



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 44, NO. 2

NOVEMBER 2002

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*Edgartown Main Street in the 1930s. Delivery truck on sidewalk. Parking was on the south side.*

## **Some Edgartown Shopkeepers In a Simpler Time: the 1930s**

As remembered by HARRY R. BUTMAN

## **The Story of Martha's Vineyard: How We Got To Where We Are**

Nervous Neutrals and Reluctant Rebels

*(Chapter Three)*

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

## **Diary of Farmer and Teacher William Butler of Farm Neck**

(January 1, 1792 to April 25, 1792)

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#### Clarification, Literally



Photograph courtesy of Chris Baer.

In the August 2002 issue (inside back cover), we published a photograph of the gravestone of Simon Athearn, inscription unreadable. Through the miracle of digital photography and a skilled choice of the sun's position, Chris Baer, Tisbury historian, has made the obscure inscription readable.

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## Some Edgartown Shopkeepers In a Simpler Time: the 1930s

As remembered by HARRY R. BUTMAN

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR: *This is the last piece I will write for The Intelligencer. The well of my memory has been pumped dry. It has been a joy to pen these several vignettes of Edgartown's golden years of the 1930s, an attempt to capture in a net of words an elusive and evanescent yesteryear.*

THE EDITOR OF THE INTELLIGENCER has asked me to tell of the buildings and people of Edgartown's Main Street as I knew it in the early 1930s, when I was the newly ordained fledgling minister of the Federated Church.

It will be a work of collaboration with him, for I am now in my 99<sup>th</sup> year and while old Mr. Alzheimer has not wholly stopped me, he has laid a detaining hand on my shoulder. I am becoming prone to what the Editor calls "mis-remembering," which I elect to label with the flossier name of "confabulation" – fact and fancy mingling.

I shall relate memories of Main Street from Four Corners, where Water Street crosses it, up to Summer Street. That means I will not speak of such notable structures as Dr. Daniel Fisher's mansion, the Whaling Church, the Courthouse and the Town Hall. Nor will I tell of some of the notable persons who worked in them, such as Judges Abner Braley and Jim Boyle.

I will make one exception and write of Orrin Norton and his blacksmith shop on Dock Street across from the parking lot now at the foot of Main Street. The parking lot was not there then. Orrin's prowess with things metallic was hailed by Joseph Chase Allen, the inimitable chronicler of the Vineyard of yesterday — and with reason. Orrin had a way with metal. But

REV. HARRY R. BUTMAN lives in California and is 98 years old, or as he prefers to put it, is in his 99<sup>th</sup> year. While he was the young pastor in Edgartown Federated Church (1932 to 1937), these memories were born. The Editor is saddened that this, his fourth article, will be his last. His memoirs have brought us much delight.

his skills came up lacking when, at Fred Rodger's suggestion, I gave him my broken typewriter to repair.

Orrin returned it to me unrepai red and with it there was a small bag of tiny parts, unidentified. But that didn't lessen my admiration for Orrin's skill in turning a piece of iron, glowing cherry-red, into something useful with his hammer and anvil. As I remember the place, there was even a large tree outside his door, which was always open. Whether it was the "spreading chestnut tree" memorialized by Longfellow, I don't know.

Now back to Main Street. On its southwest corner at Four Corners stood the Edgartown First National Bank – red brick, white trim with gray granite steps, Arthur Hillman, president. The building had been built nearly a century before as the first home of the Martha's Vineyard National Bank, which around the turn of the century had moved to richer fields in Vineyard Haven. Some years later, Mr. Hillman along with a few other Edgartown business men gave the village its own national bank.

Arthur was a Harvard man, a good tennis player, and a bitter foe of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt whom Arthur habitually castigated for "stealing our gold."<sup>1</sup> I was more personally acquainted with his brother Horace, who fished the Grand and Georges Banks in his motorless, two-masted schooner, *Eliza*. Captain Horace took an unaccountable shine to me and offered me the use of his goose-shooting blind on Katama Bay, halfway out to Norton Point.

