



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 39, NO. 1

AUGUST 1997



Milk bottle cap from Seven Gates Farm, a high-quality milk producer in the early 1900s

History  
of  
Dairy Farming  
on  
Martha's  
Vineyard  
by  
CLYDE L.  
MacKENZIE Jr.

"Parson" Thaxter, Chaplain  
And Poet of the Revolution  
by REV. JOSEPH THAXTER

*Documents:*  
A Running Account  
Of Matters & Things  
by Henry Baylies

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## AMPLIFICATION

Dear Editor:

In your fascinating article on the Edgartown Lyceum (*Intelligencer*, May 1997), you asked for reader help in identifying certain references.

Mrs. E. Oakes Smith (p. 182) is Elizabeth Oakes Smith (1806-1893), a prominent feminist author and one of the first women to lecture before lyceums. She knew the leading reformers and Transcendentalists of the day, wrote for the *New York Tribune*, and, with her husband, Seba Smith, edited *Emerson's Magazine* and *Putnam's Monthly*.

"Animal Magnetism" (p. 183) was a pseudoscience that, in the U.S., had pretty much degenerated into a form of hypnotism. The name derives from *Reflections and Discovery of Animal Magnetism* (1779) by Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (hence the term *mesmerism*), who believed that regulating magnetic currents in the body is essential to maintaining health. (In this context it's hard to believe that the Lyceum record is meant to be sarcastic (fn 7, p. 183) in describing the Rev. LaRoy Sunderland as putting some of the audience "in a magnetic state without leaving the desk." Sunderland, an ardent abolitionist, had the reputation of being one of Methodism's most eloquent preachers. After 1840, he became interested in mesmerism -- a matter of controversy in his denomination, but evidently a practice at which he excelled!

The "Dr. Alcott" who spoke in 1851 (pp. 183-84) would have been William Andrus Alcott (1798-1859), cousin of transcendentalist Bronson Alcott, the father of Louisa May, author (*Little Women*, etc.) and a prominent proponent of vegetarianism and other health reforms.

Thanks for your good work!

Wesley T. Mott, Secretary

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Oak Bluffs

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Editor: Arthur R. Railton

Founding Editor: Gale Huntington (1959--1977)

*The Dukes County Intelligencer* is published quarterly by the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society (formerly the Dukes County Historical Society). Subscription is by membership in the Society. Copies of all issues may be purchased at the Society's library, Cooke and School Streets, Edgartown, Massachusetts.

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The Martha's Vineyard Historical Society was founded in 1922 as the Dukes County Historical Society. The name was changed by vote of the members at the annual meeting in Edgartown, August 1996. A non-profit institution, it is supported entirely by membership dues, contributions and bequests. Its purpose is to preserve and publish the history of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands.

The Society maintains the Thomas Cooke House, circa 1763, a house museum of Island history, open to the public from mid-June to mid-September. Open all year on the Society's grounds at Cooke and School Streets, Edgartown, are the Francis Foster Gallery, the Capt. Francis Pease House and the Gale Huntington Library of History, as are the Gay Head Lighthouse exhibit with its 1854 Fresnel lens and the Carriage Shed containing an 1854 Button fire engine and many 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 fee. Research assistance is provided at the Gale Huntington Library.

You are invited to join the Society. With membership you will receive this journal four times a year. For information, write to the Society, P. O. Box 827, Edgartown, MA 02539.



## History of Dairy Farming On Martha's Vineyard

by CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr.

*Vineyard tradition has it that years ago its men were all mariners, braving the seas chasing whales. In fact, most Vineyarders grew up closer to the soil than to the ocean. Few histories have documented this fact. Clyde L. MacKenzie, most of whose previous contributions to these pages were related to the sea, sets forth here the little-known story of dairy farming, the Island's major occupation until recent years.*

During the first half of this century, dairy farms occupied about half the land area of Martha's Vineyard and supplied all the milk, cream, most of the eggs and some of the meat consumed by Island residents, both year-round and summer. The number of cows on individual farms ranged from one to 30 or more. In addition to cows, there were oxen, horses, hens, pigs, sometimes geese, turkeys, ducks and goats, plus, of course, cats and dogs.

Early history of dairy farms is scant. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, "a farmer in Pennsylvania," published *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1783 and one of his letters contains a description of Martha's Vineyard. A reader gets the impression that the author did not make a thorough survey of the Island himself, but got his information from Col. Beriah Norton and "Dr. Mahew," whom he thanked for their "hospitable treatment." Here are excerpts from the letter that are related to farming:

Edgar [town] is the best sea-port. . . as its soil is light and sandy, many of its inhabitants follow the example of the people of Nantucket [and go whaling]. . . Chilmark has no good harbour, but the land is excellent and no way inferior to any on the continent: it contains excellent pastures. . . The town of Tisbury is remarkable for the excellence of its timber, and has a harbour where the water is deep enough for ships of the line. The

CLYDE L. MacKENZIE Jr., is a Vineyard native and a frequent contributor to these pages. He grew up in Edgartown next to the Arthur Norton dairy farm and as a teenager worked on the Edward T. Vincent dairy farm and the Katama dairy farm managed by Elisha Smith.



flock of the Island is 20,000 sheep, 2000 neat cattle, besides horses and goats. . .<sup>1</sup>

A second account of farming on the Vineyard was written only a few years later by Dr. William Baylies of Dighton. He and Rev. Samuel West of Dartmouth traveled to Gay Head in 1786 at the request of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences "to examine the mineral productions of Gay Head." In Baylies's account there is the following:

The Indians inhabiting this part [Gay Head], when lately numbered, amounted to two hundred and three. The land produced Indian corn, rye, potatoes, peas, flax and beans; but in small quantities, since the British General Gray [sic] deprived them of their sheep, which animal greatly enriched their soil. They now had recourse to the whites, on the east end of the Island, for a supply of bread corn. Their cattle were almost starved through the winter; and of course, gave but little milk in the summer, though furnished with a plenty of sweet feed. . . . we found the soil to be good; wanting nothing but industry and proper management to render it capable of producing every kind of vegetable in perfection. It was rather light and dry, consisting of a greyish sand, and vegetable mould, two feet or more in depth, intermixed with portions of darker coloured earth.<sup>2</sup>

While we have found few records of Vineyard dairy farming in the early 1800s, it was, no doubt, done on a small scale. Even families in villages owned one or two cows along with a flock of chickens plus a pig or two. Virtually every family owned a horse for transportation. Most had a vegetable garden for their own sustenance. Large-scale farming had not yet arrived.

From the mid-1700s until 1900 Martha's Vineyard was generally free of forest and underbrush, the land being used to pasture 20,000 or more sheep. Most of the Island was a vast sheep pasture. Then in the late 1800s imports of wool from abroad, as well as from our own west, at lower prices (and of better quality), put eastern sheep farmers, including those on the Vineyard, out of business. (Russell, 1982, *Bramhall*, 1988)

In 1858, farmer and educator Leavitt Thaxter of Edgartown, son of the late Rev. Joseph Thaxter, proposed the for-

<sup>1</sup> Only five years after Grey's Raid, the sheep and cattle herds are back to the number they were before the Raid. This puts into question the legends of starving Islanders. The count must have come from Colonel Norton and Dr. Mayhew, so it would seem to be accurate.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, v. 1, 1821, pp. 147-155.

mation of a county agricultural society. A meeting was held at the Dukes County Academy in West Tisbury with many farmers present. Thaxter was elected president and this resolution was adopted:

Resolved, That the attainment and diffusion of scientific and practical knowledge in the cultivation of the soil, is a subject of such importance as to demand the associated effort of the farmers of Dukes County.

Benjamin Luce of Edgartown made "some humorous and pertinent remarks." Among them:

The brightest boys in the family were selected for the bar, the pulpit, and the counting-room, -- while the more stupid ones were reserved for the farm; to exercise their muscles at the plough-tail and the dung fork.<sup>3</sup>

The first fair was held in November that same year, 1858, and was attended by between 1500 and 2000 persons. It was, Henry L. Whiting, Secretary of the Society, said, "one of the best and largest audiences the Vineyard had ever collected together." So many attended and entered livestock and other items in competition for prizes that he was forced to apologize for the inadequacies of the judging. But he made no apologies for the quality of the entries:

Nobody had anticipated such a show, and nobody had prepared for it. . . The exhibition of Stock was of the *first order*. Few Societies, of long standing, can boast of a finer display of *native cattle*. . . the number of animals on the ground was between 60 and 70. . . Perhaps the most remarkable of all our productions was the *corn*. Few counties in our state, or *any state*, can show more beautiful specimens of this valuable staple.<sup>4</sup>

In less than a year, the Society had built the Agricultural Hall on land it purchased from Mrs. Hannah Look.<sup>5</sup> The second annual Fair was held in the new hall. The next major action was the purchase of "six thoroughbred Ayrshire bulls of reliable pedigrees . . . which were located two in each town on the Island [Chilmark, Tisbury and Edgartown]." In 1864, eleven thoroughbred Ayrshire cows and heifers were purchased in Rockland Lake, New York, and sold at auction to

<sup>3</sup> *Transactions of the Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society*, published by the Society, 1865, p.5.  
<sup>4</sup> *Vineyard Gazette*, Nov. 5, 1858.

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Look of West Tisbury sold the Society 2 1/2 acres for \$250. The building, constructed by Moses C. Vincent of Chilmark, cost \$2368.84 (*Transactions . . . of the Agricultural Society*, 1865).



Vineyard farmers (at a loss to the Society, incidentally, of \$350).

Unprofitable as it may have been, this action started the Society on the road to raising the quality of milk produced on the Island. That, it seems, was its top priority.

The timing was right. Soon afterwards, milk began replacing wool as the farmers' cash crop, stimulated by the Island's fast-growing summer resort business. The demand for fresh milk increased rapidly in the early 1900s when vacationers filled the hotels and summer cottages. Some farmers invested in larger barns, increased their herds and became commercial milk producers, adjusting to the state regulations for milk producers that began in the early 1900s. Other farmers, perhaps discouraged by those regulations, turned to the building trades and shellfishing for cash income.

#### Seven Gates Farm<sup>6</sup>

The first and most ambitious dairy farm on the Vineyard was Seven Gates Farm in North Tisbury. The farm had its origin in 1887 when Prof. Nathaniel Shaler bought the Chase farm of 90 acres.<sup>7</sup> Shaler, a well-known professor of geology at Harvard, had not intended for his "estate" to become a dairy farm; he was more interested in its geology.<sup>8</sup> But when he died in 1906, his daughter, Gabriella, inherited the property and with her husband, Willoughby Webb, a New York lawyer, moved there year round. It was Mr. Webb who decided to create a model dairy farm, stocked with the best milk cows he could find and operated in the most modern, hygienic manner.

When Shaler died, Seven Gates had grown to about 2000 acres, the professor having steadily bought abutting farms as they became available. He gave it the name "Seven Gates Farm," that being, he said, the number of gates he had to open and close to get to his house from the original en-

From Seven Gates Farm by Elizabeth Bramhall.



At Seven Gates, Webb built this "Big Barn" in 1914 to accommodate 70 cows.

trance on Indian Hill Road.<sup>9</sup> In all, fifty-two purchases of land were combined to form today's "farm," now a corporation of land owners operated as a private, mainly summer, colony. It is no longer a dairy farm.

But in the early decades of this century it was a first-class, award-winning dairy farm. Living in the old farm buildings scattered around the acreage were a number of families, mostly Portuguese immigrants from the Azores. They provided the labor to run Webb's model farm. Many of today's well-known Portuguese families on the Vineyard began life in America at Seven Gates.

The farm became so famous for its modern procedures and quality products that in 1913, Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston made it his summer home, occupying "The Bungalow."<sup>10</sup>

In his pursuit of quality milk, Webb imported registered Jersey cows from the mainland. At its peak, the farm had 60 milking cows, 12 dry cows, 3 teams of horses and 20 farmhands on the payroll. Webb was extremely proud of his herd,

<sup>9</sup> Since 1907, the entrance has been on North Road just west of North Tisbury center.

<sup>10</sup> "The Bungalow" had been built in 1910 for Shaler's sister-in-law. From it one can see Vineyard Sound from Woods Hole to Gay Head. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, while living in the Shaler House in 1941, would walk to the Bungalow to watch the sunset from its porch. (Bramhall, p. 115)

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Bramhall, *Seven Gates Farm: The First One Hundred Years*, 1988, p. 33. This book, published by Seven Gates Farm has a wealth of information from which much of the following section is drawn.

<sup>7</sup> The professor paid \$1700 for the property. He said he always wanted his own moraine.

<sup>8</sup> Shaler did own many sheep, probably to keep the underbrush from covering his boulders.



being a fanatic about the facilities, which, though small compared with mainland farms, had the latest equipment and was operated under the most hygienic rules. Cleanliness, high butterfat content and purity of the milk were emphasized. The men who did the milking wore wooden shoes and fastidiously washed the udders before each milking. The stalls were as immaculate as a farm kitchen. The bacterial count of the milk was among the lowest in the nation. None of the regular farm hands was permitted to enter the area where the cows were milked or the room where the milk was bottled.

