were getting better, but the conveyance was unchanged. In 1872, the Beach Road between Oak Bluffs and Edgartown was completed as was the Oak Bluffs to Vineyard Haven road across the opening to the Lagoon Pond.

Then Islanders decided wagons weren't enough. It was the era of America's infatuation with the railroad. Some Edgartown businessmen proposed a railroad for the Vineyard. After considerable financial and political maneuvering, a nine-mile narrow-gauge railroad, its track only three feet wide, was completed in what must have been the record time of three months, from June to August 1874.

Let's take a hypothetical ride on that railroad. The year is 1891. The railroad had been in business for 17 years and had yet to make a profit. My grandfather grew up in Boston, graduated from Harvard in 1888 and from the Episcopal Theological School in 1891 and could well have made such a trip that year before going west to begin his ministry in Idaho. Possibly he did so because he must have known of the Island before the 1920s when he returned to buy land on Tashmoo Lake.

Sidewheel steamers were making several trips a day from the mainland to Oak Bluffs (also called Cottage City until 1907). On busy Sundays two or three steamers were often unloading passengers at the same time onto the wharf in front of the Seaview House. As the hoards of summer visitors came down the gangplanks, the narrow-gauge train, its steam up, waited on the wharf, ready to take them to Edgartown or Katama, to hotel or beach or clambake.

On busy days in 1891, four cars made up the train. The four included the three original cars dating back to 1874, built by Jackson & Sharp in Wilmington, Delaware. These were the open-air coach, "Katama," with lengthwise seating along the sides and pairs of seats down the center; the



Train, ready to head for Edgartown, has loaded passengers from two steamers at the Oak Bluffs wharf. The River Queen, right, was used by General U.S. Grant in Civil War.

elegant closed coach, "Oak Bluffs," with four-abreast plush seats; and the short baggage car, Number 5, which could be adapted to seat 22 passengers. A second closed coach, about which little is known, had been added in 1876.

The small 0-6-0 locomotive, "Edgartown," would be simmering quietly at the head of the train below the veranda of the Seaview House, her fireman checking the fire and water, and her engineer oiling the machinery. "Edgartown," called the "Active" when it first came to the Island, was built by Porter-Bell of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in May 1874, probably for the Chester & Lenoir Railroad in North Carolina, but hastily sent to the Vineyard when the previously ordered "dummy" engine, obtained from Jerome Wheelock in Worcester, proved unsatisfactory.¹

Passengers could buy tickets in an office on the wharf if they hadn't bought a through ticket to Edgartown or Katama in Boston from the Old Colony via the steamship line. Round-trip tickets from Cottage City to Katama cost 75

¹ The name "Active," although now accepted as the name of the locomotive, seems not to have been used at the time.

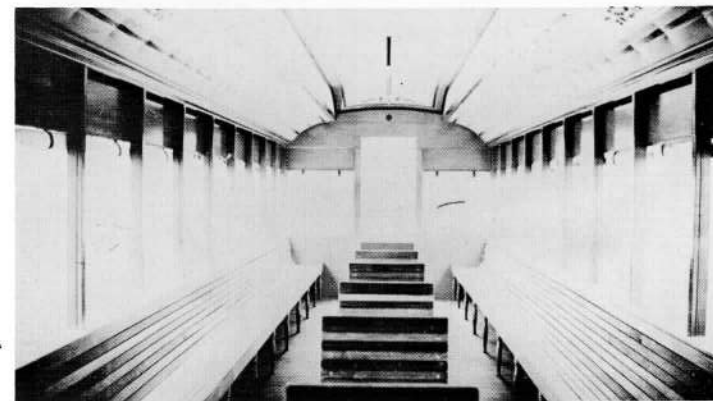
cents, 50 cents one way, and 25 cents from Edgartown to Katama. For those who were going to stay in Edgartown or at Mattakeset Lodge at Katama, luggage was checked in the baggage car. Passengers received an elegant brass baggage token to be turned in when the luggage was recovered at their destination. I have seen a few of those brass baggage tags that were used for checking suitcases or trunks.

A couple of quick blasts on the whistle would alert the last-minute passengers to board the train and with brass bell clanging, smoke puffing from the tall diamond stack, the locomotive would jerk and lurch the cars forward. The cars were coupled with "link and pin" couplers, rather than the knuckle couplers known today. The "link and pin" had quite a bit of slack between cars and was later abandoned by most railroads because many brakemen lost fingers while inserting the link into the following car before dropping in the pin.

The cars did not have air brakes. Braking was done by brakes on the locomotive tender or by the brakeman cranking the brake wheel on one of the cars. Since M.V.R.R. trackage was quite level (no more than a five-foot rise in 1000 feet), braking problems would not be frequent. When the train started and stopped, the cars would jerk as the slack was taken out of the coupler links. It was not the smooth ride we would expect today.

The little engine would pull the coaches slowly around the curved wye track on the wharf, past the south end of the Seaview House and run behind the bathhouses toward Edgartown. Occasionally, the train would stop at the bathing tower at the foot of Samoset Avenue to pick up passengers. People who often made the trip from Cottage City to Edgartown would use multi-ride tickets, much as commuters do today.

After clearing the bathhouses at Cottage City, the train proceeded at 25 miles per hour or so along the waterfront, with Nantucket Sound to the left. Soon, Sengekontacket Pond would appear on the right as the train chugged along the wide beach. The track was literally like the "house builded upon the sand," and, as a result, winter storms



Courtesy Delaware State Archives

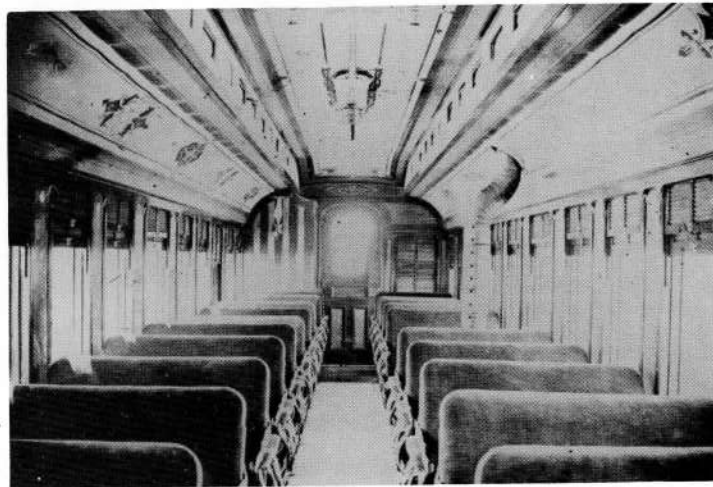
Open coach, Katama, with a few curtains drawn, had unpadded seats.

frequently washed away the ties, requiring expensive repairs in the spring. A severe storm in January 1883 washed out 800 feet of roadbed, plus some pilings on the bridge across the opening to Sengekontacket Pond.

The ride along the beach provided an attractive view. But on one July day, the scene was traumatic. "Excursionists on the train" spotted a woman's body face down in the water near shore. Conductor Dana Hadley stopped the train and, with help from his colleagues, pulled her from the water. She was resuscitated after "every effort was made to induce respiration in the apparently lifeless body."²

On another occasion as it sped along, the train

² From *New Bedford Standard*, July 12, year unknown. The clipping describing the attempted suicide has a handwritten comment by Conductor Dana Hadley: "... It was a hard sight and I did not eat a bit of dinner to pay for it. Lyman & Wes helped me get her up to the train." The woman, despondent in a recent marriage, was Mrs. William Murray, 25, of Edgartown.

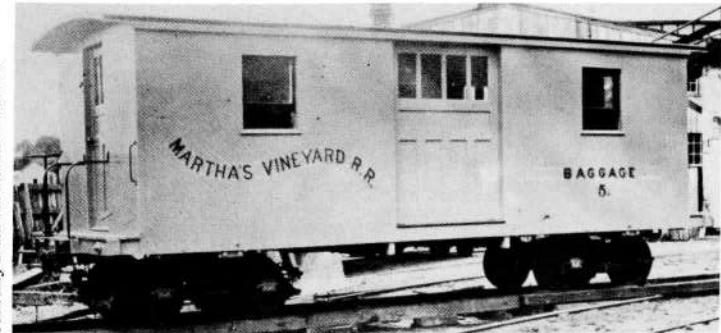


Courtesy Delaware State Archives

Elegant closed coach, Oak Bluffs, had upholstered seats and a light.

"spooked" a horse pulling a carriage on the sandy road. A man and three women on the carriage were hurt with "severe" injuries. They were taken to Oak Bluffs on the train for medical attention.

As our train approached Trapp's Pond, the track turned to the south and made a gentle curve toward the west side of Edgartown, crossing what is now the Edgartown golf course. There, near the present clubhouse, was the line's only dirt cut. A minimum of whistle blowing was needed since there were no grade crossings until after the train left the Edgartown depot on the western edge of town. Approaching the depot, the train passed a small engine house and perhaps a turntable used to turn the locomotive when



Courtesy Delaware State Archives

Baggage car, No. 5, could be fitted to seat 22 passengers if necessary.

needed. Then it ran literally inside the depot, as the tracks passed directly through the frame building. The station had odd-appearing braces on its west side, installed to stabilize the structure after a winter storm had damaged it.

After the ride of less than twenty minutes the train was in Edgartown. A few passengers would get off at the depot on Main Street and head for hotels or homes. But most would continue on to Katama and South Beach either to stay as guests at the Mattakeset Lodge or as day trippers to enjoy the famous Katama clambakes in the Casino. Day trippers bought round-trip tickets for \$1, which included the clambake. On Friday nights, a clambake and "hop" were held and an extra trip was made after the dance to take the celebrants back to Cottage City.

When it left Edgartown and headed south to Katama, the train curved around the cemetery, making a slight rise, passing across a couple of earth fills (still visible today). A few grade crossings would require the bell to be rung and the whistle to be blown. There were wide grade-crossing signs stretched over the roads from one side to the other warning of the dangerous train. A good strong southwest wind was usually blowing across the Katama plain bringing smoke loaded with coal cinders back through the cars.

The track ran through several farms, which occasionally caused problems. In 1879 an ox owned by Elijah Vincent was struck by a train, breaking its leg. The railroad settled Elijah's claim of \$40 for damages.

From Mattakeset Lodge, the track continued on to South Beach. So after unloading passengers at the Lodge, the train swung around the wye track, clearing the east switch before backing down a half-mile or so to the beach. At least one train a day ran directly to the beach. Trains going only to Mattakeset would pull around the west leg of the wye toward the beach, then back right up to the hotel. The train was thus turned in the correct order to head back to Edgartown and Cottage City. Presumably, the train crew would be careful in operating through the wye tracks, so as not to repeat the occasion when it failed to stop and ended up crashing into the hotel.

. . .

Now I'd like to go into more detail in describing the railroad and its rolling stock. There is not a lot of surviving material about the M.V.R.R., making research difficult. From several time cards and published timetables, I have learned that the usual run from Oak Bluffs to Edgartown took 20 minutes, from Edgartown to Katama 15 minutes.

Scheduled Sunday trips were limited in number, which seems strange to us today, who think of Sunday as a major day for vacation travel, sightseeing and outings. However, there were vestiges of Puritanism on the Island. At the office of the *Vineyard Gazette* there is an original undated petition, five feet long, with 200 signatures protesting Sunday operation of the railroad in Edgartown. Petitioners claimed that the railroad upset worship and "Sabbath quiet and decorum." Among the signers, as one would expect, were several clergy. A short time later, another petition called for the resumption of the Sunday service.

Arrivals and departures at Cottage City were timed to coincide with the steamer schedules. Trains picked up tourists in Edgartown and took them and their luggage to the departing steamers at Oak Bluffs, a much valued service. If the train was late, as it occasionally would be, the steamer would delay its departure. When passengers got off the boat headed for Edgartown or Katama, they would only have to walk a few yards to board the train. Several time cards still



A busy day at Mattakeset Lodge; passengers on the four-car train pose for their photo.

exist that show connecting steamer arrivals and departures.

Track for M.V.R.R. was 30-pound rail (30 pounds to the yard) and would be considered quite light today. Ties were for the most part laid directly on sand along the beach, subject to washing out in storms. There were only slight rises in the grade, one near the present golf clubhouse (as mentioned) and another south of Edgartown. At the time of construction, some had argued that the track should run to the west of Sengekontacket Pond, a route which would have taken longer to build and been more expensive. It surely would have saved considerably on storm-damage repair.

The switches were "stub" switches, which means that the main track was moved back and forth to align with one or the other of the diverging tracks. This was common in early narrow-gauge construction, but is no longer used. The moving track was controlled by "Harp" switch stands, again a distinctive style of switch control used in early narrow-gauge railroads. (Harp switch stands are often pictured on early Colorado narrow-gauge lines, and I have seen them on an abandoned narrow-gauge line in Upper Michigan. They are shown clearly in several M.V.R.R. photos.)