I once spent three days and two nights in that primitive shack with my wife and children. During those three days not a single soul went past – those were the spacious golden years of Edgartown, as yet undiscovered by day-trippers and weekenders. In those days there were many "summer people," but they were truly *summer* people, staying all summer, renting or owning lovely houses scattered around town.

On the north corner across Main Street, opposite the bank, was the drugstore (nobody called it a pharmacy then). The druggist was a pleasant, smiling little man whose name is not secure in my memory. Could it have been George Daley? Clerking there, which usually meant being behind the marble-

<sup>1</sup> President Roosevelt took the U.S. currency off the gold standard in April 1933.



Left, Arthur Hillman, standing in front of the bank he presided over; Right, his brother, Captain Horace, fisherman, friend of the author.

topped soda fountain mixing milk shakes and cabinets<sup>2</sup> was Edward "Pete" Vincent, not to be confused with the legendary Deacon Edward Vincent.

In the course of years, Pete went on to become a man of influence, a "Town Father." I remember that once during those prohibition years, he righteously refused to sell me a few drops of potable alcohol to fill my dory compass. It didn't occur to either of us to use methanol, the additive that boosts today's gasoline.

But of those working in the drugstore, the one I remember most clearly and most dearly is Miss Susan Beetle. I will make an ecclesiastical excursus to tell why. She was college-trained, a rare thing among the Vineyard's females of that day, having graduated from a pharmaceutical college in Boston. She proudly listed her degree, "Reg. Ph.," after her name.

My most memorable moment with Miss Beetle occurred during a meeting in the Federated Church on the evening of July 12, 1932. It was the day that I preached my candidating discourse, hoping to be selected as pastor. Three women of the church met with me: first, the brilliant, black-eyed Bertha

<sup>2</sup> A New England milk shake contained no ice cream. With ice cream, it was a cabinet, sometimes called a frappe.

Beetle; second, Bertha Mayhew, a descendant of the founding pastor of the Vineyard's first church, ancestor of the one I was seeking to be minister of; and, third, Susan Beetle, a Baptist saint of the Lord, as well as being the above-mentioned "Reg. Ph." The trio wanted me as their minister and were organizing a campaign on my behalf.

Said Bertha Beetle, dark eyes flashing, "A few old fools like my father and John Foreman and Theodore Wimpenny, want a pretty face in the pulpit. But we need a man."

She was referring to another candidate for the post, a woman, daughter of the superintendent of the Baptist Churches in Massachusetts. The Federated Church had, a few years earlier, been formed by combining Edgartown's Congregational and Baptist Churches.

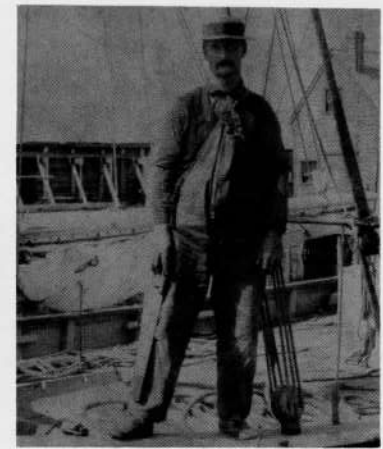
"She is a brilliant woman," I said, trying not to show my delight at their support.

I had met the candidate a few weeks earlier at a seminar for rural Maine ministers, bankrolled by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the patron saint of the Baptist church at the time. I had gone there to deliver a lecture on using literature as an aid to sermonizing. I am still rather proud of my choice of books: *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, Franz Werfel's novel dealing with the Turkish massacre of Armenians in the early 1920s, an example of genocide still angrily debated today; *Moby Dick*, long before Melville had become big-time; and James Joyce's masterpiece, *Ulysses*, then hot off the press, still legally available and not yet banned in Boston.

After my words of praise for my female competitor, Susan Beetle responded with these few quiet words loaded with deep sociological meaning: "We have all the brilliant women we need in Edgartown."