The farm delivered fresh milk to the hotels of Vineyard Haven and Oak Bluffs. George T. Silva, whose family lived and worked there, told an interviewer that the milking began at 4 a.m., as the milk had to be at the hotels by seven, delivered in a truck with solid-rubber tires.<sup>11</sup> Before World War I, Erfurt Burt and his brother Percy went along with their father on the truck to unload the milk at the hotels. Their father, Otis, who drove the truck, later became superintendent, as did Percy after him.

The farm's reputation came less from its milk than from its exceptional butter and cheeses. It was impractical in those days to ship milk in quantity to the mainland so the fresh milk had to be sold on the Island. Surplus milk, which was very high in butter fat, was turned into butter and cheese. In 1913, an article in the *New Bedford Sunday Standard Times* said this about the farm:

The resources of the farm are now turned almost wholly to butter making. "Seven Gates" butter supplies one of the country's most famous clubs, the Chevy Chase Club outside Washington, D.C. The Metropolitan Club in Washington also serves "Seven Gates" butter. . . [One cow], the pride of the Farm, on a test for a year, produced three pounds of butter a day.<sup>12</sup>

The first superintendent of the Shaler farm, as it was

<sup>11</sup> George T., who helped deliver the milk, recalled that he and his brothers were paid 10 cents an hour. In addition, they were paid 25 cents for every rat or snake they killed. Mrs. Webb hated both. When the boys began collecting more than once for the same dead rat, she made them cut off the tail before paying them to end the practice. His father, Otis, was paid \$35 a month, plus being provided "the house by the pond." (Oral history tape, MVHS)

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *Seven Gates Farms: The First Hundred Years*, Elizabeth Bramhall, Seven Gates Farm, publishers, 1988, p. 33.



From Stan Lair Collection.

Portuguese family working at Seven Gates poses in front of their living quarters.

called by Vineyarders, was Francis (Frank) H. Reed. A farmer in Chilmark, he was hired about 1906. His successor was Otis Burt, a pound fisherman who had married his daughter. Otis ran the farm for 20 years until his son Percy took over in 1945, serving until 1967.<sup>13</sup> In 1919, the dairy farm was discontinued and its prize herd of Jerseys sold to Island farmers. The *Vineyard News*, an Island newspaper, published a letter on May 29, 1919, that suggests that Mr. Webb by then had sold most of the herd.<sup>14</sup>

Mr. Webb did a very patriotic thing for the Vineyard when he permitted all Vineyard farmers to take their pick from his magnificent herd of standard-bred and registered Jerseys at a price which would have been cheap for fair ordinary cows. . . one townsman obtained. . . from Seven Gates. . . their premier cow, winner of the silver medal, class AA. . . She is also the champion clean milk cow of Massachusetts. . . He also got from Seven Gates her grand-daughter, a promising heifer, registered but never entered in competition. . . Truly, it is not an ill wind which blows pure milk and rich cream to the permanent and summer residents of the Vineyard. (signed) Vineyard Reader.

At just about that time, Webb had fallen into financial difficulties and was forced to abandon his hobby. The summer residents on the property, some of them owners, some renters,

<sup>13</sup> Otis married Henrietta Reed. Seven Gates, for more than 60 years, was headed by members of the Otis and Burt families.

<sup>14</sup> After the herd was sold, fresh milk was still provided to the summer residents of Seven Gates by the Portuguese workers who continued to keep one or two cows for their own use.



were anxious to keep their rural preserve intact and formed the Seven Gates Corporation, which Webb headed until he died 1937.

#### 1920 Survey of Vineyard Farming

A survey of Island farming in 1920 published by the United States Department of Agriculture (Latimer, 1925) revealed the following:

- Of the land area of Dukes County, 50.3 per cent was in farms. Owners operated 88.2 percent of the farms; 5.9 percent of the farms were rented and another 5.9 percent were operated by managers.<sup>15</sup>
- Share tenants received half the crops and half the increase of livestock. Most of the sheep remaining were pastured in the hills in the western part of the island.
- Farming consisted of dairying, poultry raising and some market gardening. On a typical farm, the outbuildings consisted of a barn, wagon shed, tool shed, garage, hen-house, piggery and, of course, an outhouse. The barns were not heated during the winter. The warmth of the cows kept the water pipes from freezing. The barn usually had a vaulted roof for its hayloft with a hay-fork rail along its length.
- The standard machinery were two-horse and one-horse steel moldboard turnplows, a hay-mowing machine, hay (buck) rake, side-delivery hay rake, hay loader and spring-tooth, spike and disk harrows. (The hay mower had become available in the 1800s, the hay loader in 1900 and hay bailer in 1950. The steel harrow, disc plow and cultivator came in soon after the Civil War (*Collier's Encyclopedia*)).

Farms also had a hay wagon and an all-purpose wagon to haul crops, wood and other materials. The farmer's tools included pitchforks, manure forks, hoes, axes, shovels and buck saws. In the early 1900s, some farms added a wagon that spread manure automatically as a horse pulled it along

<sup>15</sup> If these percentages include the Elizabeth Islands, which they may, it would greatly distort the land-use percentage from a Vineyard standpoint.



From Stan Lair Collection.

Unidentified worker harrows soil at Seven Gates with four-horse team, c. 1920.

the field, saving a great deal of hand labor.

- The number of Vineyard farm animals and their average dollar value in 1920 were: dairy cows, 848 (\$72); beef cattle, 97 (\$68); horses, 220 (\$140); sheep, 4,532 (\$7); chickens, 5,444 (\$1.90); and pigs, 605 (\$26).
- Here are the numbers of dairy cows in later years:
 

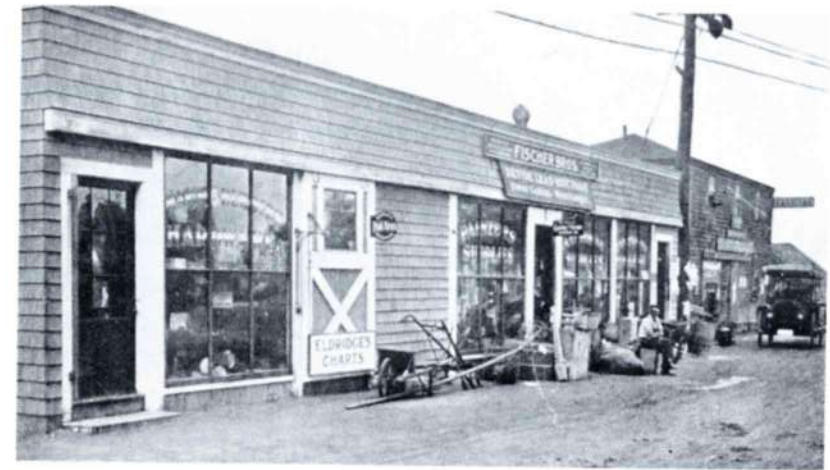
1920	848
1925	718*
1935	518*
1942	397*
1952	363* (*Roman and Sherburne, 1954)
1965	69**
1975	27**
1986	137**
1995	5** (**J. Nunes, personal communication)
- Sandy and loam soils were used most extensively for tilled crops and the loamy coarse and stony soils for pasture. The Island's soil tends to be dry, being sandy and the drying winds blow steadily. The typical crops were hay (timothy, redtop and clover), corn (grain, silage and sweet), oats and rye. Potatoes and other vegetables were grown on small patches for home consumption and local markets.





Bottle caps from Seven Gates list the butter-fat content and day of the milking.

- The methods in use on the farms were much the same as throughout New England. Small amounts of fertilizer were used and liming was not common. The dairymen bought all the concentrated feeds needed, but produced all the roughage. The feed included grain to feed dairy cows, work animals, hens and other livestock. Little attention was given to seeding or rejuvenating pastures. Field corn was cut by hand and shocked in the fields. The average frost-free season was 199 days, extending from April 19 to November 4. This allowed ample time for all crops common to this region to mature. But in an average year, spring was too cold and summer too dry for profitable large-scale market gardening.
- Farmers usually rotated crops over six years. Tilled crops were raised for three years: alfalfa the first; corn the second; and oats the third. Then grass was allowed to grow during the fourth, fifth and sixth years. They learned that each crop takes different minerals and nutrients from the soil. Planting one continuously would deplete the soil's fertility. Alfalfa removes much potassium and phosphorus, but takes nitrogen from the air and fixes it in the ground in nodules on its root hairs. Next year's corn will become very green and productive from the nitrogen in the soil left



Fischer's store sold everything: boneless codfish, hardware, gasoline, charts, did house painting and wiring, had a marine railway and ran a mail-order business.

- by the alfalfa.
  - In 1920, the average price of an acre of farmland was \$19.18. (Taxes on farmland were about \$1.00 an acre.) Residents owning non-farm acreage regarded themselves as "land poor," because they had to pay taxes on land from which they received no income.
  - Dairy farms in West Tisbury, Chilmark and Gay Head had fields divided by walls of stone that, in the 1700s and 1800s had been dug up from fields to allow plowing. Today in many wooded areas these stone walls still exist, souvenirs of abandoned pastures and fields.
- The way the Fischer farm in West Tisbury "just grew" from a small beginning to a large farm, was typical. It began in Vineyard Haven, where Albert O. Fischer owned a marine hardware store on Beach Road. It is said that the store operated the Island's first gasoline pump. Like many Island families, the Fischers owned a cow to provide milk, cream and butter for the family of three boys and one girl. That was about 1920. Because a cow is "dry" for two or three months a year, Mr. Fischer bought a second cow and during much of the year had surplus milk, which he sold to his neighbors. Demand for his milk rose and he gradually expanded his herd to eight



cows. That required a lot of hay so he bought a hay mower. Eventually, with so much stock and equipment, he rented a barn near the old U.S. Marine Hospital. The cows were pastured nearby, getting water from Ben Luce's Pond.

By 1939, the herd had increased to 20 cows and a bull. In that year, he and son Arnold obtained a large section of land in West Tisbury on the shore of Tisbury Great Pond. They drove the herd there and together they operated what became known as Flat Point Farm. They cleared much of the land to create fields for crops and pastures for the cows.

#### Vineyard Dairy Farms

The following is a partial list of farms on the Island with the approximate number of cows on them from the 1920s into the 1960s.

- *Chilmark*: James Adams (20 cows); Ernest Correlus (10 cows); Orlin Davis (10 to 15 cows); Jack and Walter Jenkinson (4 cows); Eldon B. Keith, operated by Ozzie Fischer (8 cows); Herbert Mayhew (10 to 12 cows); Almon Tilton (6 cows); Robert Vincent (6 to 8 cows); Ellsworth West (6 to 8 cows).
- *West Tisbury*: Otis Fischer; Leonard Athearn (4 cows); Ernest Correlus; Arlin Davis (10-15 cows); Arthur Greene (4 cows); Robert Flanders (15 cows); John Hoff (4 cows); Hoyt's farm (4 cows); George Hunt Luce (10 to 12 cows); Jerry and Mark Mayhew (5 to 6 cows); Frank Norton (10 to 12 cows); William T. Silva (8 to 12 cows). Others known to keep cows included Joseph Silva, Herman Stratter, Mrs. Rogers, William and Edgar West. Almon Tilton, Joseph Walker, Frank Drake, Joseph Merry and later his son Lloyd.
- *Vineyard Haven*: Julio Araujo (2 cows); Carl Lair (2 cows); Manuel Campos (2 cows); Francis Duarte (1 cow); Jesse Ferro (2 cows); Joe Figieura (2 cows); Freeman Leonard (2 cows); Antone Lopes (2 cows); Gus Norton (2 cows); Robert Norton (12 cows); John Olson (1 cow); John Pachico (2 cows); Joe Rogers (8 cows); Manuel Silva (1 cow); Elisha Smith (3 cows).



Ami Fischer poses with delivery truck and two bottles of Guernsey milk, 1942.

- *Oak Bluffs*: Nelson Bettencourt; Frank Chase (14 cows); Joe Duarte (2--3 cows); Ham Luce (16 cows); Frank Madeiras (1 cow); Henry Constant Norton; Antone Sanchos (18--20 cows).
- *Edgartown*: Barriault (1 cow); Manuel Bettencourt (4 cows); Dairyland Farm (40 cows); Ed Gentle (1 cow); Fred Higgins (1 cow); Del Jernegan; Bill Johnson; Katama Farm (7 cows); Arthur Marchant (10 cows); Arthur Norton (25 cows); Clem Norton (16 cows); Jeff Norton (1 cow); Orin Norton; John Prada (16 cows); Antone Salvador (4 cows); Harry Smith; Albert Vincent; Edward T. Vincent (25 cows); Willie Vincent; Bob Waller (19 cows); Bob West (1--2 cows).
- *Chappaquiddick*: Casmede Bettencourt (1 cow); Sally Jeffers (2 cows); Ben Pease; Ben Smith (2 cows); Charlie Welch (4 cows). Also Benjamin Cohan and William Pinney.



The larger farms, those with 15 or more cows, kept 50 to 200 acres of land in mixed use. Most acreage was for pasturing cows, some for growing hay, corn and vegetables and some was wooded. If a farm, such as the Arthur Norton farm with 50 acres, was short of pasture, the owner each summer would obtain permission to graze some of his heifers on pastures the other farmers were not using. Mr. Norton pastured some heifers on Chappaquiddick.

Large dairy farmers had a big barn for their cows and horses and a cellar where cow and horse manure collected. Just behind each stall there was a hinged trap door in the floor about 15 inches square. When cleaning the stalls, farmers opened the doors and with hoes dropped the manure into the cellar. They kept three or four pigs in the manure cellar to mix straw and other additives, such as leaves and seaweed, they spread on the manure. When these additives decomposed, they enriched the manure, making it a better fertilizer.