A word about the "wye tracks" and train direction: There was a triangle-shaped wye built on the dock at Oak

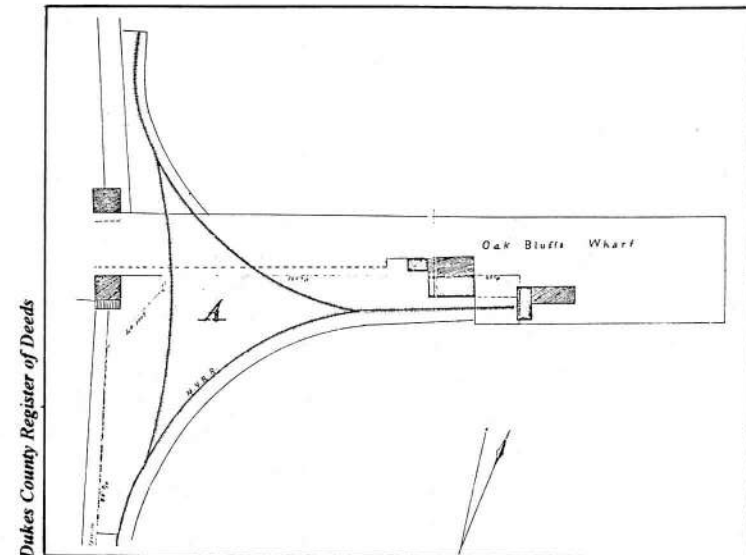
Bluffs, but its "tails" were only long enough to hold the engine, not the entire train. The arriving locomotive would pull the train onto the wharf, uncouple the cars, then pull ahead to the end of the track. The switch would be thrown and the locomotive backed around toward the present-day entrance to Oak Bluffs harbor. The switch there was thrown and the locomotive was driven in front of the hotel past a third switch and backed down to the cars. Thus the locomotive was now headed toward Edgartown, but the rest of the train was unchanged. Existing photographs show the various stages of this maneuver.

In Katama there was a similar wye track, but its "tails" were long enough to handle both locomotive and cars. There was plenty of space at Katama, unlike the crowded wharf at Cottage City, making the extension cheaper to build. The entire train would then be lined up at the Mattakeset Lodge ready for the return trip.

During the fire that destroyed the Seaview House in 1892, both the wye and the wharf were badly damaged so the train could no longer roll onto the wharf. Thus, there was no way to turn around the locomotive. It would pull the cars to Cottage City from Edgartown, but would have to operate in reverse on the return trip to Edgartown. During the period the wharf could not be used, the terminus for the train was at the base of a tall bathing tower above the bathhouses.³ In 1894, scheduled service to Katama and South Beach was discontinued for lack of interest, although in August 1895 the railroad was advertising "Special excursions to Katama and South Beach when called for."

The original "dummy" engine first delivered to M.V.R.R. came from Jerome Wheelock in Worcester, Massachusetts, and was built to resemble a passenger coach with a vertical steam boiler and driving mechanism. Supposedly, it could move itself and pull additional cars. The presumed advantage was that a locomotive of this sort was not supposed to frighten horses. Several were used in various

³ It was not a "bathing tower," despite its name. It was high on the bluff and was used by spectators who watched the bathers below. See p. 84 for location of tower.



Wye track layout on the Oak Bluffs wharf in front of Sea View House.

small railroads around the country and on city elevated railways. The one sent to the Vineyard ran well until it reached a curve, which it could not negotiate, so its forward progress ceased. This problem was rectified, but it still couldn't pull enough cars, so had to be returned to the builder. There was a law suit in which the railroad claimed losses of \$300 a day in fares due to the unit's failure. Eventually the suit was settled for \$2000. I have never seen any photographs of the dummy engine.

The locomotive that replaced the dummy was delivered in August 1874. It was an "0-6-0" which meant that it had six driving wheels, but no "pilot" wheels or "trailing" wheels. This arrangement was common for yard engines used to switch cars in a terminal, but not commonly used for pulling through trains. It was built by Porter Bell & Company in Pennsylvania, Construction No. 201, 9 1/2-inch by 14-inch cylinders, 33-inch diameter driving wheels, overall length of engine and tender 30 feet, overall weight 22,000 pounds. She was a fairly standard small locomotive and I know of one like it that had been used in logging service in Idaho

and ended up in Nome, Alaska, where it still exists.

Readers are probably familiar with the locomotive's 1874 "baptism" in Woods Hole harbor, when an Old Colony switching locomotive pushed the flat car on which the small engine was loaded too hard against a bumper. The engine broke loose from the flat car and rolled into the water. She was quickly raised and hauled to the Old Colony shops for cleaning. In very quick time, she was carried by steamer to the railroad track at Katama, landing at Mattakeset's pier on August 27, 1874, and immediately placed in service.

The M.V.R.R. train when loaded weighed 30 tons, a light load for this type of locomotive. The engine burned around 1500 pounds of coal per day and could run up to 30 miles an hour, although 15 was recommended. Apparently speed was not a problem, because the train had no known wrecks or derailments caused by high speed.⁴

When the engine arrived it is said to have carried the name "Active," but there seems to be no contemporary evidence of this. Its published name was "Edgartown" and several pictures show this name. Later, it became "South Beach" before the abandonment and subsequent sale of the locomotive. Despite the lack of evidence, it is known in Island history as "Active." Even recently I have seen a motorboat in Vineyard Haven named "Active" with a silhouette of the locomotive on the stern. A short-lived hobby store in Vineyard Haven was called "Active Depot."

The cars were built by Jackson & Sharp of Wilmington, Delaware. The "Oak Bluffs," while a relatively plush car for its days, was probably a stock item for Jackson and Sharp. I have pictures of an almost identical car running on the Hancock and Calumet Railroad in Michigan. John White's book, *The American Railroad Passenger Car*, shows several similar cars built by various manufacturers. A unique feature of these J & S cars was a heating stove placed in the center of the car, as compared to most other cars, where the heaters were placed at one or both ends. A small toilet room was

⁴ See article following this one for descriptions of a few accidents that the train did have.



Train crew and onlookers pose for photo. Engine's name is visible on cab: "Edgartown."

provided in one end and a single interior light in the middle. Exterior trim was ornate with a fancy paint scheme. An oval emblem appeared on each side in the center with the name "Oak Bluffs" painted on it.

These cars would seat about 44 persons, two by each window, but being narrow-gauge cars, they were a little more crowded than a regular coach of that day. The seats were of plush upholstery and were "walk over" seats, i.e., when the train reversed direction, a crewman walked through the cars and pushed the seat backs over so passengers would face forward.

The "Katama," the open car, was likewise a fairly common design for its day. It had open upper sides with rolldown shades to protect against rain. The seats were wooden and hard, certainly not very comfortable given the jerking of the link and pin couplers. However, despite the hard seats, anyone who likes trains would have found a ride on the open-air "Katama" enjoyable. Many tourist lines, especially on scenic mountain trackage, have similar cars in use today.

The small 24-foot baggage car was unusual. It had a

curved (radial) roof, two small windows on each side and a center baggage door, plus small doors at each end. While mainly intended for parcels or baggage, seating for 22 could be installed when needed to handle overflow crowds. It sported an elaborate lettering scheme on its sides.

In 1876 an additional passenger car, number or name unknown, but somewhat similar to "Oak Bluffs," was obtained from Jackson and Sharp. I have been unable to find out much about it or obtain builder's photos as I have with the other three cars. It was simply described as "similar to those built for the D.& R.G. narrow gauge in Colorado." In photographs the car appears to be a little higher than the other cars and to have board and batten siding. Also it has a somewhat different color scheme. The first three cars were a light color (maybe light gray or yellow), the fourth car has a dark letterboard and window sashes. On the first three cars, the lettering is dark (probably black), on the fourth, the "Martha's Vineyard Railroad" lettering is painted in light (white or light yellow). Lettering below the windows appears faintly in one photograph and may say "Ocean. . ." This car probably seated around 44 passengers.

Statistics for the season of 1882 indicate that the train ran 6527 revenue miles, hauled 26,142 passengers; its greatest one-day passenger count was 1037, greatest count on one run, 412.⁵ This latter must have been a round trip, for even stuffing people in, it would be impossible to carry that many people in three passenger cars (assuming 55 to 60 per car, including standees) and 30 or so in the baggage car.

The railroad owned very few buildings. There was a small building on the wharf at Cottage City, containing a small ticket office and baggage room. Later, the roof was extended to provide more shelter for waiting passengers.

The main structure was the depot in Edgartown, located a little east of the present Depot Service Station, approximately 110 feet from the centerline of the road. It was an unusual "run through" building, a design occasionally used

⁵ Also in the following article, a news story is quoted that gives a one-day total of 1800 riders. It may have been an exaggeration.



From R.C. Shute Collection, DCHS

Run-through depot in Edgartown. At right, Conductor Hadley; Fireman Henry Luce is crouched on engine; others are unknown. Man at left may be Ticket Agent Chase Pease.

in those days, but not always too satisfactory. There was always the danger of fire being started by sparks from the engine while passing through. Dimensions were around 34 feet wide, 65 feet long, with a 12-foot extension on the east side. It is possible some coaches were stored in the depot during the off-season. I am not sure if the depot also contained offices for the railroad, or where those offices were if not there. Support braces were installed on the west side of the building to strengthen it against further heavy winds following a heavy blow in February 1876 which had caused some structural damage.

North about 300 feet from the depot was a simple wooden two-door engine house, with a single track running into it from the rear. This provided a place for indoor storage of the locomotive and repair work. It suffered some roof damage from a fire started by oily rags in May 1878. Fortunately, the locomotive was pulled out and the fire extinguished without total loss of the structure.

There may have been a turntable in the area, but it is not known where. There must have been some method of filling the tender with coal and, it would seem, there must

have been a small tank for engine water. However, neither of these common railroad support facilities appear in any pictures. A *Gazette* clipping of June 1883 describes the schooner *Glide* arriving in Edgartown with a load of coal for the M.V.R.R.

There is a question about whether there was a "run around" track at Edgartown, allowing the engine to uncouple from the train, then run around to attach to the other end after it had been turned on a turntable. There is no evidence of either such a track or of a turntable.⁶

There were probably just loading platforms, either of plank or of slightly elevated gravel, at the bath houses in Oak Bluffs, at South Beach, and at the Mattakeset Lodge. In January 1901, long after the railroad had gone out of business, a newspaper story stated that

Harlan C. Chadwick has purchased the station at the South Beach, formerly the terminus of the M.V.R.R. and will have it transported to the Chappaquiddick bathing beach where it will be utilized next season as a pavilion.

This is the only reference I have been able to find of a railroad building at South Beach, but it clearly states that there was one. I have no idea how track maintenance was carried on, realizing that most similar lines had small handcars, work flat cars, or such, to get rails, ties, other materials or tools to trackage not otherwise accessible for repair workers. Here again we must depend on a casual newspaper story that ran in the *Seaside Gazette*, August 23, 1875:

The overturning of the dump car on the M.V.R.R. in the morning, strewing its passengers around promiscuously, caused a brief flutter of excitement, though happily no one was injured. . .

It is not easy to understand what kind of "dump car" is being written about. Surely, if it was a hopper car for hauling road-bed ballast, it would not be carrying

⁶ In an old clipping, dated December 24, year not given, from the *New Bedford Standard Times*, a former M.V.R.R. employee is quoted as saying, "down the way a piece [from the Edgartown station] was a siding at the foot of an incline, behind some high bushes." No evidence has been found of the siding.

passengers. However, the day of the accident was Regatta Day and ridership would have been unusually heavy so perhaps the car was of such a configuration that passengers could be carried when necessary.

Like many railroads of its day, M.V.R.R. was underfinanced from the very beginning. Poor maintenance, unpaid bills and unreliable service probably resulted. In 1891, the Old Colony Railroad took over ownership and management because of debts owed by the company, but it was too late. By then things were going downhill fast.

The fire that destroyed the Sea View House, pier and trackage in the fall of 1892 caused operation problems. The general financial depression of 1892-93 across the country and the failure of land development in Katama, all led to increasing difficulties. The Mattakeset Lodge suffered from low occupancy rates. Maintenance, as so often happens with such lines, was deferred and reliability suffered. Finally, in 1895, the end came.

The locomotive was sold to a construction company in Boston and loaded on a schooner which, according to local tradition, unmentioned in the newspapers, ran into a heavy fog and had to use the engine's bell for warning other vessels. I do not know what happened to the four cars. One account states that "Katama" had been used in connection with a photographic business in Oak Bluffs; another that the baggage car probably became a tool shed on a farm, but I cannot confirm either.