What she meant was that in those pre-feminist days, there was no place in the workplaces of Martha's Vineyard for highly capable women. The brilliant women of Edgartown (and there certainly were some during those years) had only two choices of a career: marriage or spinsterhood.

Our minor-league colloquy was taking place in the rear of the sanctuary of the Federated Church, not far from the pew of



Two of Miss Bertha's three "old fools." Left, Theodore Wimpenny, who kept his hymnal secure; right, John Foreman, fisherman, when younger.

Theodore Wimpenny, who will be mentioned again. I speak of that pew knowingly because as a regular summer visitor after my pastorate ended, I sat in it for 48 years. It is the fourth pew from the front on the north side of the church. During those 48 summers of Sunday occupancy, I became familiar with a unique feature of the pew: attached to the bottom of the pew directly in front of it was a small drawer with a keyhole and a lock. Inside the locked drawer was Theodore's personal hymnal. In his absence, nobody was going to use his hymnal for free.

Old Theodore was an interesting man. He was 80 years old when I knew him almost 70 years ago. In his youth, he had "whaled it" in the Pacific as Joseph Chase Allen would put it, so he might well have been whaling in the Pacific when the *Essex* was rammed and sunk by a gigantic sperm whale. It was that disaster that inspired Melville's *Moby Dick* and the recent publication of *In the Heart of the Darkness: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*, by Nantucketer Nathaniel Philbrick.

Next north on Main Street was the "Paper Store," owned by Leroy M. Tilton, featuring its "Home-made Ice Cream." Running the store was his wife, Jessie, a testy lady, whom all children, and many others not so young, respectfully called Mrs. Tilton. The store had a soda fountain, a couple of tiny tables with bent iron-wire chairs.

The major attraction in the store, however, was a sturdy, low table piled high with newspapers, hence it was always known as the "Paper Store." It had been simply the "Paper Store" for more than 30 years. The papers arrived each morning from many cities on the mainland. Each morning, a line of summer residents patiently waited until their hometown paper was unbundled and stacked on the table. In the back of the store there were racks of magazines of all kinds.

Mrs. Tilton's husband died in 1937, my last year as pastor, as I recall. They had no children and she continued to run the store. When she died, Irving Willoughby who had clerked there for years, took over the business.

The "Paper Store" was once the scene of a three-cornered debate involving Mrs. Tilton, Theodore Wimpenney and me. At the time, Mrs. Electus D. Litchfield, a summer resident with bright blue eyes and a social conscience, was convinced that Edgartown needed a boys' club and, on my advice, had engaged Joe Robichau to manage it. (Incidentally, I remember picking up Joe late one cloudy evening in 1933 when he got off the steamer from Woods Hole at the Town Wharf in Edgartown. The steamer spent the night tied up there in those days. Joe had come to the Island to run the Boys' Club at my suggestion, he and I having grown up together in Beverly. Later, a high school teacher and coach, he served many years as an Edgartown selectman. Like me, he is approaching the century mark.)

One morning when I went into the Paper Store, as was my daily habit, I was promptly assailed orally by Mr. Wimpenney, who had no use for such new-fangled nonsense as a boys' club and wanted to be sure that I knew his feelings.

"Teach boys to play?" he snorted indignantly. "Might as well teach kittens to play!"

As a novice curé of souls, I had not learned what seasoned pastors come to know – the truth of scripture which says that "a soft answer turneth away wrath." So I made a hot reply. Mrs. Tilton took issue and a fine verbal imbroglio ensued.

"What do you mean," she demanded, "coming into my store and insulting one of my old customers? You're a fine minister!"



*Main Street of the author in 1930s. Drug store, right; up a bit, Tilton's Paper Store, sign visible; left, Hillman's bank. Trees are at movie theater.*

In my innocent and fiery youth, I had no intention of retreating. "It's a fine store," I said sarcastically, "where a minister can't come in to buy a paper without being insulted by one of your customers. Why don't you tell him to stop talking?"