The Fischers collected oak leaves from the Vineyard Haven cemetery to spread over the manure for the pigs to mix. Farmers usually spread a little corn on the manure to encourage the pigs to root around more. The farmers with only one or two cows simply piled the manure alongside their cowsheds.

Several farms, including the Luce farm in Oak Bluffs, had been in one family for over 100 years. Ham Luce's grandfather peddled milk from his farm for 35 years, from about 1850 to 1885. Then Ham's father took over and sold the milk for another 35 years until about 1920 when Ham continued the operation until about 1950. When Ham took over, he mechanized the delivery route with a Model A Ford, replacing the horse and wagon.

Not all dairy farms dated back as far as Luce's. But Manuel Bettencourt's came close. He bought his on Clevelandtown Road, Edgartown, for \$1500 in 1895. For that, he got 27 acres on Mill Hill, a house and barn complete with cows, chickens and pigs. Bob Waller's parents purchased their farm on the Plains in Edgartown for \$4000 from a family named DeJesus in 1918. John Prada owned a small farm off the

Katama Road in Edgartown with four cows. When he was 50 years old, he purchased a larger farm with a large barn at the west end of Clevelandtown Road, and expanded his herd to 16 milking cows. Charlie Welch, a gentleman farmer on Chappaquiddick, purchased Pimpneymouse Farm with four cows, a bull and two work horses in 1932.

Katama Farm on the Plains south of Edgartown covered about 250 acres. Before World War II, it was principally a sheep farm. During the war, in 1943, Oscar Burke, whose family owned the famed Sweetheart Soap Company, bought it and hired Elisha Smith as manager. Most of the acreage was used to raise barley, oats and wheat, which were sold to the turkey farm in Vineyard Haven as feed. About 1946, Elisha bought the farm and increased the small herd of cows to 70 milkers and 70 heifers. He sold the milk to the Cooperative Dairy (about which more later). Seventy acres were planted with potatoes, the varieties of which were selected to be able to harvest them from July 4th into the fall. Most of the potatoes were sold off-Island.

About 25 Edgartown school children worked on the Katama Farm, with 10 or more showing up daily after school. The author of this article was one of them in 1945 and 1946.

#### Breeds of Cows

On Vineyard farms were four different breeds of cows. The amount of butterfat in their milk varied. The more butterfat in the milk, the more value it had because it would produce more butter and cream. The largest breed on the Island was the Holstein. Hardy and well-behaved, its milk had 3.5% butterfat. The next largest was the Ayrshire, whose milk also had 3.5% butterfat. Then came the Guernsey, which like the Jersey was a little high-strung and had to be treated well. The Guernsey's milk contained 5% butterfat. The Jersey, the smallest of the breeds, had 5.1% butterfat in its milk. Island farmers kept two of the breeds pure: the Holstein because it produced the most milk; and the Jersey because its milk had the most butterfat. Ayrshire and Guernsey breeds were mixed.

Of course, other farm animals were raised. The most



common breed of pigs on the Island was the Chester White (all white). There were also some Berkshires (black and white). Most chickens were Rhode Island Reds. Others were Plymouth Rocks, Leghorns, Barred Rocks and Bantams. There were a small number of Silver Spangles Hamburgs (with feathers on their feet). The largest hen farm was Ox Pond Farm in Edgartown with as many as 20,000 laying hens. Bob Brown was manager. The turkey farm on the Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road had 20,000 birds, which were sold to stores on the Vineyard, Nantucket and the Cape. Joe Bettencourt was the manager.

Cows are old enough to be bred with a bull when 18 months of age. They are pregnant ("comin' in") for 9 months and usually give birth ("drop") their first calf when they are 27 months old. If a cow dropped her calf in a pasture, farmers put the newborn in a burlap bag with its head sticking out, hauled it a wheelbarrow to the "maternity room" in the barn. Some cows would hide the calves in a nearby woods until they were about two weeks old. Then the calves would follow their mothers into the barn. During the first three days after giving birth, a cow's milk contains colostrum. The calves needed this as it provided essential immune globulins, containing antibodies that protect calves from infectious diseases and assist the establishment of the intestinal function.

After giving birth, a cow will produce milk for about 10 months before gradually going "dry." As she does, she produces some milk about every other day for a few weeks, before going completely dry for about 2 months until she has another calf. Two or three months after "dropping" her calf, she can be bred again. Farmers kept a book for each cow, dating when each was bred ("serviced"). They knew a cow was in heat when she mounted other cows and bellowed. "Sending out the message" is what that was called.

Vineyard farmers, wedded to summer business like every other Islander, timed the breeding of cows to keep a steady milk production all summer when demand was strongest. The cows were bred at the end of summer, had their calves in the

spring and produced milk all summer. After Labor Day with the summer demand gone, farmers usually had surplus milk, the cream of which was used to make butter, the skim milk fed to their pigs.

During summer, cows got most of their food in the pasture. It was supplemented by a few quarts of mixed bran, wheat and cottonseed meal fed to them in a tub in their mangers during milking. In winter, when cows were kept in the barn, they got all the hay and grain in their mangers.

Cows and horses did have ailments. Common in cows was bloating, which occurs when foam in the rumen (first stomach) prevents belching. Since a healthy cow belches about 200 gallons of gas a day, such blockage causes the gas to inflate her belly (*Hildebrand, 1995*). If the gas is not released, its pressure on the lungs could kill the cow. By punching a small hole in the cow's side just past the ribs, the farmer lets out the gas, covering the wound to prevent infection. Sometimes at birthing, the calf becomes stuck in the womb. The farmer has to reach in to the womb and turn the calf around. Wearing shoulder-length gloves, he attaches a rope to the calf's feet, pulling as the cow heaves in labor. The Island veterinarian, Dr. Dudley Jones (and later Dr. William Wilcox), regularly vaccinated cows and horses for equine encephalitis and treated cows for brucellosis, tuberculosis and other diseases. A specialist visited the farms to dehorn cows, file horses' teeth so they would not spill out grain while feeding and to perform castrations.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the state began testing all cows for TB. Authorities feared that it could be transmitted from cow's milk to humans, but few, if any, cases were ever proved. Any cow testing TB positive had to be destroyed. In the first year of testing, several Island farms lost all their cows, while others lost as many as half. After that, they lost only a cow every few years.

A cow gives milk for eight to ten years, depending on her health. Near the end of her productive life, she would produce only three or four quarts a day, making it unprofitable to



keep her. She then was sold, usually to Mr. Resnick, a butcher from Brighton, Mass. Some were sold to the Cronig Brothers who ran a slaughter house in Vineyard Haven and sold the meat in their store. Each year, a farm with 15 to 20 milking cows would have one or two "dry" cows to sell.

The very old, spent cows with more bones than meat had the lowest grade of beef. These were classified as cutters or canners. Farmers were paid ten to twenty cents a pound on the hoof for such cows. A farmer could sell a cow's hide for seven dollars if he killed and skinned the cow himself. The meat of old cows is tough and has a strong odor if they had been grass-fed. Cows fed with grain have marbled meat, which is more tender. Meat from old cows ends up in frankforts, baloney, canned corned beef and sometimes hamburg. As a last resort, dog meat.

Most of the large farms kept a bull, which they usually raised from a calf, to breed their cows. Male calves, however, were often sold for slaughter. Only one was needed on most farms. The females (heifers) were kept and became milking cows when they matured. The males were sold for veal at about two weeks. Mr. Cronig would lift the calf to see how much he weighed, feel the legs and then tell the farmer how much he would pay, usually fifty cents or a dollar.

When a male that was kept for breeding was about half grown, the farmer inserted a metal ring, about four inches in diameter, through the soft tender tissue in his nose. To the ring, he attached a long pole with a snap ring on one end. With the pole, he could walk the bull peacefully. Bulls usually were kept in a pen, but sometimes were let out with a strap over the horns and a rope through the ring.

Dairy bulls could have nasty temperaments. When their ears went back, "Look out!" was the barnyard shout. The nose ring could be a life saver. When Craig Kingsbury was knocked over by his bull, he grabbed the nose ring and managed to control the animal. Some farmers with children did not keep a bull, fearing he would injure or kill one. The Luce Farm in Oak Bluffs was one such. There were eight chil-

Photo by Craig Kingsbury.



Unidentified boy shows how a rope tied to a nose ring can control the bull.

dren and no bull. Cows were led to a nearby farm for breeding. Albert Fischer hired out his bull to service cows for other farmers, many being "backyard" farmers with one cow. He would haul the bull to the cow's farm on a trailer. Each time he would do so, his granddaughter would say affectionately: "What a nice man Grandfather is to take the bull for a ride all the time."

A farmer usually kept his bull for no longer than three to five years. After that, there was danger of too much inbreeding. Also, older bulls often became very ornery.

In 1952, Fred Fisher began the business of inseminating cows. He charged about six dollars per cow, providing up to 2 additional servicings free if the first did not take. With artificial insemination, farmers could choose to have their cows bred by the best genetic breeds available.

#### Horses

Small farm tractors began being available in the 1930s, but many farmers didn't switch to tractors until much later. Bob Waller, for example, worked his farm with a team of



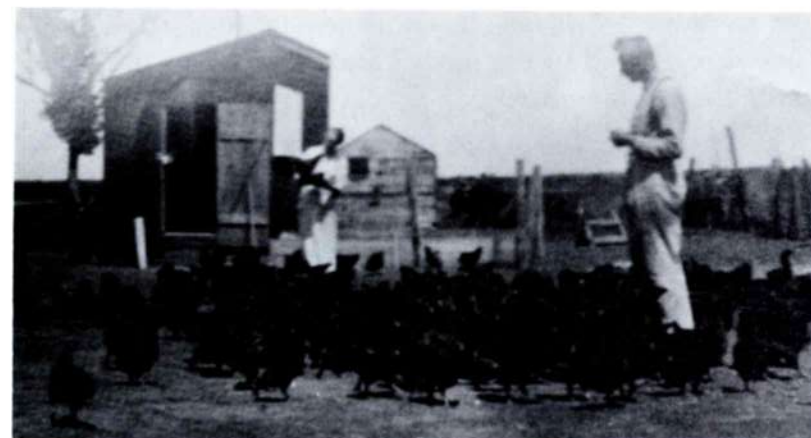
horses as late as the mid-1950s. Before investing in a tractor, commercial farmers usually kept two draft horses for pulling plows, hay rakes and wagons. Farmers occasionally earned money by using their horses to do work for others. Ham Luce's horses earned money in winter by hauling cakes of ice up the ramp into Wigglesworth's ice house in Oak Bluffs (MacKenzie, 1995). Only rarely were draft horses raised on the Island. Usually, farmers purchased them off-Island for about \$150 each when they were about four years old and already trained. A horse could be expected to do productive work for up to 20 years. Arthur Norton had one of the last (and oldest) in Edgartown. Named "Babe," it died at 36 years. Bob Waller kept two work horses until the late 1950s. One of them, also named "Babe," was sold in 1957.

Horses, like cows and people, suffered ailments. One was colic (gas in their stomach) which a horse suffered when he was given water to drink after a day of hard work in the summer heat. Most farmers watered their horses mornings before they started work. To relieve colic the veterinarian put a tube down into the stomach to release the gas. The horse was then given water and some wet bran mash and feed. It had to be watched carefully for a while afterwards.

Worms were another horse sickness. Bott flies laid eggs in their mouths and the grubs got into their stomachs. Horses are not fussy about what they eat and sometimes would get parasites by eating the oats in the droppings of an infected horse. Old horses sometimes had kidney stones, becoming so thin and weak they had to be sent to the "glue factory." A horse's teeth could wear so unevenly that they were unable to grind corn and other grain properly. A specialist was called to grind the teeth evenly.

#### Hens

Every Island farmer had a flock of hens to provide eggs and meat. Even some non-farmers living in town had a chicken coop in their backyards for their own needs. Large farms kept as many as 200 hens, plus a few roosters, of course. A "sitting hen" often laid a clutch of eggs in a hidden location and would surprise the farmer three weeks later with her baby



*William and Jessie Waller, feeding their hens on the Edgartown Plains in 1918.*

chicks. But most chicks were bought off-Island each spring. Their arrival in town postoffices was a special annual event. Shipped in cardboard boxes with four compartments, each containing 25 chicks, the chicks emitted high-pitched chirps that could be heard all over the postoffice. Some farmers kept the chicks warm with bricks heated on the stove and wrapped in newspapers until they were big enough to survive.

Hens begin laying eggs at five months. The number laid depends on the quantity of food they eat and the amount of light they receive. To lay at full capacity, which is an egg every day, hens need at least 14 hours of daylight. With less, they do not lay as many. Years ago, when hens were first domesticated, they laid only in the summer when the days were long. During the reduced daylight hours in the fall, they produced no eggs, instead adding fat to insulate themselves from the coming cold. Farmers soon learned hens would lay all winter if the hen house was kept lighted, at first, with oil lamps, then gas lights and finally electric lights.

In warm weather, farmers kept hens inside in the mornings so they would lay their eggs in the coop, letting them outside each afternoon. The birds spent their outdoor time scratching the bare ground and around manure piles to find insects and seeds to eat. Farmers dumped crushed scallop and quahaug shells in the hen yards so the hens would ingest



them to provide calcium. It was slowly released as the shell pieces were ground in the gizzard and absorbed in the blood, making the shells harder.