The rail was salvaged, with a few pieces turning up here and there on the Island, along with a number of spikes. A *Gazette* item noted that rails were being collected on Chadwick's Wharf in October 1899. Some may have been used on marine railways. One report said some rails were later used on the Edaville Railroad in South Carver, Massachusetts, another that they went to Boston. I don't know for sure.

An April 1901 advertisement announced the end of the great dream of Edgartown's businessmen: "For Sale, MVR R property, one car, right of way, depot lot. James E.

Chadwick." In May of 1907, the *Gazette* reported that the old Edgartown depot was being demolished.

The Vineyard Museum of the Society exhibits the locomotive's headlight, along with spikes and a little hardware. There are a few old tickets in the archives and an occasional time card. I saw and photographed a multi-ride ticket, partly used, valid for travel between Oak Bluffs and Edgartown. Now most of what remains is in the form of photographs plus some places where the remains of the right of way can still be seen, especially in seasons when there are no leaves on trees or bushes.

In researching this article, I could not help thinking how valuable it would be to railroad historians if somehow the article would ignite an interest in the old railroad. It would be of great value if someone came forward with more data on the subject. If any reader has such information, the Dukes County Historical Society would be highly pleased to receive it.



Rare action photo of the moving train as it steamed along the beach heading for Oak Bluffs from Edgartown in 1892, only three years before the railroad ended operations.

Katama: Why the Railroad Came to Be and Not to Be

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

IT SURELY was among the biggest mistakes ever made by the voters of Edgartown when at Town Meeting, April 18, 1874, they voted to buy \$15,000 worth of stock in the Martha's Vineyard Railroad Company -- a company without a foot of track and which, at the time, was only a dream in the minds of its promoters. To finance the stock purchase, the town borrowed \$15,000 from banks in New Bedford and Fairhaven. It was no small amount of money. The ordinary working man in 1874 was earning about \$300 a year; \$15,000 would hire 50 men for a year, the equivalent of about a million dollars today. The town's stock purchase provided over a third of the company's total capital. Without it, the railroad probably would not have been built.¹

What convinced the conservative citizens of Edgartown to approve such an huge expenditure? It was their concern about the future. They had watched the new settlement on the north side of town, Cottage City, expand and prosper, while they stagnated. They wanted a share of the prosperity. Fueling the boom at Cottage City were three private organizations: the Camp Meeting Association; the Vineyard Grove Company; and, most of all, the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company. The men who had created the Oak Bluffs

¹ For more details of this meeting and of the railroad finances see Henry Beetle Hough, *Martha's Vineyard: Summer Resort*, Tuttle Pub. Co., Rutland, Vermont, 1936, pp.101ff. A thorough study of the physical layout of the railroad is given in Walter Blackwell, *Tracing the Route of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad*, privately printed, 1971 and 1973.

ARTHUR RAILTON is editor of this journal.

Company were the men promoting a railroad. Why not join in their successes?

There was another concern. Cottage City residents were threatening to secede, to form a separate town. Secession would cut in half Edgartown's tax collections. Although they paid more than half of all the taxes, property owners in Cottage City, most of them summer residents, were politically powerless. Old Town residents had the votes and controlled the purse strings.

Earlier, in an effort to share some of Cottage City's tourist business, Edgartown had borrowed \$40,000 to build the Beach Road, directly connecting the two very different parts of town. The road was supposed to bring prosperity. But it had not done so. Something more was needed.

That something was the Katama Land Company, a real-estate development owned by some of the men who owned Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company. In 1872, two years before the Town Meeting, it had bought 600 acres on the plains at South Beach. Thousands of tiny house lots were laid out. Summer - resort Katama would be, it was hoped, even more successful than Oak Bluffs. It had more to offer, with many choice waterfront lots on the bay and on the ocean.

But despite all their efforts, sales were slow. Katama was too far from Oak Bluffs, too inconvenient. What was needed was fast transportation. Steamers were too slow. Railroads were running onto the steamboat wharfs in New Bedford and Woods Hole. Why not onto the wharf at Oak Bluffs? A trip from there to Katama would take less than a half hour. Surely that would bring sales. Or so the Katama investors thought.

Supporting the Town Warrant article calling on the town to invest in the railroad were many Edgartown businessmen. Speaking for them were Capt. Nathaniel M. Jernegan, sales agent for the Katama Land Company, and Samuel Osborn Jr., whaling entrepreneur and politician. Both were well-regarded, both were sure a railroad would

bring prosperity. Samuel Osborn, 51 years old, was the town's second biggest individual taxpayer.² He knew how to make money. When he urged the stock purchase in Town Meeting, the voters listened.

Osborn explained that the town would invest only if another \$25,000 was raised privately. That was convincing, especially when he let it be known that he was going to invest his own money.³ With \$40,000 raised by stock purchases, he said, the railroad would issue \$35,000 in bonds, bringing its total capital to \$75,000,⁴ enough to build the nine miles of narrow-gauge railroad needed to connect Oak Bluffs with Katama. "Gentlemen present," the *Vineyard Gazette* assured its readers, "had the figures to show this."

Heading the opposition was Ichabod Norton Luce, a boat builder and founding member of the Island's Republican party. He had been keeper of Gay Head Light from 1861 to 1864, appointed by President Abraham Lincoln to replace Democrat Sam Flanders. Luce didn't live in Old Town, he lived in Vineyard Highlands, East Chop. He was not a financial man. He was a craftsman, a carpenter. What did he know about stocks and railroads?

Luce didn't claim to know how to run a railroad, but he knew how to make his point. He argued against public money being used to promote private interests:

It is as absurd to ask the town to develop Katama as to ask it to keep Mr. Osborn's ship in repair and find her in spars and rigging.⁵ The Katama Land Company is abundantly able to develop their property, and if they want a railroad let them build one.

² He paid \$571.16 in property taxes; Dr. Daniel Fisher, the largest taxpayer, \$619.76; Katama Land Co., \$130.68.

³ Samuel Osborn's obituary (*Gazette*, March 22, 1895) states that he lost thousands of dollars in the railroad and the Katama Land Company. He may have lost thousands at Katama, but he only bought five shares of railroad stock, valued at \$500. In fact, he may not have put up any money. In 1879, the railroad sued him over his promissory note for the five shares (*Gazette*, May 16, 1879). Nathaniel Jernegan, the other speaker, bought 20 shares at a cost of \$2000. He and Grafton Collins were Edgartown's largest investors in the railroad.

⁴ Hough states that Old Colony Railroad bought \$36,000 in bonds (*Summer Resort*, p.119).

⁵ Osborn owned the whaling bark *Clarice* at the time. By 1880 he was the owner of eight whalers.

He reminded the voters that the year before they had been talked into another bad investment: the Beach Road. They had voted to borrow \$40,000 to build the road because, its supporters promised, it would bring prosperity. Where is that prosperity? What did we get for our \$40,000?

Captain Jernegan, a retired whaling master and former representative to the General Court, described the railroad's finances. His projections showed that "a handsome profit" would be made. Osborn was more precise: "I expect a net return of ten per cent." The investment wouldn't cost the voters money, it would make money. Or so he implied. The borrowed money would be paid back by earnings and then the town would have income from dividends. Furthermore, the railroad would start a building boom, bringing in tax money and providing jobs. "Build this road and manufacturers will come along, Katama will grow, everything will grow," the *Gazette* predicted.

The voters approved the stock purchase, but barely. A two-thirds majority was required and with 149 votes for and 72 against, it received only two votes more than needed. A proposed amendment, offered by C.R. Dunham, would have required the railroad to run "to the westward of the Camp Ground and Sanchacantackett [sic] pond and that proprietors of land along the line contribute land gratis." Before the vote, Dunham withdrew his amendment, but the Town Record states that "the sense of this meeting is that the route of the railroad be on the west side of the Camp Ground and on the west side of the pond."⁶

After his defeat, Ichabod Luce wrote a letter to the *Gazette*, re-stating his position:

. . . take care of your poor, your schools, your roads: these are the legitimate functions of a town government. Let private projects take care of themselves.

He denied that there would be jobs for residents: "The fact is that the work will be done with imported Irishmen. . . when you take into the account the number of men and horses employed in carrying passengers to the South Beach.

. . . [which will then] be done by the iron horse fed with fire, it is to the laboring man a very serious matter."⁷

Luce turned out to be right. It was a bad decision. Three years later, the shares, for which the town had paid \$15,000, were sold to Antone L. Sylvia of New Bedford for \$315 at public auction. Good riddance, the townspeople said. But until 1891 they were paying off the bank loans.

The man behind the railroad and the Katama development was not an Islander. He was the Hon. Erastus P. Carpenter of Foxboro, a successful and well-liked entrepreneur, who seemed to have the Midas touch. It was he who had created the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company with its wharf and Sea View House that had done much to bring on the boom. Carpenter invested \$2000 (20 shares of railroad stock); his Foxboro company invested another \$500. He had a splendid "cottage" in Cottage City, second only to Dr.H.A.Tucker's.⁸

Carpenter had chosen for his right-hand man Joseph Thaxter Pease, eldest son of Jeremiah Pease, the joyless, straight-laced Methodist, father of the 1835 camp meeting. That camp meeting had been the seed of the boom, starting the Island down the road to becoming one of New England's finest summer resorts. Carpenter's choice of Jeremiah's eldest son for his treasurer was a wise one. Joseph had been the first Cashier of the Martha's Vineyard National Bank and later its President. He was the Edgartown Town Moderator and Judge of the Probate Court. Respected by everyone, he was the perfect Islander to be Carpenter's financial man, although he invested none of his own money in the railroad.

When his Oak Bluffs development began running out of space in 1872, Carpenter chose Katama as his next project. Edgartown businessmen, anxious to share in the summer trade, joined him, buying acres of land along Katama Bay and South Beach. Retired whaling masters, ship owners and

⁷ Hough, p.107.

⁸ Tucker's "cottage" had just been equipped with a gas generator, fueling 30 gas lights; Carpenter's cottage had 15. These were the first houses so equipped. *Seaside Gazette*, July 11, 1873.

businessmen eagerly invested in the new development.

Town planner Robert Morris Copeland of Boston was hired to lay out the subdivision. He drew up another Oak Bluffs, which was also his design. The first building to go up was a "cottage" for Mr. Carpenter, demonstrating the seriousness of his intentions.⁹

The following spring, 1873, a wharf was built into Katama Bay. At the head of the wharf was a large gatehouse, a 50-room hotel, Mattakeset Lodge. But it was to be only the first hotel at Katama, the promoters promised. Shortly, a 250-room hotel would be added, the Island's finest, surpassing even the Sea View House at Oak Bluffs. On August 1, 1873, Mattakeset Lodge was opened with a party for invited guests who arrived from Oak Bluffs on the steam yacht *Minnehaha*. Carter's Band of Boston, "numbering eight pieces," provided music during the trip and later for the dancing. It was a "very numerous and brilliant" gathering, the press reported.

In an effort to build interest in Katama, the agents sold low-priced excursion tickets on a steamboat from Oak Bluffs to the new development. Each ticket had a stub entitling the rider to a free gift. At the Society is one such ticket, Number 8220, signed by Bullock & Brownell of the Sea View House and Stumcke & Goodwin of Mattakeset Lodge. These two hotels, seemingly competitors for the tourist dollar, were working together to promote the new resort. After all, they were owned by the same people.

That summer, intense effort was made to sell the lots, the choicest of them priced at \$200. Unexpectedly, the Federal government came through with help to the new resort. It cut an opening across the barrier beach to the ocean, making it easier to get to the deep ocean water to fish. The *Seaside Gazette* was ecstatic:

Yes, old Katama, the pasture for sheep and beeves, but whose advantages for cool air, ocean view and good clams, are unsurpassed by any other site upon the coast, is coming up. The wharf and hotel are there, the land is laid out, business has

⁹ Carpenter seems not to have used his Katama cottage, preferring his Oak Bluffs residence. He rented out the one at Katama.

begun and the men who direct are in earnest.¹⁰

Large advertisements ran in the newspapers, extolling the pleasures of "Katama, the Lovely," emphasizing its location on the "famed Atlantic Beach. . . [whose] rolling surf Daniel Webster declared superior to Niagara."

But sales were slow. Not because Katama wasn't "lovely," but because of the national economy. In September, Wall Street collapsed, starting the Panic of 1873. The failure of Jay Cooke and Company helped bring on a five-year depression during which more than 10,000 companies went bankrupt. The panic was such that the New York Stock Exchange was closed for ten days, an unprecedented action.