I don't remember just how the brouhaha ended, but I then paid for my paper and went out. Nor do I remember anything more about the joust continuing, either in the store or at the church. I do know that the Boys' Club did come into being despite Mr. Wimpenney's views.

Close to the Paper Store was the home of Mr. Henry Edson [Edison?], the only resident of that part of Main Street. He was a pleasant, quiet man and I enjoyed my pastoral visits with him. It seems to me that his house (now known as the Desire Coffin House) was the only truly old building in that block.

Next on the north side of the street was the real estate office of Stuart Avery and his sister, Olive. Then came the post office – Preston Averill Sr., postmaster. The post office, in those days, was a place of social significance. People came in when the day's mail was scheduled to arrive. While it was being sorted and placed in the boxes, each box secured by a combination lock (left to C, right to M, or was it the other way around?), there was ample time for the assembled townspeople to exchange the news. It was the day's social hour for the

village. Most had come on foot. Parking spaces along Main Street (it was one-way only from School Street down to Water Street then — and just in summer, I believe) were rarely filled to capacity. Today, of course, every post office needs plenty of parking spaces and so Edgartown's has moved out of town. Far enough out so very few can walk to it (and still in need of more parking spaces).

Along here, perhaps in the same building as the post office, there was a bakery, called "Our Own Bakery," owned by one of the Averill family, I seem to remember.

Also it seems to me there was a hardware store somewhere along here (not the one started by Lauress Fisher after World War II), but I can't recapture its memory. It troubles me that I am unable to come up with the owner's name as he was a close friend of my brother John.

Nor do I remember much about the little shops along the other side of the street above the bank. I do recall Edwin Gentle's barber shop in a large house set back a bit from the sidewalk. Edwin had one memorable mannerism that deftly combined business and tonsorial propriety. He would give your fresh haircut a final brushing and say, "There, that will do you for three weeks." He was counting on your return.

I do recall that in one of those small buildings there was a cobbler's shop. The shoemaker was Archie Gallant, about whom I remember very little except I can easily recall the special odor inside his shop, a fragrant mix of leather, wax and shoe polish accompanied by the whirring of the buffing brush as he gave the repaired shoes a final shine. Putting new, slippery soles on comfortable, old shoes was the standard practice then. The shop was a busy place and Archie was a hard worker.

Next to the barber shop was an edifice of great economic and social significance. It was the Edgartown Playhouse, a movie theater built by Alfred Hall, who bought the business from a Mr. Dexter in the 20s. Dexter showed his movies in the Town Hall, but Alfred decided the town deserved a theater. He didn't show movies every night during winter, but Saturday's doubleheaders were packed. Mrs. Dexter played the piano to accompany the silent films, even after Mr. Hall took over.



*Morris Hall in front of his store.*

Across the street was Hall's Department Store, owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Morris Hall. Morris was Alfred's older brother, an engineering graduate from M. I. T., who was unable to find work in his profession so he came to Edgartown, where his father, Benjamin, owned the dry-goods store. When his father died, Morris and Rose, his wife, took it over. I rarely had reason to enter Hall's Department Store, as it was advertised. Selling clothing, fabrics and sewing-related items, its shelves were filled with bolts of cloth that Mrs. Hall would unroll on the counter to cut as many yards as the seamstress wanted.

Going west, you came to the First National Store, one of the New England chain of grocery stores. It was housed in a brand-new brick building (the street's only other brick building was the bank) that Alfred Hall owned, having had it built at the request of the company. The store was managed by a competent young Portuguese man whose name eludes me. The meat-cutter there was a member of my church and lived across School Street from the Baptist Church. One of the clerks later was Clyde MacKenzie, who has written some interesting articles on East Coast fisheries for *The Intelligencer* and other scholarly journals.