Years ago, after a hen had laid 20 to 30 eggs she became "broody" and instinctively began setting on a clutch of eggs to hatch a brood of chicks. During this, she would not lay her daily egg. To shorten this non-laying period, farmers put the "broody" hens in a wire cage with no nest for a few days. When returned to a nest, they would go back to laying. Today, "broodiness" has been bred out of hens and they are expected to lay about 360 eggs a year. With the small flocks in town, the care and feeding often became the housewife's job and money from the sale of extra eggs was her pin money.

When using artificial light to increase egg production, farmers discovered that hens would be good layers for only about 2 years. In the second year, production sharply declined and hens were used for food. Also after the second year, their eggs had softer shells and were often eaten by the hens, messing up the other eggs.

Farmers who kept ducks sometimes used bantam hens to hatch duck eggs. The hens would become bewildered when the ducklings instinctively headed for the pond, making a noisy attempt to keep them out of the water. Hens didn't expect their babies to be swimmers.

#### Pigs

Nearly all Island farms, large or small, had at least one pig which was raised to about 200 to 250 pounds. It took only about 150 days for a piglet of 35 pounds to weigh that much; for every four pounds of dry feed eaten, a pig added one pound of weight. Pigs not kept in the barn's manure cellar were confined in backyard pens which usually were mud holes. Pigs do not sweat to cool themselves, so they enjoy wallowing in mud in hot weather. Farmers fed them kitchen waste along with a water-grain mixture plus skim and sour milk. Almost every Portuguese family had a pig or two. The pigs ate kitchen waste collected from hotels, plus that of the family.

Full-grown pigs were usually slaughtered in the fall,

providing a family with a good supply of meat, including fat, lard, fresh pork, fatback, salt pork for chowders, ham steaks, chops and sausage. The intestines were used for sausage casings; the stomach (hog maw or haggis) was a favorite of the Scotch and Irish. The cheek (jowl) was another favorite, sliced and fried. The pig's ears and tail were also eaten. A favorite Portuguese dish was blood pudding, a spicy sausage.

To preserve cooked pork it was put in a wooden firkin or clay crock and covered with hot lard. When a piece was cut off, more hot lard was added. Preserved this way, pork could last two years. Sometimes salt was used to preserve the pork.

Small farmers hired professionals to butcher and dress their pigs. Island butchers included Harry West in Chilmark and West Tisbury, Joe Bernard in Oak Bluffs and Bill "Gyp the Blood" Salvador in Edgartown. In the 1940s, slaughtering and dressing a pig cost \$5 or \$10, depending on size.

Each town had an animal inspector to make sure cows were kept clean, properly fed and housed. Inspectors were paid \$100 a year. At various times the inspectors were: Craig Kingsbury plus Drs. Brush and Mitchell in Vineyard Haven; Willis Hughes in Oak Bluffs; Bill Johnson in Edgartown. Most Island towns still appoint Animal Inspectors annually. Years ago, all also had Inspectors of Slaughtering.

#### Blacksmiths

There was at least one blacksmith in each town. Farmers depended on them to make and fit shoes for their horses. In addition, the village blacksmith was essential for repairing farm machinery and wagons. Many parts were produced by the blacksmith on his anvil rather than ordering them from the factory. Among the best-remembered blacksmiths are Tut Chase in West Tisbury, Prentis Bodfish and Elmer Chadwick in Vineyard Haven, Will Norton in Oak Bluffs and Orin Norton in Edgartown. Orin Norton, a small farmer himself, was sympathetic with the emergency needs of farmers and was very popular as a result. If a farmer showed up at his shop on Dock Street in Edgartown with a job, Orin would do it right away and make any non-farm customer wait. He excused the action



by saying, whether it was true or not: "He called me and I promised to do this right away."

#### The National 4-H Program

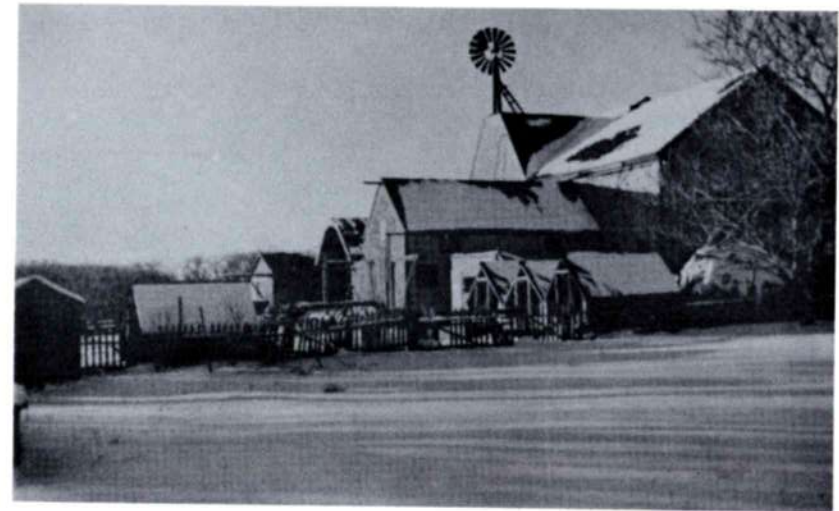
The 4-H Club, for young people from 10 to 21, began in the early 1900s. Boys were taught how to handle animals and other skills needed on the farm; girls learned homemaking. Adult leaders, always voluntary, were trained by the Extension Service of the University of Massachusetts. Ebba Eckburg Rogers was the Island's first adult leader, followed by Emily Smith. From the 1940s to the 1960s it was Mrs. Edith Morris in Oak Bluffs with Elizabeth Alley as her secretary. Meetings were held on farms or for girls in the leader's home. The youngsters would raise calves, sheep, goats, rabbits and chicks, as well as plant and tend a field crop. When 4-H gave a boy 50 chicks to raise, he was required to record egg production. The program appealed more to girls than to boys, who, some suggest, went to meetings mostly for the girls and the refreshments. At least 10 Island women at a time were leaders of girls, teaching knitting, dress making, rug and quilt making and cooking. At meetings, a pledge is given: "I pledge my **H**ead to clearer thinking, my **H**ear to greater loyalty, my **H**ands to larger service and my **H**ealth to better living, for my club, my community and my country."

#### The Grange

Another agricultural group is the Grange, a fraternal organization of farmers. The Vineyard chapter was founded in 1905 with Agricultural Hall in West Tisbury as its meeting place. Chilmark and Edgartown had branches. Although at first most members were farmers, the Grange devoted itself mainly to community service. More recently, members have come from all walks of life. One of its projects was dredging Mill Pond in West Tisbury and settling on it a family of swans. When someone is down on his luck and his roof starts to leak, the Grange will fix it, doing it without publicity. It's that kind of organization.

#### Farming Life

Typically, living on an Island farm were three generations: the farmer and his wife; their children; and one or more



*Everett Whiting's barn and windmill in West Tisbury on Christmas day, 1947.*

parents of the husband or wife. Such a family was able to get by with not a great deal of money. The farm provided nearly all it needed, including meat, vegetables, milk and wood for heating. Sometimes, clothing, usually vests, were made from grain and potato sacks. Socks, sweaters and scarves were knit at home, most often by the grandmother. The entire family worked to keep the farm going. Each child had chores, the boys helping the father with the livestock and the girls helping with the housework. The women cooked, served meals, washed dishes, mended and washed clothes and kept the fires going. Some washed the bottles for the milk sold to neighbors. The wash, as the laundry was called, was hung outside to dry and in winter it would freeze hard on the line and was carried like boards into the kitchen for final drying (Morgan, 1992).

Most farmers wore clothes ordered from the Sears Roebuck catalog, a standard in the farm library. They usually wore blue denim pants, jackets and bib overalls, plus a tweed cap with a short visor. In winter, they wore rubber boots lined with felt nearly an inch thick. When going to town on Saturday, they always changed into clean overalls and their wives changed from a working apron to a fancy clean apron. Clothes were carefully patched and lasted for years.



In the main, the wives were good cooks, taking pride in the food they served. They had plenty of practice. Their husbands and his helpers worked hard and expected to eat well. A typical breakfast was oatmeal, bacon, ham, eggs, toast, milk and fried potatoes. Lunch was robust sandwiches or leftovers from the night before, plus cake or pie (apple, blueberry or custard, except in rhubarb season). For supper, wives served pork chops, steak, corned beef, cured ham, or a casserole of soft-shelled clams, quahaugs or fish. Sunday dinner was usually roast chicken. Some wives got up as early as 4 a.m., to have fresh bread and muffins ready for breakfast. The work of the women did not change very much with the seasons, unlike the men's. After supper, as evening meals were called, grandmothers would read to the children. It was a Norman Rockwell life style.

Little was thrown away. There were no solid-waste problems caused by packaging as today. Little food came from the store. Table scraps of meat were eaten by the family dog, vegetable leftovers went to the pigs and old catalogs and magazines were used in the privy. Barn and privy manure fertilized the fields.

In summer, when children were not in school, chores included weeding the vegetables and feeding the weeds to the pigs, driving the horse team, cutting and loading corn stalks for the cows. When school was in session, boys had to rise early to get chores done before walking to school, regardless of weather or distance. There were no school busses. Children often made pets of newborn calves, sheep and goats, but were aware that eventually all livestock were slaughtered.

Farm children had 4-H projects in competition at the County Fair every year. Calves raised in 4-H became part of the farm's herd. The fair offered non-farmers, both Island and summer people, a chance to see farm animals close up and to smell hay and manure, both of which, in nostalgia at least, have a sweet fragrance.

At Christmas, a pine tree often cut on their own land, was decorated with strings of popcorn (most likely grown on



*Arni Fischer and his mother pose proudly on their new Farmall tractor in 1930s.*

the farm), chains of colored paper, angels formed of paper cones and, at the top, a cardboard star covered with tinfoil. There being no electricity, there were no lights on the tree. Glass balls and icicles were hung and on wintry nights, the drafts in the room made the icicles flutter and twinkle in the soft glow of kerosene lamps (Morgan, 1992).

Some farms had live-in farm hands. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, in Edgartown, Elisha Smith lived as a farm hand with Arthur Norton and his wife; Patrick Delaney lived as a farm hand with the Edward T. Vincents. In the 1930s, the pay was \$1 a day plus room and board. In the 1940s, with the war's inflation, it was increased to \$50 a month.

Many boys from non-farm families worked on farms after school on Saturdays and all summer. (The author was one.) The work included bringing the cows in from pasture for milking, feeding them grain, collecting eggs. In the early 1940s, Mr. Vincent paid boys 10 cents to work after school and 25 cents for all day Saturday. By the end of the 1940s, pay was as high as \$3 a day in summer.

A farmer's son worked throughout his youth learning how to run the farm as he was expected to take it over as an adult. He had to learn the intricacies of crops, livestock and often pesky machinery.



Farmers attempted to control as many variables as possible by careful planting and choice of fields for various crops, as well as by intelligently feeding and manipulating their livestock. But there was a limit to their control. Much of farm production is controlled by weather. The preferred spring and summer were warm and sunny, with rain once a week at night and no severe wind storms. Planting is a gamble because heavy rains could wash out the seeds. Haying is a similar bet on the weather as rain delays drying. Seeds had to be planted as early as possible so plants would have time to mature by fall. A farmer is a producer with the least control over production, costs and crop prices. For his son to learn all these variables requires a lot of time on the job and more than book learning.

#### Names of Farms

Some of the Island farms carried imaginative names, usually based on a topographical or botanical feature. But others were only known by the farmer's name. Among the most descriptive names were Oak View Farm, later changed to Vineyard Downs and now Rainbow Farm; Pimpneymouse Farm; Twin Oaks Farm; Brookside Farm; Scrubby Neck Farm; Indian Hill Farm; Woodsedge Farm; and Dairyland Farm. Many farms had their own milk bottles with the farm name embossed in the glass. Such bottles are highly prized as collector's items today.

#### The Farmer's Work Never Ends

Years ago (and today to a lesser extent), a farmer worked 365 days a year, never taking a day off. Even when sick he had to work because every day the animals had to be fed, the cows milked and the milk delivered. And it was a rare farmer who ever retired. Usually in his later years he helped one of his sons run the farm, often until his final illness.

Work days were long, starting at daybreak and ending about 7 p.m. First, the cows were fed, milked and the stalls cleaned. That took about two hours. In warm weather the cows were let out to pastures. Cows stay in a loose herd in a pasture, one cow being the leader. When the leader cow wanders, the others follow. Some farmers put a bell around the

leader's neck so as to locate the herd more easily in a large pasture. With cows pastured, the farmer fed the hens, collecting the eggs, and fed the pigs. It was then time to deliver milk to his morning customers. After that, if haying and planting were not on the schedule, he tackled the many jobs of maintenance of buildings and equipment. At the end of the day, cows were milked again, all animals fed and bedded down for the night. Hens were herded into their coops before the farmer went in for supper, after which, the milk having cooled, he delivered it to his afternoon customers.