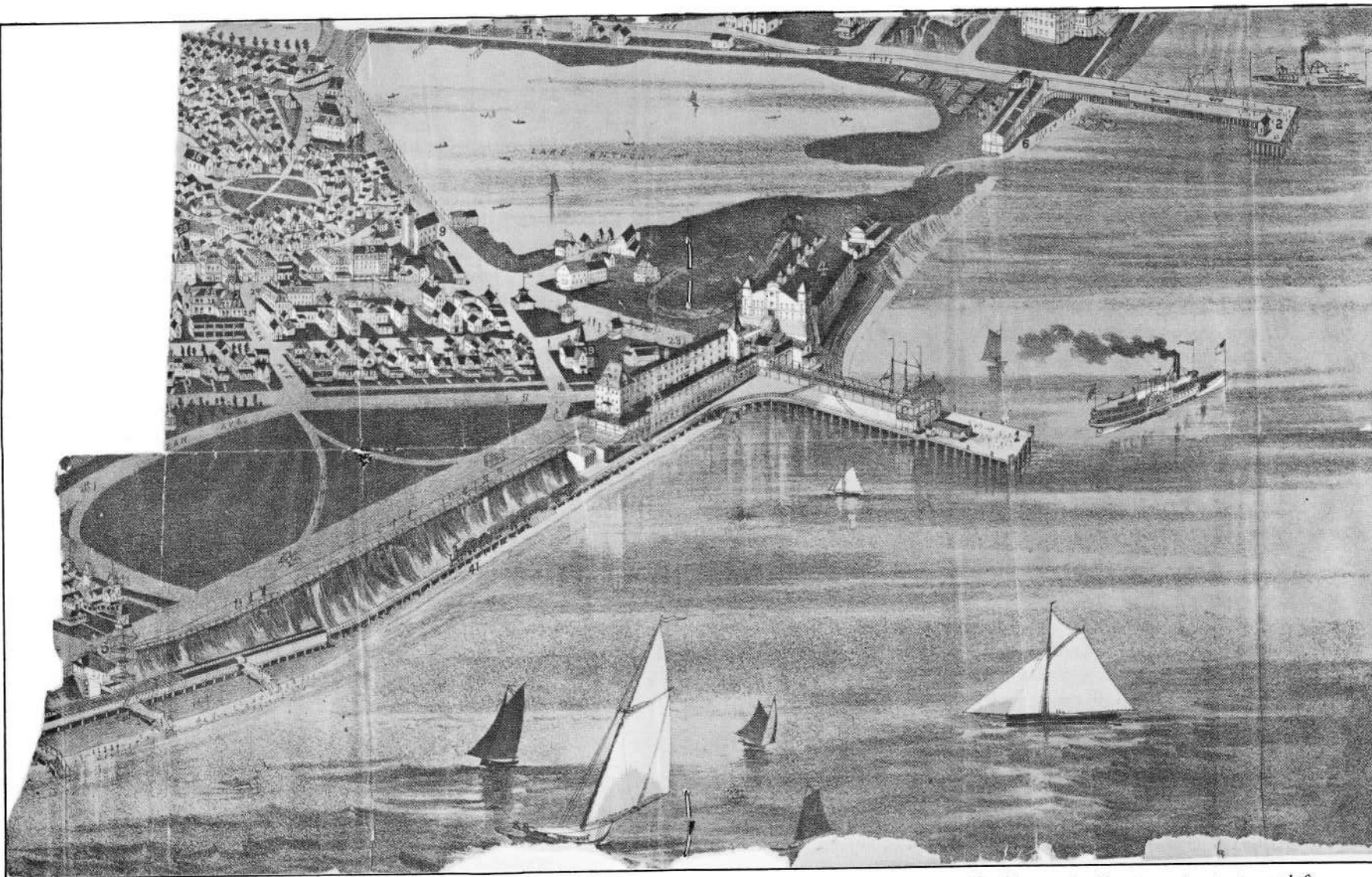
In 1874 only 12 lots were sold. The trouble, the Edgartown investors said, was not the national economy, it was that Katama was too hard to get to. Steamers from Oak Bluffs took too much time. Faster, more convenient transportation was needed. Trains would carry prospective buyers to Katama in half an hour. That would revive the faltering sales. Or so Mr. Carpenter and his associates believed.

That was the thinking behind the railroad, which was only an idea when that Town Meeting took place. After the town agreed to invest, the company was incorporated. That was on June 17, 1874.. On the board of directors were E. P. Carpenter, Grafton N. Collins, Laban Pratt, Nathaniel M. Jernegan, Samuel Osborn Jr., Richard Holley, Shubael L. Norton, Joel H. Hills and William Wing. Four directors, Carpenter, Pratt, Collins and Jernegan, had each invested \$2000, making them the largest individual stockholders.

Erastus P. Carpenter was elected president, Joseph Thaxter Pease, treasurer. These two men now headed the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company, the Katama Land Company and the Martha's Vineyard Railroad.

The company wasted no time. Within two months, Dacey Brothers of Neponset, who had bought \$7000 in stock, were laying the narrow-gauge track along the beach to Edgartown, the cheapest and shortest route. Ignored was the preference shown by voters to have it run west of

¹⁰ *Seaside Gazette*, August 15, 1873.



Fragment of an 1890 lithograph shows wye track on wharf in front of the Sea View and route of the train behind bathhouse. Bathing tower is at extreme left.

Sengekontacket Pond, through Ocean Heights.¹¹ Everything would be "ready for rolling stock by July 20th," the Gazette promised.

¹¹ In one deed for land on Main Street, the sellers inserted this provision: "when there are five families within a radius of a half mile. . . the M.V.R.R. shall erect . . . a flag station. . . on the lands now known as 'Ocean Heights' and owned by the said Grantors." It was not done.

The biggest construction projects were a bridge across the Sengekontacket opening and the trestle for the track running along the beach to the Oak Bluffs wharf. The Edgartown depot was put up quickly at a cost of \$3000. The work had to move fast. It was already mid-July, the season was peaking. Potential customers were arriving on every steamer. All that was needed was a train.

It wasn't much of a train, only two passenger cars and one baggage car. They were being built by Jackson & Sharp in Delaware and scheduled for delivery before July 15. The engine was coming from Jerome Wheelock in Worcester and was to arrive by July 18. If all went well, the railroad would be running by the end of July, the height of the summer season.

The end of July came and no sign of the train. The season was half over. The editor of the *Seaside Gazette* in Cottage City was worried. The cars had been shipped from Delaware a week earlier, where were they?

The Schooner *Nellie Treat* had been at sea a week, at five o'clock yesterday afternoon. As she has on board the cars for the M.V.R.R., some anxiety is felt in our midst for her speedy arrival.

His anxiety was premature. The following day, the *Nellie Treat* sailed into Oak Bluffs and he happily reported her arrival. There was more good news. The engine was also on the Island. All was well:

The cars for the railroad are all here and upon the track. The schooner *Nellie Treat* arrived with the three on Saturday morning and on Sunday afternoon the steamer *Monohansett* brought the dummy car [the engine] from Woods Hole. The cars are all very neat and tasty, and will well repay inspection.

Three days later, a small group gathered on the Oak Bluffs wharf for the inaugural run,

a privilege. . . granted to a select few. . . the following gentlemen, accompanied of course by the requisite number of Newspaper men, left the wharf on a trip to Katama: Henry Ripley [New Bedford], Superintendent of Martha's Vineyard Railroad; Dr. H.A. Tucker [New York patent-medicine manufacturer and Oak Bluffs's wealthiest summer resident, but not a stockholder], Capt. Wm. Lewis [New Bedford stockholder], S.L. Norton [director], W.G. Dacey [builder of railroad], Asa Shiverick [Oak Bluffs ticket agent], Prince Crowell [Old Colony Railroad], Thomas P. Howes [director], N.M. Jernegan [Katama sales agent and director], and J.K. Baker [Dennis Port, stockholder].¹²

Treasurer Joseph Thaxter Pease, the highest ranking company executive, got on board at the Edgartown depot,

¹² *Seaside Gazette*, August 7, 1874.

along with Capt. Grafton N. Collins (director) and a few others, unidentified. No doubt, Sam Osborn was one.

Not present on this historic run was the president of the railroad, the Hon. Erastus P. Carpenter. On June 27, he had sailed for Europe on business. It was just as well he wasn't there. He wouldn't have been pleased:

The trip proceeded, with several stops, to Edgartown, where the engine's general debility required a halt of two hours. . . the party proceeded to Katama, where, after several delays, they arrived at 2:15 [four hours after leaving Oak Bluffs]. . . [they then enjoyed] one of Stumcke's famous dinners. . . more debility (on the part of the engine, not the party) and at six o'clock, the company started for home.

The results of the expedition were, first, the finding of the track in splendid condition; second, the condemnation of Jerome Wheelock, who has landed on the island a handsome dummy car (built, however, by Osgood Bradley), the engine of which cannot, without radical changes, draw itself 10 miles an hour, to say nothing of a train of cars. . .

It will be an evidence of the directors' appreciation of the dummy, to say that in the evening they held a meeting, and appointed J.K. Baker to start by the first boat to Philadelphia to purchase a first-class locomotive. . .

We should be unjust did we not mention the officers of the train -- Mr. John B. Worth, conductor, Mr. W.P. Whittemore, engineer, and Mr. Wm. Knight, who officiated at the brakes. . .

Since writing the above, Mr. Wheelock has arrived, and has pronounced the fault not with the engine, but with the man who tried to put it together, and could not do it properly. We shall see.¹³

The editor reported a week later that "The dummy has finally disgusted every one who has anything to do with the road. . . She will never do the work required of her."

But he had good news. Mr. Baker had purchased a locomotive, which was on its way to Woods Hole and would be loaded on a steamboat as soon as it got there. On Monday, August 17, the locomotive arrived at Woods Hole wharf. Tuesday was spent "putting the machinery in complete order for running and the steamer *Martha's Vineyard* was engaged to transport it in the evening." Then,

¹³ *Ibid.*

a most unfortunate occurrence:

A freight car loaded with fish, took it into its head (or brake) to have some fun, and accordingly about ten minutes prior to the steamer's arrival, coolly knocked the engine and tender off the wharf into 13 feet of water. . .

Although the editor treated it rather lightly, there was nothing funny about the accident. The future of the railroad, in the form of a 9 1/2-ton locomotive, was resting on the ocean floor. The following day, a crew from Vineyard Haven, headed by C.E. Davis and Mr. Delamar (a diver), raised the engine from the ocean bottom. At 6:15 p.m., it was once again on the wharf, dripping salt water:

It was raised by immense purchases, supported by shears, the fall being hoisted by the locomotive "Puritan" of the Old Colony Railroad. . . it was deemed best to place the locomotive upon a flat and send it to Boston. . . "the Edgartown" will, in all human probability, be upon her track by Sunday night at the latest.¹⁴

Sunday, the steamer *Island Home* carried the dried-out locomotive directly to the Katama wharf where it was rolled through the gatehouse onto the main line. The next day, Monday, August 24, 1874, the railroad began operating. At the end of the week, President Erastus P. Carpenter returned from Europe, having been blissfully unaware, until then, of the trauma. The *Seaside Gazette* announced the train's schedule:

OUR RAILROAD. We take pleasure in presenting to our readers to-day the time-table of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad, according which trains began running to yesterday. The engine is fast and strong, and makes fine time. The noon train made the run from Edgartown yesterday in 17 minutes. Excursion or single tickets may be obtained from Mr. Shiverick, and through tickets to Katama are sold at all the principal ticket offices in New England. The trains yesterday were crowded, even the baggage car being filled with passengers. The officers of the train appear in uniform caps, and are very courteous and efficient. Long life to the Martha's Vineyard Railroad!

The start-up had been late. The season was nearly over.

¹⁴ "Edgartown" was the engine's name. The name "Active," which today is accepted as its name, is not mentioned in any news story. It isn't clear where it came from.

There were only two weeks of tourist trade left. During those two weeks, business was good. Trains were crowded. So curious was the public about this wondrous Iron Horse that many had to wait for the next trip to get on board. The company announced that next year more cars would be added to meet the demand.¹⁵

When the season ended, the railroad company began catching up on its paperwork, recording a total of 29 deeds in the Court House for the land it had purchased. The total recorded cost of the 29 pieces was \$3036.80.

Then, a surprising move. In November, the company's assets were attached for its failure to pay Wheelock for the dummy engine, which had proved inadequate and had been sent back. A court hearing was held and the case settled. In January, the attachment was withdrawn. The railroad was free to continue in business.¹⁶

The 1875 season began on an encouraging note. Perhaps the nation was pulling out of the depression. The Lodge at Katama, run by Henry Stumcke of Boston, a major stockholder in the railroad, was filled most of the time. Trains were loaded to capacity, at least so the *Gazette*, a leading promoter of the project, reported. To increase ridership, the Mattakeset began putting on a clambake and hop every Friday night. A Clam House had been built adjacent to the hotel. The train made an extra trip back to Oak Bluffs after the dance. On pleasant evenings, the Hop, as the dance was called, was held under the stars on the open second-floor balcony of the Lodge, within sight and sound of the pounding surf at South Beach. It was like a dream, the dancers must have thought, dancing under the stars on the shore of the Atlantic.