When the farmer brought the cows into the barn from pasture (calling "Cow boss! Cow boss!"), each cow went right into her stall, hungry for the grain in the manger. They preferred grain to the grass they had been chewing all day. Up to a point, the more feed, the more milk. The farmer sat on a three-legged stool next to the udder, put a 14-quart pail under the bag and began drawing milk from two teats at a time, rhythmically with an unforgettable sound. Occasionally, a cow kicked during milking, upsetting the pail. If this occurred, the farmer placed kicking chains on her back legs. He normally milked 4 to 6 cows an hour.

A cow produced up to twenty quarts a day in two milkings. (Milk is mostly water, suspended solids making it an opaque white.) In the milk room, the farmers strained the warm, fresh milk through cheesecloth into another bucket, saving some for the waiting barn cats. Milk must be cooled to 50 degrees F., within 2 hours or it quickly sours.

Various methods were used for cooling. The most common was to pour the milk slowly over a series of parallel tubes through which cool water ran. Arthur Norton set the milk bottles or cans in water cooled with ice from Louis Pease's ice house. Manuel Bettencourt did his cooling by running water from a hose over the milk containers. Orlin Davis at Brookside Farm, Chilmark, cooled his in a small stream he diverted to run through his barn. Once cooled, the milk was delivered to houses in quart bottles and to hotels in 10-quart cans; cream was in pint bottles; heavy cream in half-pints.



Milking machines became available soon after World War II. They did not draw milk any faster or better than hand milking, but they saved the farmer's time and labor. John Prada had the first one in Edgartown.

#### Peddling Milk and Other Produce

Farmers delivered milk to most customers, some getting it in the morning, others in the early evening. A small number of customers picked it up at the farm. Sometimes, cream and eggs were delivered with the milk. One to four quarts were delivered to each customer daily. In the early 1900s, before they bottled the milk, farmers poured it from a milk can into a pitcher the customer had ready. But from the 1930s, milk was delivered in quart bottles which were bought off-Island. During the coldest days in winter, the milk would freeze, with two or three inches of frozen cream sticking up out of the top of the bottle (children argued over who would get to lick the underside of the cardboard cap). Insulated boxes were kept by the back door in extremely cold areas to minimize freezing. Customers washed the empty bottles and placed them outside the back door to be collected when the fresh milk was delivered. The bottles were then re-washed and sterilized at the farm.

Customers paid by the week or month, usually by placing the money in the empty bottle. In the 1920s and 1930s, milk was delivered for 10 cents a quart. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, some customers had difficulty paying and after a few months, a farmer might drop them. If so, the customer would switch to another farmer and repeat the procedure. (There were no food stamps for hungry families.) The large farms had many customers on their routes. Arthur Norton, with 20 milking cows, had about 150 customers in summer, some being Edgartown hotels. He delivered to each hotel twice a day.

During World War II, farmers began charging 15 cents a quart. The federal government then ordered that milk be sold for no more than 11 cents a quart, causing farmers economic hardship. Farmers have little control over prices.



Left, Albert Fischer Jr., with Arni Fischer, showing off their goats in 1927.

In the 1930s, Frank Drake drove a truck from house to house on Chappaquiddick, delivering vegetables, milk, chickens and eggs. "Governor" Handy, who also farmed on Chappaquiddick, delivered produce with his horse and wagon, covering the same route every day. "Dolly," his horse knew the route by heart and when, some said after too much alcohol, the "Gov'ner" fell asleep, Dolly would stop at each customer's house and wait until the cook came out and selected the wanted produce, recording it in an account book. She then gave "Dolly" a slap and off the horse and wagon went to the next customer's house while the Gov'ner slept.

#### Work by the Seasons

Each season, farmers had special chores in addition to the daily routine. In spring, they spread manure on the fields to replace the potassium and humus taken from soil by the crop. Manure was spread from a wagon by pitchfork or, in later years, by a manure spreader. A multi-toothed drag was pulled across the field, breaking up the clumped manure and spreading it evenly. Earthworms carried the manure down into the soil. They also aerated and loosened the soil as they wormed through it. Some farmers used chicken manure to increase po-



tato production. They would mix a little manure in each hole before planting the potato eye.

Farmers plowed twice each spring. The first time, in March or April after the frost had left the ground, was for planting early crops, such as oats for the horses, hay and vegetables for their own use. Vegetables included potatoes, turnips and carrots for use all winter, plus peas, beans, Swiss chard, beets, onions and lettuce. Squash and cantaloupe were planted at the end of May when there was no danger of killing frost. In late May, a second plowing prepared the soil for late crops, such as corn (cow and sweet) and Japanese millet.

Summers, farmers spent a few hours each day hoeing weeds in the corn and vegetable gardens and cutting hay to feed the cows in winter. Stub Perry, who fished bay scallops in the winter and worked for Arthur Norton during the summer, had the reputation of being the best man in Edgartown at hoeing weeds in corn rows. The trick was to lift the weed roots above ground so they would dry out, killing the plant. Stub moved along rows faster than anyone else while still doing a thorough weeding job.

Haying began early in July and lasted a month or more, depending on the weather. After it was cut, the hay was left to dry. "Make hay while the sun shines," was and is a farmer's adage.<sup>16</sup> Hay put into a barn moist might start a fire by spontaneous combustion, although no such fire has ever been recorded on the Island. Also moist hay may become moldy and rot. Some farmers picked up dried eelgrass from pond beaches and others cut salt hay in wetlands to use as bedding for their cows (see *Intelligencer*, May 1997, pp. 158-9.)

In the 1800s and early 1900s, Island farmers had only hand scythes to cut hay. Then, the mowing machine arrived, followed by dump rakes that gathered hay in rows. Side-delivery rakes which did that more efficiently came later. Another haying machine, the tedder, fluffed up the wet hay, so it dried faster. Hay fields had to be plowed and reseeded about every ten years or they would not produce well. Farmers short of hay



*Stones from Edgartown farms form wall lining harbor from Cooke to Morse Sts.*

would buy some from Smith, Bodfish and Swift, the farm supply store on Vineyard Haven's waterfront.

Haying was hard work for the farmer and his sons. Using pitchforks, they lifted the dry hay into a large crib on a wagon. Piled high with hay, the wagon was driven into the barn. There, with a pair of large tongs on a pulley riding a rail above the mow, the hay was raised by hand power into the mow and stored for the winter. It was a back-breaking job.

In late July and August, farmers harvested corn and garden vegetables, eating some fresh, but wives "put up" most of the tomatoes, green beans and corn in quart Mason jars to be stored in the cellar and eaten during the winter.<sup>17</sup> In the fall, they harvested potatoes, turnips, carrots and squash. Beets and carrots were sold to stores for five cents a bunch, \$1 for 18 head of lettuce and five cents a pound for sweet potatoes. Vegetables such as potatoes, turnips, carrots and some squashes were stored in the root cellar for family use, although some were sold fresh. Surplus turnips were fed to the cows.

In winter, farmers cut firewood with axes and buck saws. The wood was hauled out of the woods by horse power

<sup>16</sup> Another adage was "No rain in May and you'll get no hay."

<sup>17</sup> Morgan, 1992.



and stacked for a year to "season." Some farmers sold wood, either cut or "on the stump." Winter was the time to repair machinery and clean and oil harnesses, which when taken care of would last a lifetime.

#### Outside Incomes

No Island farmer could support his family by the sale of milk, cream, eggs and firewood. They had to have and did earn outside income. Some examples:

- In West Tisbury, Arnie Fischer's wife worked as a school teacher. Fred Fisher made money inseminating cows for other farmers.
- In Oak Bluffs, Ham Luce got some of his cash flow from Anthier's Pond, digging soft clams, quahaugs and oysters (planted from Cape Cod), and spearing eels. His family ate some of the seafood and he sold the rest. He picked up money trapping muskrats and selling the fur. For the family table, he shot rabbits, ducks and geese. His wife sold blueberry and huckleberry pies, plus jelly made with cranberries and wild grapes, all picked by the family.
- In Edgartown, Arthur Norton was paid as town superintendent of roads. He and Elisha Smith did road work, including snowplowing town streets with a horse-drawn plow. Mr. Norton sold sand for roads and clay for private tennis courts from pits in his pasture.
- John Prada earned extra money pumping out Edgartown cesspools, getting a "bonus" by spreading the liquid manure from his tanker ("honey wagon") on his fields. One field was used to grow grass sod to be sold for new lawns for summer people. After the sod was removed, John sold the loam beneath it. Edward T. Vincent sold firewood and rocks. He gathered most of the rocks on up-Island roads. He and his wife would take an automobile ride every Sunday through West Tisbury and Chilmark.<sup>18</sup> He picked up rocks that had toppled from walls along the road, put them on the car's bumpers and hauled them to Edgartown. He had his favorite collecting spots and after many years some

<sup>18</sup> The Sunday automobile ride up-Island was many down-Islanders' favorite activity.



*It's not hard to tell who owns the woodlot. Taking a turn at the saw in his best suit and hat is Tom Dexter. Others are listed only as Charlie H., Derby Weston and Ralph. Unprotected blade looks very treacherous. No safety guards then.*

"abandoned" rock walls up-Island were noticeably lower. Mr. Vincent also dug quahaugs in Katama Bay to sell. He is remembered as being so strong that he used only his right arm to pull the rake along the bottom. Most fishermen needed both arms.

- Manuel Bettencourt sold sand and rocks from his farm. One major rock project was the bulkhead all along Edgartown's waterfront. The bulkhead is still there, running from the Reading Room at the end of Cooke Street down to North wharf at the end of Morse Street. Most of the rocks on both sides of today's Edgartown Yacht Club came from his farm. Other Island farmers sold rocks for the rest of the project.<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Bettencourt did "outside" laundry in summer. She did the scrubbing by hand and was paid 75 cents to \$1.25 for each basket of clothes.
- Bob Waller's wife worked in summer as a waitress and his mother sold cut flowers. She also sold bulbs she cultivated by mail order off-Island. Bob worked on other farms on the

<sup>19</sup> Rocks were income for many farmers. In 1941, the breakwater was built in Vineyard Haven harbor with rocks bought from Seven Gates Farm. In 1947, Seven Gates's financial report said, "[We] have gotten the State to buy much rock on the hills to the profit of the Farm." Rock sales were so frequent at Seven Gates that it was questioned whether it should continue. A Rock Committee was formed to decide: "Do we have a moral obligation to sell rock to shore up our Island?" The farm had the Island's largest collection of rocks, which was one reason Geologist Shaler had bought it. The decision was that rocks no longer would be sold; Shaler would have been opposed to selling the farm's "glacial heritage." (Bramhall 1988)



Plains, sometimes being paid in hay and other produce.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Electrification*

In 1933, only one in ten farms in the nation had electricity. Then came the New Deal and the Rural Electrification Administration which lent money to cooperatives to build power plants for farmers. By the 1950s, most Vineyard farms had electricity. Waller farm on the Edgartown Plains was not electrified until the early 1950s and was among the last Island farms to get power.<sup>21</sup> Farmers quickly replaced oil lamps with electric lights, bought new radios (radios had been battery-powered) and replaced cook stoves and ice boxes with electric ranges and refrigerators. Soon came electric pumps, indoor plumbing and oil furnaces. The day of the privy and wood stove had ended.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Tractors*

Tractors became affordable in the 1940s, phasing out the work horse. Earlier, in the 1920s, there were the Fordsons with iron wheels. Soon, lower-priced tractors such as the FarmAll were introduced, priced as low as \$800, complete with plow and disc harrow.

Islanders are ingenious by necessity and some farmers made their own tractors based on an old Model T or Model A Ford or a Chevrolet. A few used the chassis of an old Buick or another large car. The body was removed, driveshaft shortened and two transmissions coupled to a truck rear end to reduce the gear ratio for hard pulling. Most of these parts could be picked up at the dump or in the bushes behind the barn. Called "Doodle bugs," they were cheap, worked fine and lasted for years. Leonard Athearn has two that are still in use, dating from 1929 and 1930. He also has a Fordson from the 1920s. Tractors, built to take a lot of hard usage, last a long time when given reasonable care.

<sup>20</sup> Their daughter, Allouise (Waller) Morgan doesn't like the use of the name "Katama" for the section south of town where she grew up. It was always known as "The Plains," never Katama, she says. She believes Katama came into use when the airfield was so named.

<sup>21</sup> Seven Gates was electrified soon after World War II, but power lines didn't get to western Chilmark and Gay Head until 1952.

<sup>22</sup> In recent history, the energy crisis temporarily rekindled the wood stove in Island homes.



*This may have been the Island's first tractor. It may be Arni Fischer aboard.*

#### *The Corn Chopper*

Soon after World War I, Island farmers began using a new type of feed: chopped and fermented corn silage. Some large farms built silos beside the barns to store the corn. A "corn chopper" cut freshly-harvested green corn stocks into pieces less than two inches long, blowing them through a chute into the top of the silo, gradually filling it. That winter, the farmer, on a ladder in the barn, climbed into the silo atop the chopped corn and shoveled it down a chute into the barn. This was the basic winter food, about 20 pounds of it being forked into each cow's manger. The cows loved silage and ate it twice a day. By the end of winter, the silo was usually empty, ready for the new crop. Milk production was increased when cows were fed fermented corn rather than feeding them dry hay. Feeding had to be done after milking or an unusual strong taste would be in the milk.

#### *The Hay Baler*

The hay baler revolutionized haying, ending the back-breaking labor of lifting hay into the wagon by pitchforks. Baled hay also took up much less space in the barn. Dried hay, already raked into rows, was picked up by the baler, compacted and automatically tied into a bale with cord. In the late 1940s, Edmund Cottle, one of the first Islanders to own a bailer, did



custom baling for other farmers. Sometimes, it was a struggle for Cottle to get the hay in for all his customers if a rain storm was approaching. Soon, all farmers had their own balers.

#### *Co-operative Dairy*

Unlike baling, milk delivery became a joint effort. In the 1940s, Vineyard farmers decided it didn't make sense for each one to deliver milk door-to-door in the same town. Sometimes three farmers would be delivering on the same street each morning. Mainland farmers were forming cooperatives to solve the problem and Arnold Fischer, Arthur Norton and Jeff Norton were sent off-Island to investigate. These men spearheaded the cooperative movement.

Another leader in the cooperative movement, William W. "Pete" Pinney, owned Sweetened Water Farm on the western edge of Edgartown. He was a progressive New Dealer, open to such new ideas, and he asked dairy experts from the mainland to come to the Vineyard to explain the details. But these pioneers weren't able to sell the idea very quickly. It wasn't until 1946, five years after the formation of the Martha's Vineyard Milk Producers Association (which was promoting a cooperative) that one was established. Mr. Pinney was its first president. At least 20 farmers joined, including Elisha Smith and Benjamin Harrison Cohan, whose farm on Edgartown Great Plains had the Island's largest dairy herd. The Dairyland Farm near Trapps Pond on the Edgartown-Oak Bluffs road was bought as the base.<sup>23</sup>

Milk was picked up from farms of members by a truck driven by Jack Donnelly of Edgartown and hauled to the Dairyland barn, where it was pasteurized and bottled. Before this, Island milk had been sold "raw." The state of Massachusetts did not prohibit the sale of raw milk, but many mainland towns had. It was not illegal in Island towns.

The Cooperative Dairy quickly prospered. In 1949, milk production on the Island increased by 120,000 quarts and by 1951 the dairy's annual sales totaled 757,000 quarts, some even being exported to Nantucket.

Its most profitable year was 1954 with 33 Island farmers supplying it with milk. At a banquet in 1956 to celebrate the 10th anniversary, it was announced that "Dukes County would be the first county in the state to be certified free of Bangs disease."<sup>24</sup>

#### *Dairy Farming Declines*

By the 1960s, Island dairy farmers were having rough economic times. In 1961, Mr. Pinney sold his herd of Ayrshires. However, he still believed in his brainchild, the cooperative: ". . . the sale [of the Ayrshires] would help with the surplus milk [problem]", he said.<sup>25</sup>

It was a period of change for farmers, not only on the Vineyard but across the country. More powerful tractors, improved seed and chemicals had eliminated much drudgery, but had also greatly increased yields and costs. With larger crops, prices declined, placing farmers in a financial squeeze. Farmers' sons took jobs in town as an easier life than their fathers had (Hildebrand, 1995).

Another change was the decline in the demand for home-delivered milk. It now accounted for only 20 percent of the cooperative's income. The popularity of supermarkets and other retail outlets for milk in cardboard cartons was bringing an end of the morning visit by the milkman. In 1963, Hood & Sons from Boston took over the distribution function of the Cooperative and began shipping milk in from its mainland dairies in summer to meet the higher demands. Only nine farms remained in the Cooperative, the largest being Elisha Smith's. When he sold his farm in 1963, two-thirds of the Island-produced milk was eliminated. That same year, the Cooperative Dairy closed down.

With the increasing popularity of the Island as a summer resort, the land values were rising rapidly. Many farmers chose to sell their land and use the money to live more comfortably. Ham Luce sold his 200-acre farm for \$160,000 (\$800 an acre), a lot of money in the 1950s. Milk production

<sup>24</sup> Wells, p.48. Bang's disease, caused by bacteria, often results in the calf being aborted.

<sup>25</sup> There was some thought that Mr. Pinney's progressive views on regionalization and slowing development were hurting the cooperative's sales among conservative Islanders (Wells, p. 48).

<sup>23</sup> See "When Dairies Worked" by Julia Wells, *Vineyard Magazine*, July 1994, p. 45ff.



dropped. The Whiting Milk Company began shipping milk in from the mainland and delivering to Island stores, mainly the A & P and First National, in paper cartons. People soon preferred to buy milk that way because modern processing kept milk fresh longer than the milk from Island farms.

Today in the 1990s, only Nip'n'Tuck Farm in West Tisbury, operated by Fred Fisher and his son, remains as a dairy farm on the Island. It sells raw milk, eggs and vegetables. Mr. Fisher adds to the income by running wagon rides on summer afternoons. While much former farmland lies fallow as open fields or woods, a lot has been taken over by development. The milk, eggs and meat Vineyarders eat today come from large commercial farms on the mainland.

In the 1800s and early 1900s, almost every rural town in Massachusetts operated a "poor farm," a place where families "on the town" lived.<sup>26</sup> The farm, with a vegetable garden, hens and a cow or two, enabled them to produce much of their own food. The Vineyard's "Poor Farm" was near the intersection of Barnes Road and Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road. It closed in the early 1900s. Like the Poor Farm, dairy farms, which added so much character to the landscape with their herds of cows grazing in pastures, have also disappeared.

Once the livestock disappeared, nature took over, filling pastures with wild growth. Many residents remember vast acres of open land, not unlike Scottish moors, that are now hidden, overgrown with vegetation. Stonewalls, that framed the fields and confined the livestock, are today hidden. The landscape has reverted to what it was when the English arrived in 1642.

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<sup>26</sup> Today, we would say they were "on welfare."





## "Parson" Thaxter, Chaplain And Poet of the Revolution

**F**ORTY years before Emerson wrote of "the shot heard 'round the world," Edgartown's "Parson" Thaxter composed a poem (some might call it doggerel) memorializing the "battle" of Dorchester Heights. There actually was no battle, but General Washington had hoped there would be. He expected it to be the decisive battle of the war, resulting in the loss of so many British troops that they would capitulate.

Thaxter, although minister of the Edgartown church, was not on the Island in 1796, when he wrote his poem. He had taken time off to serve as a missionary in Maine, then part of Massachusetts. For nearly a year he rode around the vast spaces of Maine, holding church services with English settlers as well as, on occasion, with Indians. He had lots of time to think and used some of it to write "Dorchester Heights."

History tells us that Thaxter had been with Prescott's Regiment at the battle of Concord bridge a year before. He was a Chaplain in George Washington's army at the time of the Dorchester event, March 1776, probably stationed in Cambridge. Three militia companies from his home town, Hingham, were at Dorchester, but he did not serve with them. The several inaccuracies in the poem suggest that his knowledge of the event was second hand.

Boston, occupied by the British, had suffered all winter from shortages of provisions. Washington and his main force were in Cambridge, just across the Charles River, making any shipments to Boston difficult, except by water.<sup>1</sup> The Founding Fathers were in Philadelphia working on the Declaration of Independence, which would not be completed until July.

All winter Washington was criticized for doing little to further the revolution or to help the Bostonians. In February, prospects improved. The Americans had just received fifty

heavy cannon from Fort Ticonderoga, where they had been captured from the British. Col. Henry Knox and his men had dismantled them and dragged them over the frozen earth to Cambridge. It was time, Washington decided, to take action.

In Boston, the British were uncertain what they should do next. The occupation of the city required a large number of troops that were needed elsewhere. Plans were being made to evacuate and Washington, learning of the plan from his spies, decided it was time to attack. He did not want the several thousand troops in Boston to get to New York, where, he believed, the decisive battles would be fought. If he could force a British surrender in Boston now, he believed the war would end -- a negotiated peace would be worked out.

He and his generals worked out a plan. Boston was a different place geographically than it is today. It was on a large, bulging peninsula connected to the mainland only by a narrow neck, just north of Dorchester Heights, which itself was a peninsular of high ground overlooking Boston, an ideal place from which to fire cannon balls on the city.

Washington's plan was to set up some of Knox's artillery on Dorchester Heights, as though planning to mount an attack on Boston. This, he hoped, would entice the British to send troops across the narrow waterway between Boston and Dorchester to destroy the cannon. Once these British had left Boston, the Americans would attack from the north, across the Charles River, capturing the occupation troops and retaking the city. That was the plan.

The Dorchester feint had to be done quickly and secretly. Colonel Knox ordered his troops, hidden behind the Dorchester hills, to build hundreds of "fascines" -- sticks bound together in three-foot high bundles -- and "chandeliers" -- wooden frames into which the fascines would be placed. On the night of March 4, the bundles and frames were loaded on 350 wagons and silently hauled to the high ground of Dorchester. Overnight, they constructed an impressive fortification behind which they set up the cannon.

At dawn, the British, looking across from Boston, were shocked. What had been an empty hill the day before was now

<sup>1</sup> See *Intelligencer*, May 1989, pp. 112ff, for an account of one ship that was captured by Edgartown militia while trying to carry goods to the British in Boston.



a heavily fortified artillery site, its cannon threatening Boston.

Washington, too, was watching. From high ground somewhere, holding 4000 troops in Cambridge ready to cross the river and liberate Boston, he looked down on the city. British troops were being loaded at Long Wharf. Their artillery began firing at Dorchester Heights, but the balls fell short of the American position. All was going well, Washington thought. The British had fallen into his trap.

Then the weather took over. A violent storm blew up and raged all day.<sup>2</sup> Both attacks, the British on Dorchester and the Americans on Boston, had to be called off. Moving troops by water was impossible.

With an attack out of the question, the British kept loading troops onto transports, not to do battle but to evacuate the city. Within a few days, all the occupying soldiers had left. Washington rode into Boston victorious. But the celebration was muted. The British had left behind a smallpox epidemic. Washington, who had already had the disease and was immune, ordered that only inoculated soldiers, of which there were not many, and soldiers, like himself, who had recovered from smallpox, could enter the city. It was a non-triumphant entry.

Looking back on it, historians agree that the storm was fortuitous for the Americans. The British had learned of the planned invasion across the Charles River and had artillery ready to fire on the small boats carrying the Americans across from Cambridge. It is probable that Washington would have lost many of his best-trained soldiers and he, instead of the British, might have had to surrender.

Whatever *might* have been, the fact is that the storm canceled the plans of both sides. The British evacuated the city; in a few months, the Declaration of Independence was signed; and the war soon began in earnest miles from Boston.

One historian, James Thomas Flexner, in describing the events around Dorchester, placed great importance on nature's role in the conflict:

. . . the great storm of March 5 to 6, 1776, is assigned no role in the

<sup>2</sup> This storm is what drove the supply ship aground off Edgartown. (See fn 1.)

American historical saga. Yet it was one of the most crucial events in the entire American Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Thaxter does mention the storm, crediting divine help. He has the wrong date for the movement to the Heights:

### Dorchester Heights<sup>4</sup>

(1)

On seventeen hundred and seventy six  
on march the eleventh the time was perfix  
our forces marc'd on upon dorchester neck  
made fortifications against an attack

It was March 4th. when General  
Thomas moved 2000 American troops  
onto Dorchester Heights to build  
fortifications and set up artillery..

(2)

The next morning following, as howe did espy  
the banks they cast up were so corpine and high  
Said he three months all my men with their might  
Could not make two such forts as they've made in a night.

British officer Robertson said  
it would take 15,000 men  
to build that fort, it was a  
"work of magic."

(3)

Now we hear that their admiral was very wroth  
And drawing his sword, he bids howe to go forth  
And drive the yankees from dorchester hill  
Or he'd leave the harbor and him to their will.

General Howe orders attack on  
Dorchester by 2400 men. While  
this is going on, Washington will  
attack Boston from Cambridge.

(4)

Howe rallies his forces upon the next day  
One party embark'd for the castle they say  
But the wind and the weather against them did fight  
And on governors island it drove 'em that night.

2400 British load in boats, sail down to  
Castle William island. Major storm  
hits. Howe calls off attack.  
Washington cancels his.

(5)

Then being discouraged they soon did agree  
From bunker and boston on board ship to flee  
Great howe lost his senses they say for a week  
For fear our next fort should be raised in king street.

All British troops and Loyalists  
board ships, evacuating Boston, as  
serious looting occurs. "Bunker"  
refers to Bunker Hill.

(6)

But yet notwithstanding the finger of God  
In the wind and the weather which often occur'd  
Still howe like pharaoh did harden his heart

As one would expect, Thaxter sees  
the storm, so crucial to the  
battle for independence, as

<sup>3</sup> James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington in the American Revolution (1775--1783)*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1967, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> No changes have been made in the original, handwritten by Thaxter, in either spelling or punctuation. We are grateful to Fred Hills of Hingham, owner of the original, for sending us a copy of it and permitting us to publish it. Explanatory comments on right are by the Editor.



Being thirsty for victory to maintain his part.

(7)

He gives out fresh orders on thursday its said  
Forms his men in three branches when the[y] parade  
Acknowledgeing it was a desperate case  
In their situation the yankees to face.

(8)

Yet nevertheless being haughty of heart  
On friday one branch of his men did embark  
A second stood ready down by the sea side  
His dragoons are mounted all ready to ride.

(9)

Great howe he now utters a desperate oration  
Saying fight my brave boys for the Crown of our nation  
Take me for your s'altern and fight ye as i  
Let it be till we Conquer or else till we die.

(10)

But all of a sudden with an eagle ey'd glance  
They espied a fire being kindled by Ch  
In a barrack at cambridge as on many do no  
And then in confusion they ran to and fro.