But clambakes and dancing under the stars didn't solve the problem. To add to the pleasures of its guests, the Lodge built a plank walk to South Beach. Still the money wasn't coming in fast enough. At a meeting in New Bedford in mid-

¹⁵ One additional passenger car was purchased in 1876, two years later.

¹⁶ In 1876, after a court battle, Wheelock paid the railroad \$2000 for income lost during the 21 days the dummy failed to perform adequately. (Hough, p.113.)

1875, the directors of the Katama Land Company voted to take out a \$25,000 mortgage, putting up their property as collateral: the wharf, the Lodge, the Clam House, the stables and sheds. They needed the money.

It wasn't that people weren't coming to the Vineyard. The crowds were far greater than expected. On Oak Bluffs's Regatta Weekend in 1875, the steamers couldn't accommodate all who wanted to come over. The editor of the *Seaside Gazette* was having second thoughts about promoting tourist business:

Nothing like it was ever known before. . . the devout wish is expressed that it may never occur again. . . At the wharf in New Bedford, thousands of people were denied admittance on board the steamboats. . . the absence of so many people was an event to be congratulated on, for it is difficult to conjecture what would have become of them if they had put in an appearance and certainly those who were already here would have found their enjoyment seriously interfered with. . . To the glory and credit of Martha's Vineyard, let it be proclaimed there was not a solitary arrest by the police during the day.

With such crowds arriving at Oak Bluffs, if Katama and the railroad were unable to make money, the future seemed dim. Like the Beach Road, the railroad was not bringing prosperity. Making five round trips a day, it was doing its part. Operational problems were minor, but it still couldn't make a profit.

On that very busy 1875 Regatta Day the railroad had its first accident:

The overturning of the dump car on the M.V.R.R. in the morning, strewing its passengers around promiscuously, caused a brief flutter of excitement though happily no one was injured.¹⁷

One week later, the newspaper, apparently overlooking the dump car accident, ran this:

THE FIRST ACCIDENT that has ever occurred on the Vineyard Railroad, happened Tuesday afternoon. The train had left here on the usual noon trip for Katama, and within a short distance of Edgartown depot, a bolt connecting the

¹⁷ The "dump" car sounds like a work car for hauling roadbed ballast. But would it have been carrying passengers?

eccentric rod of the locomotive dropped out, resulting in breaking the rod. The damage was slight, and was soon repaired, missing only one trip.

Except for those two events, the train was reliable, providing a fast, scenic ride to Katama. Seeing a train steam along the sandy beach within a few feet of the ocean, must have made onlookers marvel. Not all were enthused, however. Horse-and-buggy supporters continued to doubt, occasionally even challenging the Iron Horse:

A SPIRITED CONTEST, in which horse flesh proved its superiority, occurred Wednesday afternoon. Nickerson's trotting horse, "Oak Bluffs," started from the Sea View at the same time the afternoon train on the M.V.R.R. left for Katama. Upon reaching the point in the road where it runs parallel with the railroad, the horse and locomotive were side by side, and from this point onto the bridge the engine and horse were literally smokestacks and necks, and so near each other the driver of the former was completely enveloped in dust and cinders. The race continued to the bridge that crosses the creek with the unpronounceable name, when the horse made a spurt and passed the train. Everything was done to break up the animal, both by yells of the passengers and by blowing the whistle, but without avail.¹⁸

Of course, "Oak Bluffs" was a race horse and he was not pulling two coaches of passengers, but, even so, those on the train must have been disappointed.

Some years later, in 1884, the ride along the beach was still being marveled at, this time more philosophically:

Anybody who doesn't believe that the sight of the sea conduces to a contemplative state of mind should observe a carload of passengers on the M.V.R.R. He will find the occupants of the landward seats cackling away like a colony of geese, while those on the Sound-ward side sit oblivious of the presence of one another, their eyes fixed on the watery expanse, and an expression of countenance as though each was striving to solve for himself the problem of the whenceness of the whereunto.¹⁹

On the last August Saturday in 1875, the railroad carried more than 1800 passengers.²⁰ At 50 cents a ride,

¹⁸ *Seaside Gazette*, August 27, 1875.

¹⁹ *Cottage City Chronicle*, August 11, 1884. Whenceness? Whereunto?

²⁰ *Vineyard Gazette*, August 27, 1875.

that would have brought in over \$900. In forecasting the railroad's rosy future at the 1874 Town Meeting, Samuel Osborn had predicted that in the busiest six weeks, the railroad would average 1000 passengers a day, taking in \$12,000 during the period and making a profit of \$10,100. If there were many 1800-passenger days during August, Osborn's prediction may have been coming true.

But the facts were otherwise. At least, that's what the taxpayers believed. They were convinced the town would never get its investment back, much less receive dividends. In April 1876, at one of the largest town meetings ever convened, Moderator Joseph Thaxter Pease (also Treasurer of the Katama Land Company, of the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company and of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad) had a most unpleasant task. He had to present for a vote an article that called for selling the town's railroad shares. One week before, the railroad had announced it would extend the tracks to South Beach to increase ridership, but voters were not impressed. They were worried about their investment. Long-time opponent Ichabod Luce proposed that the town sell "at any price." Capt. Grafton Collins, a director in the railroad who had bought 20 shares, told the crowd that it would be better "to give it away than to keep it." The company was losing money and probably would never make a profit. Collins said that free tickets were being given out to make it appear successful. The railroad was averaging only 33 cents per rider, not the full price of 50 cents. It would never make a profit that way. Samuel Osborn, who had bought only five shares, argued that it was just a question of time until the railroad began paying dividends. He claimed that Old Colony Railroad wanted to buy it, proving it believed in the prospects. Luce countered, if someone wants to buy it, let's sell while we can get our money back.

Again, the vote was close. Osborn once more carried the day. The vote was against selling. It was fortunate that the vote was not taken the next day. A terrific northern gale hit the Vineyard, washing out long stretches of track. "In short,

the road, in many of its parts, is a complete wreck. Damage from \$10,000 to \$15,000.²¹

Things kept getting worse. In the summer of 1876, the railroad had to borrow money to pay operating expenses at the height of the season. For the 1877 Town Meeting, the railroad placed an article in the warrant to have the town agree to put up funds "for the floating debt of the Company," to pay interest on the bonds if the company couldn't. It was one of two articles involving the railroad. The second again called for the sale of the stock "at public auction to the highest bidder."

The vote on the first was postponed, pending action on the second.²² This time, the voters knew what they wanted. There was no oratory by Ichabod Luce or pleading by Sam Osborn. Overwhelmingly, the article passed and the Selectmen were ordered to sell the stock. A few weeks later, Antone L. Sylvia of New Bedford bought the shares at auction for \$315, shares that had cost the taxpayers \$15,000. It had been a financial disaster.²³

It had been a political disaster as well. By 1878, Cottage City's movement to secede, which had begun in 1872, was gaining strong support. Residents had requested two chemical fire engines "else some fine day we may go down in a burst of fire and smoke." Edgartown turned them down, although it voted to buy one for itself. That was too much. Cottage City, with a seasonal population of 15,000 and a permanent population of 500, saw that it was getting little for its taxes.

Fire apparatus was only one issue, schools were another. But the major argument was that Cottage City taxes were being spent to drain their income, not to increase it. The two "Great Taps," as the drain was called, were the Beach Road, which had ended up costing \$60,000, and the railroad, which cost \$15,000. Both were designed, not to help Cottage City, but to drain off its business. It was time to break away.

²¹ Vineyard Gazette, April 7, 1876.

²² Edgartown Town Records, v.6, p.173.

²³ Hough, p.122.

The *Island Review*, a Cottage City seasonal newspaper, smarting over the fire apparatus denial, editorialized: "Our Island still has her serfs, notwithstanding the fact that slavery has been abolished. . . Cottage City remains at the mercy of the flames, entirely defenceless and unarmed." In another column in the same issue, it used a lighter approach: "Cottage City mathematicians now devote more time to the study of Division than to any other of the branches."²⁴

Cottage City's much-envied prosperity was starting to crumble. The Sea View House, the cornerstone of the boom, had been losing money and was put up for sale by the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company, which was still headed, like the railroad and Katama, by Erastus Carpenter. The hotel was sold to Holder M. Brownell of New Bedford, who had been running it. The purchase price was raised by a bond issue underwritten by the Company. To make sure that Brownell met the interest payments, the Company insisted on having its cashier keep the books. He turned over \$2500 of the receipts annually to pay the interest. Even boom-town Cottage City was feeling the pinch, as the *Boston Herald* reported:

. . . though the Vineyard has been exceptional in its prosperity during these hard times. . . the Cottage City of America is yet of the earth and liable to be stagnated like other things earthy.²⁵

The advocates of secession, at a meeting in Union Chapel, pledged \$1000 to pay the expenses of the 30-man committee. There was a storm approaching, but the tourists who flocked to the Island were unaware:

Wednesday evening many took the late train from the Bluffs to Katama, sat on the sand and watched the moonbeams sparkling over the restless bosom of the far-spreading Atlantic and silvering the surf as it broke and foamed upon the beach.²⁶

As far as the vacationers were concerned, all was well in paradise. But it was not. In May 1879, despite claims of

increasing business, Mattakeset Lodge, complete with furnishings and wharf, plus several cottages and 600 acres of land, were sold at auction by the town for non-payment of taxes. In a confusing series of sales, the property went through several owners, ending up being bought in October 1879 by Henry Ripley, now living in Edgartown, for \$5333.33.²⁷

The railroad's cash-flow problems were not going away either, especially its maintenance expenses. The roadbed was deteriorating:

A hand car, with a gang of section men, has been on the road this week, examining the track and making the necessary repairs to allow the train to pass over. . . Five thousand new ties are expected, to replace those found decayed and when in position everything will be in readiness for the campaign of 1879.

The Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company, having reduced its expenses by selling the Sea View, began improving its wharf:

The two-story shed to be built over the Oak Bluffs wharf will be 20 feet in width, running from the point where the railroad track crosses the wharf to the baggage room. . . to within 50 feet of the end of the wharf and will have a highly ornamented and attractive front toward the water. The second story. . . will be an excellent place from which to see the arriving and departing boats. . . A number of gentlemen's toilet rooms are to be fitted up in the rear of the newstand for the use of the public at a trifling charge. . .²⁸

The railroad announced it had found a way to eliminate one annoying problem:

The M.V.R.R. has solved the problem so long under discussion as to how the coal dust, smoke and cinders, so obnoxious to passengers during the summer, when car windows must be open and light suits are in order, could be avoided by substituting hemlock timber for fuel.²⁹

There were other complaints about the railroad. Not all

²⁷ Ripley, you may recall, rode on the inaugural trip of the dummy engine and was listed as "Superintendent" of the railroad. He was probably buying for Laban and himself, the mortgage holders. It is most confusing to work out exactly what was going on during this period. The author makes no guarantee that his guesses are correct. He hopes they are, but welcomes correction if not.

²⁸ *Vineyard Gazette*, June 27, 1879. The ladies were out of luck.

²⁹ *Vineyard Gazette*, July 18, 1879.

²⁴ *Island Review*, August 24, 1878.

²⁵ *Boston Herald*, June 26, 1878, reprinted in *Island Review*, June 29, 1878.

²⁶ *Island Review*, August 17, 1878. Whenever a heavy surf was running, the railroad hired the Town Crier to shout the equivalent of "Surf's Up" on his rounds, encouraging riders.

Edgartown residents were pleased to have the train running through town on Sundays. Its noise shattered the serenity of the day. A group of residents complained and the railroad agreed to eliminate its Edgartown stop on Sunday and would run nonstop to Katama. How this would solve the problem is unclear. It would still huff and puff and ring its bell and sound its whistle at the town's two grade crossings. In any case, the change was short-lived. One week later, at the request of more Edgartown residents, it went back to its former schedule, resuming the Sunday stops. It's hard to please everybody, President Erastus Carpenter must have been thinking.

The divisionists' meetings in Cottage City continued, attracting more and more supporters. Mr. Ichabod N. Luce of Vineyard Highlands, who had vigorously opposed the purchase of railroad stock, once again took the floor. This time, he borrowed from the Declaration of Independence: "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary. . ." The crowd loved it, especially when he brought up the Katama Land Company: ". . . the welfare of the northern section [Cottage City] has been sacrificed in a vain effort to build up Katama."