(11)

Moreover as providence ordered the living  
Our drums beat alarm our bells they did ring  
Which made them Cry out O the yankees will com  
O horror they'll have us come let us be gone.

(12)

Then hilter skilter they run in the street  
Sometimes on their head and sometimes on their feet  
Leaving cannon and mortar, pack saddles and wheat  
Being glad to escape with the skin's of their teeth.

(13)

Now goes fitzpartick[?] with his men a fright  
And alike, they show cowards yet still they show Spite  
In burning the castle as they past along  
And now by nantasket they lie in a throng.

evidence of God's help.

"Parade" may describe the  
troops marching  
to Long Wharf to board  
vessels in the evacuation.

These two stanzas  
seem to be  
poetic license.

There is no record of this "fire."  
There had been firing of American  
cannon from Cambridge on  
March 2nd. Some had exploded.

By Sunday, all the British  
troops and Loyalists have  
left. Residents await  
the arrival of Washington.

Again, poetic license. The  
exit was orderly, as  
such things go, only  
smallpox was left behind.

Only troops immune to the  
disease were  
allowed into the city. The British  
waited off Castle William Island.

(14)

Let, em go let, em go for what they will fetch  
I think their great howe is a miserable wretch  
And as for their men they are fools for their pains  
So let them return to old England again.

Finis

Joseph Thaxter's

Paper

17 94

*In burning the castle as they past a long  
And now by nantasket they lie in a throng  
Let em go let em go for what they will fetch  
I think their great howe is a miserable wretch  
And as for their men they are fools for their pains  
So let them return to old England again*

*Finis*

*Joseph Thaxter's*

*Paper,*

*17 94*

Reverend Joseph Thaxter signed his poem with a flourish. He was in Maine as a missionary at the time he wrote it. Again, our thanks to Fred Hills of Hingham.



## A Running Account Of Matters & Things

by HENRY BAYLIES

*Now in Providence, our diarist Henry and his ailing wife, Hattie, are contemplating a move to Ohio to help her recover. Henry is exhausted and depressed. He is also more forthcoming in his diary entries.*

*He writes about his two marriages, both marred by illness, both disappointing to him. The friction with his in-laws has a basis in religion, he says. It is clear in this installment that he does not get along with Hattie's family, except for her brother.*

*The family of Hannah, his first wife, was different. They live in New Bedford and he is warmly treated when he visits them. The marriage was brief. It is only two years since she died, now at only 28 he is facing the possible death of another wife and beginning to feel sorry for himself.*

Monday, Sept. 30, 1850. [Continued from previous installment.] In the P.M. (yesterday, Sabbath), I attend the 3rd M. E. C[hurch] at Hopkins[?] Hall under the Pastoral care of my excellent Brother David Patten. Brother Patten preached a very good sermon or exhortation from the text "take my yoke upon you."

In the evening I again attend 3rd Church for a prayer meeting. The Brethren of this Church are a Spirited company, Zealous of good works. The meeting was somewhat characteristic. I

enjoyed the exercises very much & joined with the brethren in prayer & exhortations. I felt the influence of the Holy Spirit all day yesterday. May the Lord sanctify these privileges & his grace to my eternal welfare.

Last Friday wrote to Parents & Bro. D. Binocoy[?]. Rec'd same evening a letter from Parents.

Thus far for the past. Monday has just begun.

Thursday, Oct. 3. Little worthy of record has transpired since Monday. Dear Hattie improves very slowly. Her memory is somewhat improving but yet quite deficient. She suffers considerably at times from nervous pains in her whole body but principally in her Knees & lungs. My own health is rather improved. Considerable has passed lately which in connection with a variety of incidents & appearances & reflections have tended to effect my spirits quite gloomily. Perhaps I have been troubled with the "blues," but however that may be I have felt greatly depressed. Dark! dark!! dark!!! The Lord have mercy upon me.

As the season is rapidly advancing when a journey to the west will be tedious & exposure to the changing climate to one unacclimated perhaps serious.

What to do if I could do it, where to go if I could go & a thousand other paradoxes constantly haunt my mind. Physicians say I must go out of New Eng. -- but wife is sick & I can not go. If she were able to go I design going West but the season is becoming cold when I can not go West. Perhaps I might go south & that now seems impossible for H's health -- a favorable plan but then where South & What

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South & whence the money to bear the expenses?

Saw Brother Ely today just as he was leaving in boat with his family for Fall River. He wishes me to go to Taunton & take charge of the church there left vacant by the failure of Rev. Br. Townsend's health. I told him my design of going South or West & asked of him a letter Introductory & Credentials. He promises to send it me. I should be very much pleased to get T[taunton] & preach.<sup>1</sup>

I rec'd a letter from Bro. E. S. Sippert [?] of the Female College, Cincinnati. This is a very brotherly letter affording some valuable information. Have written two letters to New York inquiring expenses of passage, etc., to New Orleans. Wrote to Dr. Oliver[?] asking assistance in procuring place as teacher or a letter Introductory & Commendatory. Also wrote Rev. Bro. Harlan[?]. my P.E. [Presiding Elder], asking Credentials, advice.

Thus I'm in an uncertain transition state.

Friday, Oct. 4. I do not now (Monday) recollect what particularly if anything transpired on this day except the arrival of Father & Mother Baylies from Edgartown.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It's obvious Henry is not enthused about heading west. He would love to have a pulpit in New England, but Hattie's health comes first.

<sup>2</sup> Henry is catching up on his diary which he has been neglecting. His parents are on their way to Boston, probably to buy stock for Father Baylies's store. He is Frederick Baylies Jr., famous as architect and builder of Edgartown's three churches: Federated, Baptist (now a residence) and Methodist (now the Whaling Church) This last had just been completely finished a year before this visit. Henry never mentions his father's church-building. Is our present view of it not accurate? Surely, Henry would have mentioned those three graceful

Saturday, Oct. 5. On Sat. A.M. Father & self took a very pleasant ramble around about Providence, especially in the regions of a Grace Church Cemetery. P.M. Parents & self took a carriage & spent some two hours in riding over & around the City. The day & the ride & the scenery around was delightful & only being obliged to leave dearest wife behind upon a sick bed detracted from the pleasure of the occasion. From Smith's Hill is the most favorable view of the City & river. At the conclusion of the ride we called on Mrs. Wardwell, formerly Lydia S. Norton of E.<sup>3</sup>

Sabbath, Oct. 6. Early in the morning the Lib[?] promised a very unpleasant rainy day but before 9 o'clock the Sun shown out cheerfully & bade the clouds be gone. In the forenoon with Parents Baylies, I attended Chestnut St. M. E. Church with the hope of hearing Bro. Carver. In this, we were disappointed, as a Freewill Baptist Bro. from Me. [Maine?] attending the F.W.B. Conference in this city preached. I understand all the M.E. Churches in the city were supplied with these brethren. The discourse was from Text, "He that winneth souls is wise", & displayed a good heart & somewhat cultivated mind.<sup>4</sup>

P.M. Parents attended Dr. Cleveland's church & expressed themselves very much pleased with this Dr. I remained at home as my health was quite feeble & took physic. My mind

structures at some point.

<sup>3</sup> Lydia was the daughter of Henry and Rebecca (Luce) Norton of Farm Neck. She married William A. Wardwell in December 1848.

<sup>4</sup> The Freewill Baptists were Arminians, believers in a free will, unlike Calvinists. The denomination was in a period of rapid growth with 60,000 members.



has for some time, indeed nearly ever since I came to this house, been severely tried by sundry appearances & circumstances, real or imaginary. I have found my nervous system unequal to this succession of grievances, which it is better to forget than remember & my health has failed. Father & Mother have both not failed to give me the most salutary advice in the premises & without this Sabbath P.M. I have prayed more for grace to assist.<sup>5</sup>

Altogether with a dose of physic I obtained some relief & concluded to get along as well as I can while we are under the necessity of remaining in this city. The Lord assist us by his Heavenly grace.

Since Thursday I have observed manifest improvement in Hattie's strength & returning memory. She appears most the time very cheerful & happy & comparatively free from pain & distress.

**Monday, Oct. 7, 1850.** This is a delightful, cool, autumn day. Parents take the cars for Boston at 8 1/4.<sup>6</sup> I went to the cars & as Jenny Lind was to arrive in about an hour I concluded to stay & watch the movements of the people & perhaps catch a peep at the "Swedish Nightingale." Long before the cars arrived, the spacious station house was literally crammed. The very wide street in front was filled with men, women & children & all sorts of vehicles while the windows & doors of church, houses, stable & warehouse opposite were crowded with lookers on.

<sup>5</sup> Henry and his in-laws were incompatible. Perhaps it was the religious difference -- they were Episcopalians, as Henry will tell us later, and were not pleased when their daughter married a Methodist minister, especially one without a parish.

<sup>6</sup> Cars, meaning the railroad train.

From the very first, I suspected trickery, yet was resolved to ~~see~~ the witness the movements of the masses. The sight was amusing, edifying & disgusting.<sup>7</sup> There were probably 3000 persons waiting & looking to see the "divine Jenny" as she should take her seat in the neat & light carriage drawn by four white horses, rained [reined] up before the door, all of whom were disappointed as she was at her room in the City Hotel long before the coach & four drove off. Retiring from the scene, I passed up Broad St. & when in front of City Hotel I was stopped by a vast crowd assembled to see Jenny. I pushed myself into the crowd to a convenient place & had not waited long when I caught a glimpse of her smiling visage at the lower pane [panel] of her window in the second story. Shortly after, she came to the window, which was thrown up by a gentleman, I believe, & waved a large white handkerchief very ungracefully from it. The blinds [shutters] obstinately refused to stay back although she frequently threw them back & at length with her own delicate fingers turned the catch & confined them.

Jenny is a good looking Swedish girl with light hair & open features. Her smile at the window was a broad grin, her motions, to me, exceedingly awkward, but then the circumstances of the case -- the blind -- may attend somewhat.

So much for a peek at the woman whose fame exceeds that of any other woman in the world. As I can not pay \$650.00, the price paid by Col. Ross for the first ticket to her concert in this city this evening, neither 6 or 8 dollars, the common price, I have done

<sup>7</sup> On occasion, Henry can be a real snob!

with Jenny & may content myself at having seem the nightingale without hearing her sing.<sup>8</sup>

Hattie, my dear wife, more to me than all the "nightingales" in the universe, is today not quite so bright and well as for several days past. Nothing serious I trust. Some quite unpleasant things this P.M., about a shawl.<sup>9</sup>

**Monday, Oct. 14.** A week has passed without even a passing note. Little of interest has occurred & as for thoughts, scarcely one finds [its] way into or through my mind from one month's end to another. The fact is my present manner of life is liable to little incident & affords little incitement to no-table thought. To live without thought, I do not, but I begin to feel that my thoughts are becoming stereotyped. When Preaching, my mind was continually busy to some purpose without myself. Then, & too when Teaching, there was some incident.

Well, my present business is of the most sacred nature -- in strict compliance with my marriage covenant. It is two years this very day my covenant with my first dear wife, Hannah, was ~~des~~ annulled by death. I was faithful to the first, I will be equally faithful to this second. My lot as a married man has been far from what is called fortunate.

To my dear Hannah I was married seventeen (17) months, during more than nine (9) of which I watched with anxiety the wastings of Consumption.

To Harriette I have now been married little more than eleven (11)

<sup>8</sup> A fascinating account of celebrity worship in the 1850s. Jenny Lind was starting her first concert tour of the U.S., under the management of P. T. Barnum, hyped in the circus style of P.T. A routine hype was the buying of the first ticket

<sup>9</sup> Another hint of friction with the Budlongs.

months & during that time I have been called to give her up to die five or six times. She has probably seen not one well day since our marriage.

I suppose that by some I might be blamed for marrying a woman so feeble as Hattie was. Probably had I been informed at the time I was afforded an introduction to her that she was a sickly, feeble girl, I should have declined an introduction or received it only as a friend an acquaintance. But from all I could learn she was a healthy girl. I became acquainted with her. I loved her. She loved me. Our love was mutually evinced, if not plighted, before I was aware of her state of health. To abandon her then, I would not. The act would have cruelly lacerated her affections & my own. I married her in the fear of God. I married her & today I do not repent the step.

'Tis two years since Hannah died. Her memory is precious. I loved her, I love her still. I shall ever love her. I find my affection sufficiently expansive to embrace both Hannah & Harriette & to love them with a pure heart fervently. Away with that Selfishness & contraction of heart which can never love but one.

The past week has seen but little if any improvement in the health of dearest Hattie. She is still confined to her bed & can not bear her weight upon her feet. Her memory is still very poor, not retaining the occurrences of the passing day. So far as domestic peace & quietude is concerned the past week has been quite favorable -- perhaps as pleasant a week all things considered as I have found here.

My own health has been poor the last week. I took a day for recreation & went to Pawtucket & spent the day. Called on sundry friends, among the



rest was Uncle R. Wilcox & Uncle James Budlong.<sup>10</sup>

Rec'd a very kind letter from Rev. Dr. Olin & a Certificate Introductory & Recommendatory to his friends & the public general. He suggests says that the interior of Georgia or Alabama have a climate more favorable for a consumptive than even Italy. Once on the spot he assures me good employment.

(Sab. preached at 3rd. Ch.) Yesterday morn, attend Richmond St. Ch. About a half hour before church time in P.M., Rev. Bro. Patten of the 3rd M.E.C. with Dr. Labyrin called upon me & demanded I should preach. Bro. P. had an important appointment (without his consent) at Olneyville & had done all in his power to procure a preacher for the Hall & now as a last resort I must preach. Expatiation was to no avail & seeing the peculiar state of affairs I consented to sit in the pulpit. I took about the first sermon I could lay my hand on & with a prayerful heart & faltering went down. My apology was the simple fact that I had not through ill health preached half a dozen times for more than a year & for the last six months not once & that my notice to preach was of only a half hour's length.

My text was "Unto you therefor which believe he is precious" & this was by far the best portion of the sermon.

However, I did the best I could under the circumstances. But the circumstances were very trying for besides the short notice & my ill or no preparation, just as I was engaging in prayer there was a cry of "Fire!" As I began to

preach, the rushing of engines & the loud cries of "Fire" quite disturbed us & besides the probable nearness of the fire lead many to leave the room.<sup>11</sup>

On the whole it was a very confused afternoon & amid the cries & noise, going out & coming in, the good people were as little prepared to hear as I was to preach.

The devil has tempted me severely about my poor sermons, etc., but there is this about it, he could not preach as much truth if he should study on his sermon six months.

**Saturday, Oct. 19.** The Scenes of the past weeks have been slightly varied. Night & day nursing has been my business. A visit to see the "100 Learned Canary Birds & Java [?] Sparrows" & a walk out to Sylvan Point Cemetery, [were] the variations. Harriette has been a great sufferer without relief. Again has her disease baffled usual remedies & her Physician has been obliged to change his course entirely with what results remains to be seen. For several nights she has been unusually restive and suffering so that I am suffering with her from a want of necessary sleep. In the family neither of us find sympathy nor assistance beyond what is necessary strictly so to keep soul & body together.

I am not at home in this family & honestly believe they are sorry we are here. The Lord save me from the control of Supreme selfishness.

Addie has not called in to see Hattie during the fortnight past because forsooth she is offended at something or nothing or pretends to be.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> One must be very sympathetic with Henry on this occasion -- no study time and now a fire!

<sup>12</sup> Addie is Hattie's sister. Her family continues to give Henry cause to dislike them.

My own health suffers severely with such multiplied labor, care & trial. I supposed as did my Edgartown friends that once in Providence with my dear H. at her father's I should be almost entirely relieved of care & labor & should have opportunity to recruit [recover]. The reverse is the truth. My labor & care is multiplied & my opportunities for recruiting restricted.

While riding with Dr. Fabrigian<sup>13</sup> this P.M., he chanced to speak of my health & the serious course I am pursuing & advised an entirely different course. I took this occasion in confidence to divulge my position & circumstances. I told him that but yesterday I said to Mother Budlong I would hire a nurse & pay her board if she would have one in the family & was repulsed with a cold, "Well, I don't think it necessary -- we can get some one to sit up nights, etc.," & that is the end of it till it is repeated.

The Dr. heartily sympathized with me in my multiplied affliction, advised my boarding out, etc. My divulgements were not unsuspected by him for he had seen that all is not right.

Well, all these coldnesses, this want of sympathy, etc., arrises [sic] or principally arrises [sic] from the fact that Harriette left the Episcopal Church, became a Christian,<sup>14</sup> joined the Methodists & married a poor Methodist preacher. There is however I judge a decided want of natural sympathy & affection. What course to pursue I am at loss to decide. Would that He who guideth the simple would guide me. I feel that my lot is an exceedingly hard one. The darkness shrouding the future

<sup>13</sup> This seems to be the correct spelling of Hattie's doctor's name. Henry's writing is clearer here.

<sup>14</sup> An interesting remark: "became a Christian." Were Episcopalians not so considered?

is totally impenetrable. The Lord keep me from murmuring or charging God foolishly. In order to [do] this I daily feel the need of triumphing grace.

I rec'd a very encouraging & sympathizing letter from my dear Mother -- the Lord bless her. I wrote Parents last evening. I never before so fully prized my dear parents as I now do. Never can I begin to repay their continued kindnesses to me & mine. Heaven smile upon them & bless them in this world a hundred fold & in the world to come with life everlasting.

Not the least cruel ingredient or element in the suffering of dear Hattie & myself here is the indifference & negative cruelty of the family. Sewall excepted.<sup>15</sup> The Lord forgive & bless them all.

**Wednesday, Oct. 30.** Since my last entry I have been so constantly busy I have scarcely found time to write a word save what was strictly required.

Having received the advice of our Physician decidedly favorable to H's going South this winter I have been busy making preparations. Wednesday morning, 23rd, I went to Boston to engage passage to Mobile, Ala. In this I was disappointed, the vessel not being suitable for ladies.

I likewise sought to dispose of my Indian Book. Visited the Historical Library, a Mr. Drake, & the Cambridge Library. I found I had been laboring under a mistake in considering the book the Cambridge Platform.<sup>16</sup> It is the Cambridge Confession of Faith. This together with finding a notice of the Publication of the book dispelled

<sup>15</sup> Sewall is Harriette's brother and the only family member whom Henry likes.

<sup>16</sup> The Cambridge Platform was a resolution by New England ministers in 1648 adopting the doctrine of the Church of England.

<sup>10</sup> Wilcox was Hannah's uncle; Budlong was Harriette's. Wonder what they talked about?



in a great measure the illusion & materially lessened the value of my old Book. It is however a very rare book.

At about 4 P.M. took cars & spent night at Father Wilcox's in N. Bedford. I rec'd a very cordial welcome & felt myself perfectly at home. This is my first stay there since my second marriage. The unpleasant feeling evidently existing in Mother W's mind is apparently dispelled. Was happy to feel that I was welcome. Dear Hannah was the theme of much of my our conversation.

On Thursday morn made several unsuccessful calls & at last called on R. Pitman Esq., an old college mate. From him I learned that my books, text books at least, would be very desirable at the South & so immediately took packet to Edgartown to make a selection.

Although this lead [*led*] me to the excursion [*trip*] I was amply repaid by the welcome cheerful smiles & sympathy of parents & friends & pecuniarily by presents. Made a flying visit & returned to N. Bedford Friday morning expecting to arrive in season to reach Providence same evening.

In this however I was disappointed by want of wind & did not reach N.B. till 4 P.M. Put up at Father Wilcox's. Called at Uncle Joseph Wilcox. Mr. Tripps, Father Kent's. Uncle M. B. Palums [?]

Saturday morning took cars for Prov. Rev. R. M. Hatfield being on board I accompanied him by way of Fall River. At F. R., Rev. L. Ely came on board boat & at Bristol Rev. F. Upham. So that we had a very social pleasant time.<sup>17</sup> Bro. Upham proposed I should have a letter of Introduction to Rev.

<sup>17</sup> They must have gone by train to Fall River, transferred to boat to Providence, via Bristol. It does seem that ministers did a lot of traveling.

Dr. Hamilton of Mobile, who formerly was a member of the N. England Conf. Accordingly, one was written by Rev. Bro. Patten & signed by Rev. Bro. Upham, D. Fellman, D. Patten & T. Ely. This letter is of great value to me.

Saturday P.M. Telegraphed to New York to engage passage to Mobile. The Telegraph broke down so that I did not receive a reply till Sab[ath].<sup>18</sup> Vessel could not accommodate a lady.

Monday night sent to N.Y. by Express<sup>19</sup> to seek another vessel & if suitable engage passage, but in this was unsuccessful as I learned this morning.

The only chance seems to [be] to go to N.Y. with wife & baggage to wait till I can get passage to suit.

Yesterday morning (Tuesday), Father Budlong gave me \$150. to assist in our journey. This is the first cent he has advanced to Hattie since our marriage. The old gentleman is very "poor in spirit." The Lord have mercy on him & keep him from jail & poor house for he seems determined he shall have to go there.<sup>20</sup>

Well, small favors gratefully received. It is true he is very much pressed for money to meet the notes of Whitman Bradley & Co., all of which come on him. He has lost several thousand dollars by Whitman & is not yet clear of his swindlings.<sup>21</sup>

The publication of Henry Baylies's diary is made possible by the generosity of Joanne Coffin Clark.

<sup>18</sup> Telegraph was new in the U.S. Six years before, 1844, Samuel Morse sent "What hath God wrought?" to Baltimore from Washington.

<sup>19</sup> Express was a growing competitor to the postoffice. It picked up letters along rail lines and was faster and cheaper than U.S. mails.

<sup>20</sup> Henry's dislike of Mr. Budlong is showing.

<sup>21</sup> Does any member know what swindle Whitman Bradley & Co. was involved in?

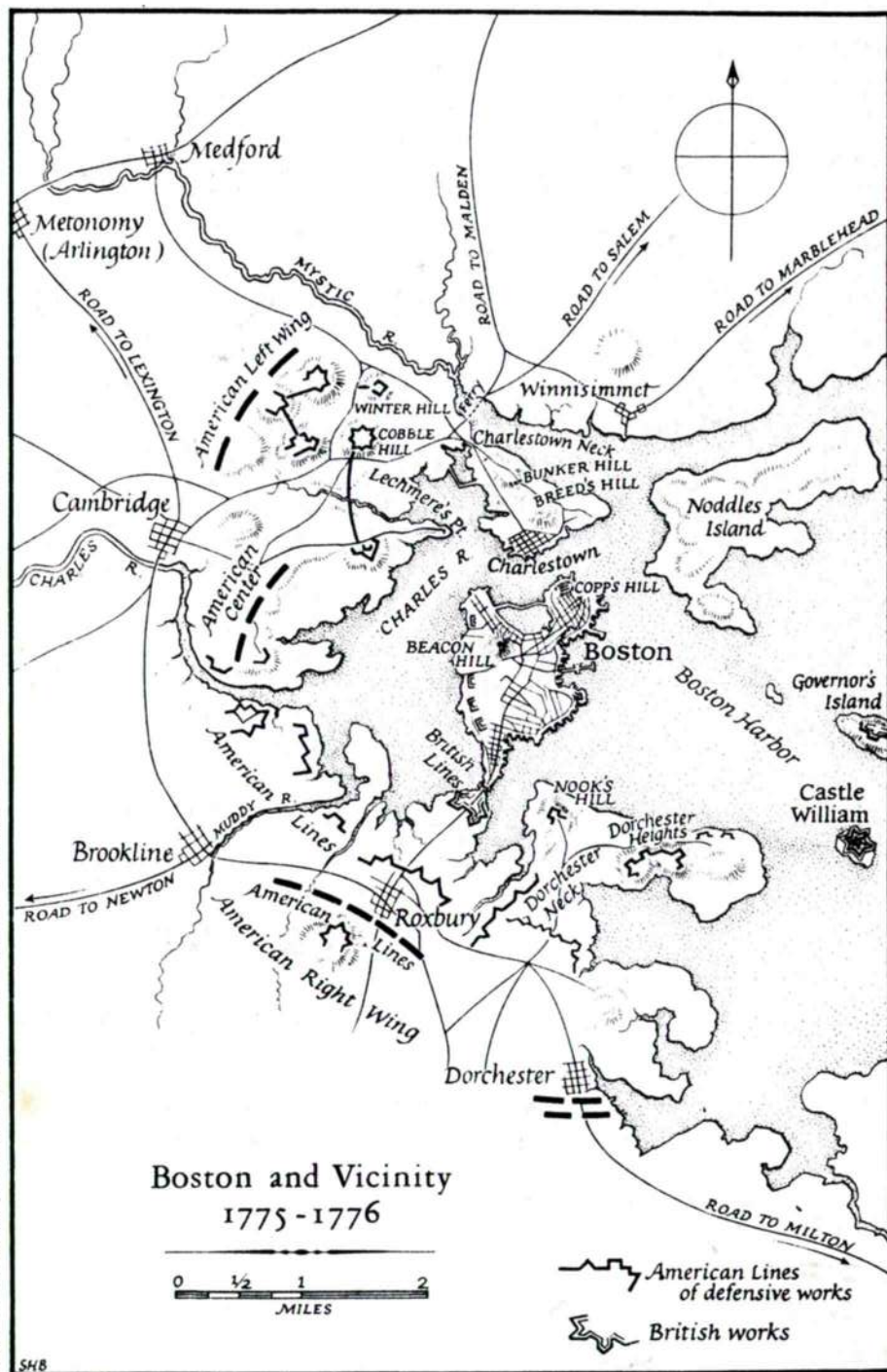
## Jenny Lind: Henry Baylies's First View of a Celebrity



From the Alice Curtis Desmond Collection at the Barnum Museum

Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," gave 100 concerts in the U.S. under the management of P. T. Barnum of circus fame. Above, Barnum, center, introduces her to the top bidder for the first ticket to her Boston opening. From Boston, she went to Providence. There, the first ticket was auctioned for \$650, the highest price paid in the tour, to Col. William Ross, a businessman who did not bother going to the concert. Auctioning first tickets was part of Barnum's publicity build-up. Our diarist, Henry Baylies, was in Providence when she arrived and joined the crowd of 3000 waiting to see her, while taking a dim view of such celebrity worship (see p. 52).





When the Dorchester "battle" occurred, Boston was joined to the mainland by a narrow neck. American "forts" were on Nook's Hill and Dorchester Heights (see page 44ff)