That winter, nature landed another one of her punches. A December northeasterly gale hit the Island with fury. As usual, the railroad was hit the hardest:

The Martha's Vineyard Railroad was perhaps the greatest sufferer hereabouts from the "old fashioned gale and storm". . . Ice, and slop, and "slosh" covered the surface everywhere. The gale was the heaviest between 8 p.m. Sunday and midnight. It received more damage, it is said, than ever before. Below the Sengekontacket bridge about 700 feet of the roadbed is gone, and for 500 feet the ties or sleepers are gone. North of the bridge about 500 feet of the roadbed is gone, the ties and rails of the whole being strewn about in chaotic masses. The bulkheads on either side of the bath-houses were undermined and broken in, in a number of places; one break occurred at the south-east end of the Sea View House.³⁰

Struggling to stay solvent despite the costs brought by winter storms, the railroad continued promoting special

³⁰ Cottage City Star, December 30, 1880.

events. In August 1881, "A Grand Fox Meet" was announced at Katama:

A number of foxes will be imported for this event. . . [twenty] hounds will be brought to the island. Prizes are \$100, \$50 and \$25. The Martha's Vineyard Railroad will run a special train to the event.

Maybe things would work out. Maybe, as Sam Osborn had said, it was only a matter of time. The Mattakeset Lodge was doing better, at least so the newspapers claimed. Its 50 rooms were usually filled:

The patronage at this hotel the present season is much larger than ever before, which is sufficient proof that the superior attractions of this famous locality are becoming better known . . . an index of what the near future will most assuredly bring forth.

There was a brief moment in September 1882 when the Island thought it might be visited for the second time by a President of the United States. President Chester Arthur was cruising in a private steamer *Despatch* along the southern New England coast. If he came to the Vineyard, it would bring another flood of national publicity, as President Grant's visit had done in 1874. But he never stepped on shore:

[the *Despatch*] steamed past the Bluffs and anchored on the eastern side of the harbor [Vineyard Haven] just outside of New York landing. . . on a careful investigation we ascertained that he remained on board the *Despatch*, enjoying needed rest, and only received one or two old New York friends from the Squibnocket club.³¹

The season was over; the railroad was shut down for the winter. The *Cottage City Star* editor, sounding as though he had been one of its regular riders (probably on a few of those free tickets), wrote:

No more riding to and from Edgartown in fifteen minutes, until another season. The M.V.R.R. engine rests from all its labors. . . a successful season. The officials have won new encomiums on their courteous demeanor, and their care for the comfort of tourists.³²

But the engine had one final job before being stored for

³¹ Cottage City Star, September 21, 1882. This was the sport-fishing club.

³² Cottage City Star, September 28, 1882.

the winter. Chase Pease Jr., a former conductor and, since 1879, the Edgartown ticket agent, had died at the age of 62. The locomotive went to his funeral:

As the procession passed into the cemetery, the locomotive, which was draped in black, tolled its bell in honor of the deceased.³³

During these years, the Katama resort was being managed by W.D. Carpenter of Foxboro, the son of Erastus. Its nightly clambakes were its most popular attraction. The Lodge never seemed able to make money. The promised 250-room hotel, talked of so optimistically years earlier, was not built. The Lodge, originally to be only a "gatehouse," was attracting a few well-to-do clientele:

Mr. W.G. Raoul and family of Savannah, Georgia, have engaged rooms at Mattakeset Lodge for the summer. Mr. Raoul is president of the Georgia Central Railroad.³⁴

Cottage City, the real center of the Island summer, was doing better as the national economy turned upward. A new attraction, the Carousel (now the Flying Horses), was built on the bluff north of the wharf. It was, the newspaper said, "a building of considerable consequence."

The railroad continued operations without incident, and without profit. In 1884, a new conductor was hired, Irving Lane of Foxboro, adding to the list of workers from the home town of Erastus Carpenter. John W. Norton continued as station master at Edgartown. The news report did not mention an engineer, but did state that "the expressman's place is as yet vacant."³⁵

Erastus Carpenter, the high-flying entrepreneur, was having difficulties not related to the railroad. A lawyer, George C. Abbott of Boston, on behalf of a group of investors, had bought the streets and parks of Oak Bluffs from Carpenter's Land & Wharf Company for \$7500, intending to divide them into saleable lots. Earlier,

³³ *Ibid.* Chase's grave was next to the railroad track which ran alongside the cemetery. Even in this ceremonial context, the locomotive's name, whether "Active" or "Edgartown," was not mentioned.

³⁴ *Cottage City Star*, June 5, 1884. Being a railroad executive, no doubt he didn't pay the full rate.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Carpenter had tried to get Cottage City, now separated from Edgartown, to buy them, but the town claimed they were already public. A civil law suit resulted.³⁶

In 1885, the railroad defaulted on its debt to the Old Colony Railroad, which took over operations. It isn't clear what happened next, but it appears that Old Colony arranged for the Abbott group to buy Grafton Collins's stock and gain control of the railroad. Whatever happened, by 1889 Abbott was president of the railroad and a Joseph M. Wardwell of Bristol, Rhode Island, was treasurer and general manager. Soon, Wardwell bought the railroad. Five years later, he bought the Katama operation, owning both Katama and the railroad. But the ownership was confused. Even the *Gazette* wasn't sure who owned the railroad:

SALE OF KATAMA: Messrs. Henry Ripley, of Edgartown, and Laban Pratt, of Boston, as trustees last Thursday (17th) sold the Katama property to Joseph M. Wardwell, Esq., formerly of Bristol, R.I., and at present the manager, and apparent owner of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad. The purchase price of the property is said to be \$15,000. The property conveyed consists of an hotel of 50 rooms and furnishings, wharf, two nine-room cottages, etc., and about 600 acres of land already laid out in lots, avenues and parks.³⁷

The county records indicate that it was not until 1892 that Old Colony turned the railroad over to Wardwell, giving him a mortgage for \$26,000. He is, indeed, a mystery figure in these dealings. His purchases of Katama and the railroad were both financed by sellers' mortgages. Two years earlier, Wardwell had bought a house in Edgartown from Charlotte S. Coffin, also investing little of his own money. Miss Coffin gave him a two-year mortgage of \$1250, which covered most of the selling price. It isn't clear who was behind Mr. Wardwell's financial maneuvers. The series of transactions is bewildering to this writer, who warns the reader that this summary is, at best, an uneducated guess.³⁸

³⁶ *The Cottage City Park Case* fills a volume of more than 1000 pages in the Society library. The editor would be pleased if some one would interpret it.

³⁷ *Vineyard Gazette*, July 25, 1890.

³⁸ *M.V.R.R. Journal* (1890-1895), DCHS, shows J.M. Wardwell withdrawing cash regularly. He withdrew \$1420 during July and August 1892. In 1893, he withdrew nothing. In 1894,

Under the ownership of Wardwell (or whoever was backing him), the Mattakeset Lodge made renewed efforts to increase business. It began advertising that it had gas lights and call bells in every room, a tennis court, bowling alleys and billiard hall. Guests were provided with bath houses on the bay beach without extra charge. Rates were \$2.50 a day, meals included; by the week, from \$10 to \$17.

At the conclusion of the 1892 season, on September 24, the huge Sea View House in Oak Bluffs burned to the ground. Viewing the blaze was the Hon. Erastus P. Carpenter who had arrived on the Vineyard that afternoon.³⁹ It, like Mattakeset Lodge and other large Vineyard hotels, had been having financial problems and insurance fraud was suspected. Also destroyed in the fire was considerable railroad property. Gone were the ticket office, the track trestle along the beach and considerable trackage, including the wharf area with the wye track on which the locomotive turned around for its return to Edgartown. With the beach trestle gone, trains could no longer pick up passengers on the wharf. When the season opened in 1893, the Oak Bluffs terminus was moved to the base of the Bathing Tower, requiring steamer passengers to walk several hundred yards to board the train.

An M.V.R.R. "Journal" in the Society archives covering the years 1890 to 1895 makes no mention of the fire, but does show a sharp drop in cash flow after it. The drop may have been partly due to the national economy. The nation was once again in depression, the Panic of 1893. Railroads were especially hard hit, having gone deeply in debt by excessive expansion; seventy-four railroads went into receivership. The Vineyard railroad had a sharp decline in cash flow, as these annual totals indicate:

1890: \$7360.55	1893: \$4643.01
1891: \$7347.25	1894: Pages for year torn out
1892: \$8344.74	1895: \$4575.28 ⁴⁰

the record is missing. In 1895, he withdrew \$1086.33. As a comparison, Fireman H.R. Luce's wages were \$42 a month.

³⁹ Hough, p.213.

⁴⁰ M.V.R.R. Journal. It would be interesting to know why the 1894 pages were torn out.

Despite its cash-flow problem, the railroad limped along, with high maintenance costs continuing. In June 1894, the railroad bridge at Sengekontacket had to be rebuilt. The Katama Land Company was going through another upheaval. Wardwell had defaulted on the mortgage and the property was taken over at public auction by Old Colony Railroad. The price paid was \$7200, a bargain. The Lodge alone had cost \$30,000 to build. Among the cottages sold was the one built for the Hon. Erastus P. Carpenter, the grand entrepreneur, who had moved to Nantucket. There, he built the Sea Cliff Inn, which was managed by Will, his son, one-time manager at Mattakeset.⁴¹

The burned-out trestle to the Oak Bluffs wharf had been rebuilt, but apparently the wye track was never replaced. The charred ruins of the Sea View House and the old skating rink still greeted arriving steamer passengers. The editor of the *Martha's Vineyard Herald* was upset:

[The town must] fill up the cellar of the old Sea View. . . and remove the ruins of the rink . . . Picturesque ruins are well enough . . . in the eternal city, but [these] will never strike the sober tourist as being that sort of remains. Let's bury them.⁴²

Things were no better in Edgartown. When the 1895 summer season opened, Beriah T. Hillman, who later became first president of the Edgartown National Bank, wrote to the *Gazette*, complaining about the unsightly appearance of Edgartown harbor:

. . . wharves that have fallen into disuse and decay, tumble-down buildings, and more or less general debris . . . The business that was once done at our wharves is gone . . . Why not clear the water front of this rubbish?⁴³

Other vehicles challenged the Iron Horse:

. . . a wheelman left Edgartown station one day last week at the same minute with the railroad train and when the latter arrived at the Cottage City wharf the cyclist had been on the dock three minutes, having covered the nearly six miles in nineteen minutes. Of course, if the engineer had been aware of the contestant he would possibly have bettered his time by four or five minutes.

⁴¹ Hough, p.262.

⁴² *Martha's Vineyard Herald*, September 6, 1894.

⁴³ *Vineyard Gazette*, June 4, 1895.

For the 1895 season, the train stopped making regular trips to Katama. The published timetable of the year stated: "Special excursions to Katama and South Beach when called for." It was signed by J.M. Wardwell, General Manager. The train's schedule now listed stops only at Cottage City and Edgartown. Katama, which had been the reason for building the railroad, no longer attracted enough riders to warrant regular service.

That summer of 1895 brought a temporary change in ridership. The America's Cup boats and the New York Yacht Club were in Vineyard waters, sailing out of Vineyard Haven. The traffic flow was reversed. Instead of riders heading to Edgartown from Cottage City, large numbers of them rode westward from Edgartown to watch the huge boats sail off the Chop. So large were the crowds that special trips had to be added to the schedule. But that was only a brief flurry of business. Money was still scarce and the equipment was wearing out. The *Gazette* had given up on the steam railroad:

The sentiment is growing daily in town that we should have better and more reliable transportation facilities for connecting with the steamers at Cottage City. Every time that communications by rail is suddenly shut off, as has occurred this week, and hundreds of visitors with their luggage are put to all sorts of anxiety, inconvenience and expense in making a start for their homes, the town receives a black eye. . . before another season, all this must be changed if Edgartown is to hold her place in the list of growing summer resorts. The *Gazette* has no disposition to lightly disparage the management of our railroad. It is probable that in his light he [Wardwell] had done the best he could with the means at hand. . . if the steam road owner or owners cannot or will not put their property in fair and proper condition, our citizens have a remedy, and the end will be the electrics, which company with its low fares and frequent trips, would be heartily welcomed.⁴⁴

A few days later, on the afternoon of September 9, 1895, another accident occurred. It was the last straw:

TRAIN DISABLED. The two o'clock train from Edgartown

for Cottage City, Tuesday afternoon, having a large complement of passengers and baggage on board, came to a thumping standstill about 1 1/2 miles this side of Cottage City, caused by the tender leaving the track owing to spreading rails. Teams were immediately summoned from the Bluffs and the passengers and their baggage were successful in embarking on the 3 o'clock steamer which courteously waited some 15 or 20 minutes for them.

The running gear of the tender was considerably damaged, and the train laid in the night on the road, but by Wednesday the men, by blocking, got the tender into condition to run the train slowly back to Edgartown, where it will necessarily be obliged to lay up for a week or ten days at least, and it is doubtful if she runs again this season, as Manager Wardwell is absent from the Island and his whereabouts uncertain.⁴⁵

It is but fair to state that Conductor Maynard, Engineer Luce and the other train men are entitled to much credit for the manner in which they have surmounted many obstacles in the running of the train this summer, having worked night after night far into the morning and used no end of expedients in their efforts to keep the train at its work.

Communications with Cottage City is now by team, which in pleasant weather is an enjoyable trip, but the opposite in stormy times, and always an unsatisfactory mode as regards baggage and freight.

Meantime all hands are wishing for the ELECTRICS.⁴⁶

The Martha's Vineyard Railroad never did resume operations. Wardwell, whomever he represented, seems to have vanished. At a public sale in the court house on October 17, 1895, Beriah T. Hillman and William M. Butler bought Wardwell's remaining interest in the railroad for \$50, the amount of the court costs. The dreams of Sam Osborn and Nathaniel Jernegan of prosperity at Katama had vanished.

But the *Gazette* had its eye on a new savior for Edgartown. It was urging the new electric railway that ran

⁴⁵ *Vineyard Gazette*, September 12, 1895. Wardwell may have been off Island on Sept. 12, but the M.V.R.R. Journal has him withdrawing \$35 on Sept. 10, and \$18.33 on Sept. 13, the final entry in the book. The odd number may indicate that he was emptying the cash drawer for the last time.

⁴⁶ *Vineyard Gazette*, September 12, 1895. "Electrics" were on the Island as a street railway from Cottage City to Vineyard Haven. In the M.V.R.R. Journal there is this entry, September 10, 1895: "Expense, To Transportation (Wreck) \$17.00."

⁴⁴ *Vineyard Gazette*, September 5, 1895.

from Oak Bluffs to Vineyard Haven to take over the steam trackage. It still had hope in the Katama dream:

An unconfirmed rumor has it that if the Cottage City Electric Railway Company are successful this fall in purchasing the M.V.R.R., that next season the Old Colony Railroad will proceed to develop its properties at Katama. . .that the elegant Mattakeset Lodge will be reopened, the wharf, or a portion of it, will be put in thorough repair and that building lots will be put upon the market. . .electric cars will run frequently from West Chop, through Vineyard Haven, Cottage City and Edgartown to Katama and South Beach.

Katama. . . is one of the loveliest spots on the whole Vineyard and rightly pushed, as can be done by the Old Colony Railroad, might become a veritable bonanza to its owners.⁴⁷

The editor published a bold call for action in the next issue of his weekly:

EDGARTOWN'S
FIRST GREAT WANT:
Electric Cars
To
Cottage City!

That same issue advertised the end of the steam railroad:

SHERIFF'S SALE
Public Auction of Martha's
Vineyard Railroad
October 31, 1895, 9 a.m.
County Court House⁴⁸

Four years later, the *Gazette* was still promoting the electric railway, seeing hope where little or none existed. A news story in 1899 made it seem almost a certainty:

ELECTRIC ROAD

The latest indications are that the line between Edgartown and Cottage City will be built and in operation by August 1st. A vessel has arrived at Cottage City with 80 poles and 3000 ties, and another is reported on the way with 5000 ties and more poles and material.

⁴⁷ *Vineyard Gazette*, September 19, 1895.

⁴⁸ *Vineyard Gazette*, September 26, 1895. The M.V.R.R. Journal shows in this final year its employees were (listed in order of frequency of payment): Henry Luce, W.H. Luce, E.A. Maynard, Lyman Smith, H.O. Adlington, E.M. Luce, John Swarz, Enos Pierce, A. Teller, Geo. Briggs. They were paid several times a week, as though the cash was scarce. Wardwell was withdrawing large sums regularly during this period. No job descriptions are given.

It sounded like the 1874 Town Meeting all over again. But this time there was no Sam Osborn and Nathaniel Jernegan to do the persuading. Both had died years before, unaware of the disaster that had befallen both Katama and the railroad.

The railroad's buildings and tracks fell into disrepair. Only the locomotive was being maintained, apparently stored in the engine house behind the Edgartown depot. The cars were sold, probably for farm sheds. The nine miles of track were being salvaged and shipped off-Island. The *Gazette*, still carrying its dream of the "electrics," was worried:

A force of men is at work taking up the iron of the Martha's Vineyard Railroad, which, it is reported, will be shipped away. Just what bearing, if any, this move has on an electric railway building here in the future is a question which is now being considered.⁴⁹

That same year, in the office of a Boston lawyer, the final sale took place:

J.L. Nason & Company report the sale at auction of the entire franchise of the [Martha's Vineyard] railroad company, by order of the Old Colony Railroad Company, mortgagees. The sale took place at the office of Col. J.H. Benton in Boston, and Collins M. Ingersoll was the purchaser, who bought for the interested parties, who will at once take possession.⁵⁰

Among the items the purchaser took possession of was the locomotive, now nearly forgotten in the engine house. In May 1900, the editor of the *Gazette*, looking out his second-floor window at Edgartown's Four Corners, witnessed a surprising scene:

. . . a locomotive traversing Main Street under its own steam. The locomotive. . . is now on Chadwick's wharf awaiting transportation to Boston. . . James E. Chadwick was in charge . . . shifting sections of track. . . laid in 3-rod lengths.⁵¹

Again, in this farewell story to the faithful locomotive, there is no mention of its name. But whether it was "Active" or "Edgartown," it made no difference now. Under its final head of Vineyard steam, the tiny engine chugged slowly

⁴⁹ *Vineyard Gazette*, October 5, 1899.

⁵⁰ *Boston Herald*, June 16, 1899, reprinted *Vineyard Gazette*, June 23, 1899.

⁵¹ *Vineyard Gazette*, May 17, 1900.

down to Chadwick's wharf for its trip to the mainland. The Iron Horse's Island romance had ended.

No doubt it was mere coincidence, but two months later, the *Gazette* reported,

The horseless carriage is here. The first to appear is the locomobile of Mr. Elmer J. Bliss of the Regal Shoe Company, who brought this vehicle down from Boston Saturday night.⁵²

That winter, "Harlan C. Chadwick. . . purchased the station at the South Beach, formerly the terminus of the Martha's Vineyard railroad and will have it transported to the Chappaquiddic bathing beach, where it will be utilized next season as a pavilion."⁵³

In the fall of 1905, when Mattakeset Lodge was closed for the season, it turned out to be forever. For the next years, a Sunday afternoon adventure for many Edgartown young people was to wander through its empty rooms and climb its balconies. Vandals tore out pipes and broke windows. In 1910, one section of the building was moved to Starbuck Neck to become an annex to the town's remaining grand hotel, the Harbor View. Another section, a two-story ell, housing the laundry and furnace rooms, was moved to upper Main Street where today it is the office of the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank.

These two bold enterprises that had promised so much, the Katama Land Company and the Martha's Vineyard Railroad, quietly disappeared from the landscape. Katama's memorial is those two buildings, both serving useful lives. But the railroad has been lost to history. All that remains are a locomotive headlight, now on display at the Society, and a few strips of roadbed hidden in underbrush.

⁵² *Vineyard Gazette*, August 9, 1900.

⁵³ *Martha's Vineyard Herald*, January 17, 1901.

Original Investors and Incorporators in the Railroad

		Amount Invested	Shares Bought
Town of Edgartown	Edgartown	\$15,000	150
J. B. Dacey & Company*	Boston	7000	70
E. P. Carpenter	Foxboro	2000	20
Laban Pratt	Boston	2000	20
Nathaniel M. Jernegan	Edgartown	2000	20
Grafton N. Collins	Edgartown	2000	20
Henry Ripley	New Bedford	2000	20
Henry Stumcke**	Boston	1000	10
J. S. Shepard	Canton	1000	10
Joel H. Hills	Newton	1000	10
S. L. Minot	Boston	1000	10
Samuel Osborn Jr.	Edgartown	500	5
Shubael L. Norton	Edgartown	500	5
William Lewis	New Bedford	500	5
J. K. Baker	Dennis Port	500	5
E. Carpenter & Co.	Foxboro	500	5
Hewins & Co. Express	Oak Bluffs	300	3
W. R. Wing	New Bedford	200	2
Nicholas Norton	Edgartown	200	2
William P. Chadwick	Edgartown	200	2
John B. Worth	Edgartown	100	1
Lewis W. Spaulding	Boston	100	1
Henry C. Daniels	Boston	100	1
Hosea Hyde	Boston	100	1
J. E. Hills	Newton	100	1
C. S. Johnson	Newton	100	1
Totals:		\$40,000	400

Edgartown incorporators who bought no shares:

Richard Holley	William W. Lewis
Jared Jernegan	Edgar Marchant
John O. Norton	H. Smith
Z. A. Tilton	William Bradley
J. H. Munroe	H. H. Davis
J. W. Donaldson	John Pierce
Thomas C. Worth	

Non-Edgartown incorporators without shares:

W. R. Wing, New Bedford
Henry L. Whiting, Tisbury

Courtesy, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

* Builders of the railroad. ** Mattakeset Lodge manager.

Documents

A Running Account Of Matter & Things

by HENRY BAYLIES

More troubles come to Henry Baylies and his dear Hattie during this installment. But he rarely complains. Her pregnancy, which came as such a surprise to us in the previous installment, ends with a miscarriage. Her health continues to be the major topic and his descriptions of her difficulties are surprisingly frank, given the era and the place: Victorian New England.

For those who are reading this journal for the first time, a brief word about Henry Baylies (1822-1893). He was born in Edgartown, graduated from Wesleyan College in 1846, became a Methodist minister, briefly serving a parish in Somers, Connecticut, which he was forced to give up because of a throat ailment that limited his capacity to sermonize.

Moving back to the Vineyard, he became headmaster at the Dukes County Academy in West Tisbury, serving for about a year. The Academy has closed down because of declining enrollment caused, in part, by the opening of a public high school in Edgartown. Henry was hired as the first headmaster of that new high school. It is the first public high school on the Island. His wife's illness is making his first term difficult, as he is frequently forced to stay home to nurse her.

Dearest Harriette, as he usually calls her, is Henry's second wife. She is from Providence. His first wife, Hannah, a

New Bedford native, died of consumption during the second year of their marriage. At the time of this installment, Henry is 28 years old, Harriette is 26.

The first entry is continued from the installment published in the May issue:

Friday, June 14, 1850 (Continued). To return to her health: Tuesday & Wednesday, there was little apparent change in her situation. Intense & continued pain even to distraction was her lot. Oh, the agony of seeing a dear one suffer so! I am rather at loss to know which suffers most, the wife who is racked with bodily pain, or the husband whose mind is tortured with anxiety & whose heart bleeds with anguish.

Wednesday P.M. I had Dr. Ruggles of H. Hole sent for. When he arrived she was under the influence of Opium & so relieved from her excruciating agonies. Tuesday night, Miss Harriette Fisher watched with Hattie & was up two or three times during the night. Wednesday night, H. being under the influence of opiates, wishes me to retire with her. I did so & she rested quite comfortably during the night. We took precaution to have proper watchers at bidding.

Thursday morning, June 13, at about 6 o'clock, without any pain she began flowing. Sister John Linton was immediately called.¹ Means were used to check but to no purpose. She continued flowing very slightly without

¹Mrs. John Linton (Sophronia) was a midwife, it would seem.

pain till about 11 o'clock. The foetus was discharged so easily that she was insensible of it. We prematurely became the parents of a plump, perfectly formed little boy of perhaps three & a half months. Dr. Ruggles came down during the P.M., expressed much sympathy with us, said if she had continued longer she would not have [been] able to carry it through & perhaps another month would mean death to both.

Dearest H. felt exceedingly disappointed at the loss, especially as it was a boy.² I confess I felt for the moment quite disappointed but remembering this was consecrated especially to God & that He has told me that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. I felt submissive to His will.

I think I see already what I did not see before that this may be very well for us both. The Lord knows & I'll trust Him. Dear wife likewise feels resigned to this Providential disappointment or dispensation. Strange to say, we both feel quite a strong attachment for this little thing. The immediate cause of this miscarriage was fright, etc., sudden start on my being called up by Father a week ago last Friday (May 31) night because of mother's severe sickness. H. immediately felt very unpleasant & menacing sensations, but did not mention anything of it to me till today. Prudence demanded she should have told me & had especial attention paid to the difficulty. By this I mean no reflection.

²How attitudes have changed! This sexist comment would be totally out of place today. Henry must have thought he was fated to follow the experience of his parents, who lost six of their seven children during the first year of their lives.

Concealing her feelings, etc., has not infrequently brought her to unpleasant results & yet this very concealing which so often brings its own punishment & sorrow sometimes to us both, is a desire to save me from unpleasant cares & anxieties. Harriette is a darling wife, as free from faults as human being can be. I love her as my own Soul & the disappointment of this loss does not in the least diminish my love for her.

Perhaps one other hurrying cause of this Mis[carriage] was, as she has in her delirium said & reaffirmed in her sane moments, she last week wrote "only about fifty pages of a Memoir of Hannah." I should think this enough of itself to produce such a result.³

Harriette remained very comfortable yesterday (Thursday) till she was distressed & thrown into spasms by a small piece of unsoaked or improperly soaked soda cracker. She found no relief from 4 1/2 till 10 1/2 o'clock. How frail we are! How fearfully & wonderfully made!

Sister Josephine P. Fisher watched with her last night. She rested very comfortably. She remained very comfortable today till 11 o'clock when the operation of phlebotomy produced considerable suffering - more than yesterday A.M. After running "hither & yon" I at length about noon obtained Mrs.(Wd.)Eliza Connolly to take care of H. this P.M.⁴

³This calls for a psychiatrist's analysis, not an editor's! Hannah, Henry's first wife who died after two years of marriage, seemingly was always in Harriet's mind.

⁴Phlebotomy was the medical term for "bleeding," a treatment that Harriette was given regularly. Eliza Connolly was probably Louisa A. Connolly, widowed daughter of Thomas Norton, deceased.

H. has felt, she says, better than a fortnight. During her severe sickness in her sane moments, which however were only occasional, her confidence in the God of all grace & consolation was firm, unshaken. She was happy & all ready to depart. Yet it seems rather strange that during her hours of delirium, religious principles or appeals appeared to possess little or no control over her. It requires in me but little grace to attend upon & take care of dearest H. when she is sane & so happy as she always then is, but when reason is dethroned & the mind so wanders from its usual course of thought & expression it requires more grace than under almost any other conceivable circumstances. Without a firm trust in God I could not take care of a delirious wife. I could take care of a stranger or one not so nearly related to me probably, but not a wife. My own health has suffered considerably from the week's labours & anxieties yet I shall recruit, I trust, by Monday.

It has doubtless been quite a disappointment to the many pupils under my charge that I have been obliged to discontinue the school during the week yet I am assured by the committee & others that no blame is attached to my course.⁵ Of course not! The first week records a sorry chapter & yet on reflection I find much to demand my deepest gratitude. When I feared that which has been realized I also seriously feared dearest wife would be mine in this world no longer. I scarcely entertained a thought she would be spared ~~through~~ [crossed out] in such delicate health through such a critical period yet

⁵The new High School was limping to a start.

the Lord has spared her. On opening "Clarke [?] on the Promises" during a part of this critical period my eye first lighted on this promise which I read to H. & which we both partially at least claimed: "Come & let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn & he will heal us; He hath smitten & he will bind us up."

Saturday, June 15, 1850. Today, dearest wife has been very comfortable. The promise is she will be quite well very soon if nothing evil occurs. My own health today has been rather miserable - violent headache, languor, etc. Have been quite busy all day about sundry things. Rec'd a letter from Rev. Bro. Talbot requesting me to supply his pulpit three or four Sabbaths, commencing the last Sabbath in this month. I replied to him that the state of my health & circumstances entirely precludes the possibility of my doing so. I regret it as Br. T. has ever shown himself a kind friend to me & mine.⁶

Began a letter to Rev. Bro. Gould. Have this evening been conversing with Dr. Pierce relative to my studying medicine. He thinks the proposition feasible & I am inclined to think I shall take no detriment from studying myself & my kind. I have taken home Paxton's *Anatomy*, which I design to read. I must give the subject careful consideration & act in accordance with reason & the teachings of the Holy Spirit - and now, tired & almost sick, I must lay me down to sleep & pray the Lord my soul to keep.

Thursday, June 20, 1850. Sabbath

⁶Rev. Micah J. Talbot was pastor of the North Shore Methodist Church (Lambert's Cove).

last, attended church P.M. & listened to the best discourse I have heard from Bro. Titus from text, "Thou not beside thyself, much healing hast made the mind." [?] Monday, no school, busy about sundry things. Father left for Boston to purchase goods.⁷ Tuesday, school. A Mr. Tuck, formerly a Teacher in Gloucester, visited the school in the P.M. in company with D[avid] Davis Esq., & Editor E[dgar] Marchant [of the *Gazette*]. In some remarks by Mr. Tuck he took occasion to pass the following complement upon the school: "Of the many schools he had visited in the state during the last three months this school appeared the best, the most interested & promised more than any." I suspected a compliment so flattering could hardly be ment [sic] but afterward learned it was ment.⁸ Wednesday, at school. The compositions & declamations of the P.M. occasioned some diffulcty [sic]. The misses were all, save one, prepared with their compositions. All the masters with declamations or compositions except Charles Norton. John A. Pease had his compo. written but refused to read it. I expostulated with him but to no purpose when I gave him choice to read it or leave the school. He left the room in great rage tearing his composition as he passed ~~from the room~~ [crossed out] out.⁹

⁷Frederick Baylies Jr., Henry's father, ran a general store on Main St. He was also a carpenter, designer and builder of Edgartown's four 19th century churches.

⁸Mr. Tuck may have "ment" the compliment, but Mr. Marchant didn't think enough of it to publish it in the *Gazette*. There is no mention of Tuck's visit or, in fact, of Baylies taking over the High School.

⁹Charles Norton was the son of Nicholas and

Immediately, Charles Cleveland arose & took his hat to leave. I ordered him to stop & come to the platform. He unexpectedly, to me, complied when I gave him a short pointed lecture & sent him to his seat, but he took his hat & left. ~~Master~~ [crossed out] Charles Norton was not prepared on Comp. or Decl. I called him with his Reader to me but he refused to take it & come. I gave him ample time, when he still refusing I told him to take his choice or leave. He left & thus I was delivered of three of the most difficult, hardest, cases in school.¹⁰

The Committee visited me in the evening & expressed their perfect satisfaction with my course in every particular & encouraged me to persevere in the same course of discipline. Popular opinion is so far as I can learn in my favor. My school approves entirely my course & even the boys themselves, Pease & Cleveland, told some of the misses they were ashamed of themselves before they got outdoors.

I exceedingly dislike such encounters, but if they must come in the discharge of duty I am ready to meet them & preserve my rights inviolate. One object of the Committee's visit was to see if I would receive Pease, who had already made an application to them for a return to the school. I consented on

Mary M. Norton. The 1850 Census lists Nicholas as "Farmer." Charles, 16 years old, is listed in August 1850 by the Census Marshal as "Mariner," so he must have quit school soon after this incident. Young Pease had previously refused to make a declamation (see May 1995 *Intelligencer*).

¹⁰Charles W. Cleveland, 18 years old, son of Charles and Eliza Cleveland, also is listed as "Mariner" in the August 1850 Census.

condition he should begin just where he left off.

Today (Thursday) the school has passed along very pleasantly. Father returned this P.M. from Boston. He says yesterday the heat in Boston was intolerable & this morning at 7 o'clock the thermometer was at 89 degrees. Here it was very comfortable & the even quite cool.¹¹

Dearest Harriette has been improving very fast this week. Today, she has dressed herself & set up considerably. She appears very happy & much better contented here than before her sickness & thinks if she enjoyed health she should prefer living here to any place she knows of. What changes a peculiar state induces. My own health is rather improving by rest amid the labors of the school room. Physical labor I can not endure, mental labor I can. It is the Physical part of the ministerial labor that injures me more than all the rest.

Tuesday, June 25, 1850. This has been to me a day of severe trial. This morning, Masters Pease & Norton returned to the school with certificates from the Committee requesting me to admit them on condition they complied with my regulations. At the closing of school I received their certificates whereupon I asked them if they were willing to comply with my requirements & commence just where they left off. They both answered "No!" I returned them their certificates & told them I could not then receive them back & they left. I have been obliged

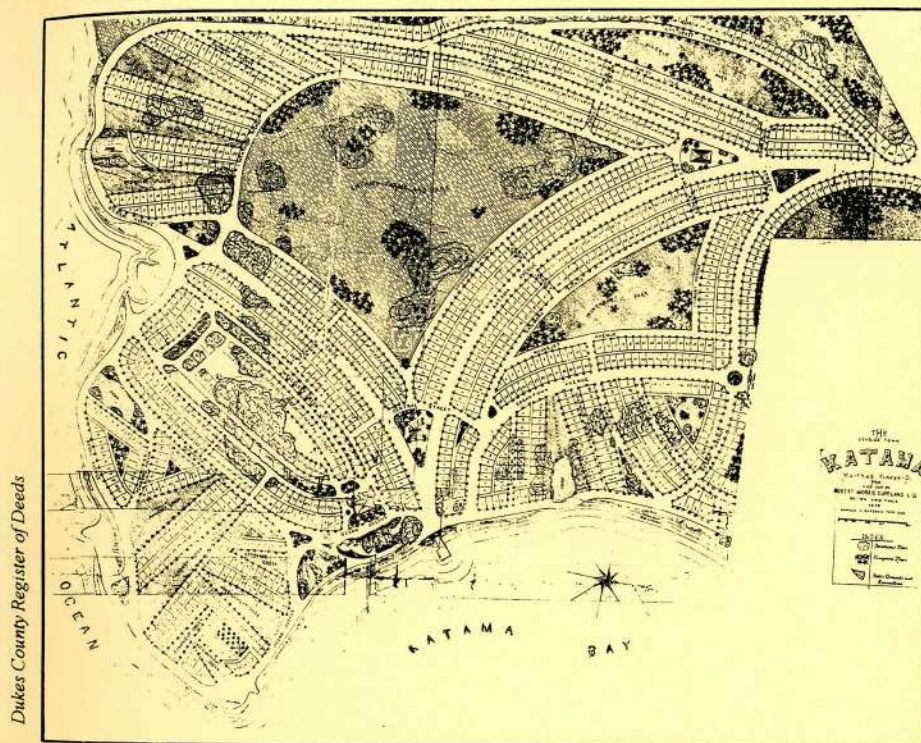
¹¹In a world of change, there is still stability! On the day the editor is transcribing this (June 1) it is 90 degrees in Boston and "very comfortable" on the Vineyard.

today to make some (for me) pretty severe remarks & rebukes to some of the school.

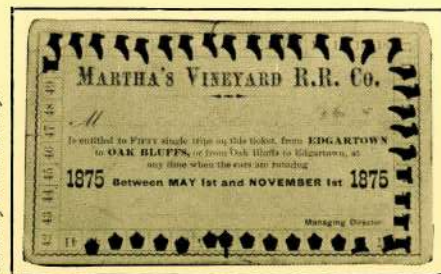
Dearest Wife has been quite ill. Her nervous system has been very much shattered & to add to the difficulty, just after she [seemed ?] to recover a little, she, in attempting to reach a vessel, fell headlong from the bed & struck the top of her head, considerably injuring the nerves. This is not yet well. Her lungs too have been very bad for a few days. Altogether, she has not been quite self, yesterday & today - a little lost. Today, she has been talking strongly of going home tomorrow & has actually packed her trunk in part, preparatory. I perceived on looking around she has been quite busy in placing things in order. Not being fully aware of her outness [?], I have suffered myself to be exceedingly oppressed in my spirits today so as almost to make myself sick. This on the whole has been a day of exceeding perplexity & sorrow.

This eve she was attacked violently with diarrhea, which however seems to be somewhat checked. When her nerves are so affected, she is exceedingly unhappy - at other times apparently one of the happiest of persons. Poor girl. I pity her in her afflictions. The Dr. says it would be well for her to take an excursion. I would gladly accompany her anywhere it would be best for her to go. And here I am perplexed. I am engaged in this school. How can I be relieved? And this is but one of many kindred difficulties. Oh, Lord, assist me. Guide me that I may do right. I feel, painfully feel, that I am insufficient for those things. O, Father, direct my steps for Jesus' sake, Amen.

The Seaside Town of Katama, a Promoter's Dream in 1872



In 1872, two years before the railroad was proposed, this plan of Katama was drawn by Robert Morris Copeland containing hundreds of house lots. See back cover for location.



Courtesy Frank McKay.

Fifty-ride ticket on the Vineyard Railroad in 1875. Nine of the rides were not used.

ROUTE OF THE RAILROAD

After following the shore from Oak Bluffs, the track ran along the sands of the barrier beach (now State Beach), across today's Edgartown Golf Course, to the Depot on Main Street, near the County Jail, then along the west side of the cemetery, heading south to Katama and South Beach. The entire train was turned around on the wye track near Mattakeset Lodge before making a return run to Oak Bluffs.