Across the street was LeRoy Vose's appliance store where smiling George Madeiros worked. LeRoy sold me the only thing



1936 photo. from right, Avery's real-estate office and store; Redmen's Hall, with post office and bakery; Hall's with awning; and First National.

I ever bought on time – a washing machine for my wife whose knuckles were sore from scrubbing – and he charged me no interest. LeRoy also sold insurance. His son, Donald, long-time president of Edgartown National Bank, years later allowed me to use the upper balcony of his two-story boathouse, the famed pagoda boat house at the end of his pier, for stepping the mast of my 21-foot sloop *Jebjab*.

While I was buying that washing machine, LeRoy threw in some advice, so bold and bizarre, considering the topic, the mores of the time and the brevity of our acquaintance, that it may sound like fiction. But as Mark Twain once wisely said, "Truth is stranger than fiction because fiction has to consider probability, and truth doesn't"

It occurred when, after gratefully accepting his kind offer, I told LeRoy that I wished I could pay cash. I didn't like being in debt, not even on the installment plan. LeRoy, agreeing with my concern, volunteered this racy counsel: "In this town, Reverend, you can sleep with the soprano if you want to, but you've got to pay your bills."

For the record, I did only the latter.

On the corner at the end of the block, across from the First

National Store, was Benny Lumsdens's store. I can't clearly remember the interior, but I think there was a pool table there. Benny was a kindly soul who chattered cheerfully as he, on occasion, sold me fishhooks and lines.

So ends my brief, rambling chronicle of that important portion of Edgartown's Main Street. As I near the century mark, it is pleasant for me to call up the shades of those who walked and worked thereon. Except for my good friend, Joe Robichau, I suppose they are all dead now.

One tends to put on rose-tinted glasses as he looks at a golden age long gone. If we who live in today's world were put back into that time and place, we would find it lacking in creature comforts and rigid with a lingering puritanical ethic, smug, cramped and provincial.

But that day had a stability and a freedom from fear which our present volatile age lacks. For we live in a time of great troubles at home and abroad, with traditional faiths and customs being shaken, with counter-crusades resurgent, and the apocalyptic horror of nuclear war a clear and present danger.

When seen against this background of imminent global storms, the life on Main Street, Edgartown, in the 1930s was a good life indeed.

So, hail and farewell, old shire town.



Vose's boat house, on a 1915 postcard. From its upper deck, the author stepped the mast of his *Jebjab* many years later. Not a power boat in sight.

## The Story of Martha's Vineyard: How We Got to Where We Are

(Chapter Three)

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

### Nervous Neutrals and Reluctant Rebels

WHEN NEWS of the shots fired at Lexington and at Concord reached the Vineyard in the spring of 1775, there were no patriotic outbursts, no drums rolling. Nor were there in any village on Cape Cod. Instead, a sense of worry, of uncertainty, settled over the people.

The men living in those towns depended on the sea for their livelihood. It was all very well for those "embattled farmers" crouching behind stone walls to fire at the British as they marched back to Boston, but there were no stone walls to crouch behind on the ocean. Britannia ruled the waves. Who would protect the mariners? Certainly not that hot-headed Sam Adams or those embattled farmers.

The issues that had brought Adams and his rebels to the boiling point had never meant much to Vineyarders. No British redcoats marched down their streets, demanding housing. Nuisances such as duties and taxes didn't bother mariners who had ways of getting around them. Five-sixths of the tea consumed in Massachusetts came in illegally, according to Governor Thomas Hutchinson. On the Vineyard, it was probably six-sixths. Sailors could avoid the tea tax, but they couldn't avoid His Majesty's warships.

It is no wonder that they had little enthusiasm for the rebellion, isolated and vulnerable as they were.

Years later, Beriah Norton stated the case forcefully while in London seeking restitution for the Island's war-time losses:

It is a matter even of public notoriety that the inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard did at the commencement of the Rebellion in this Country make the most explicit declarations that they would not be concerned with either party in the

Controversy, because by their local situation they were equally exposed to the resentment of both: they were on the one hand directly opposite and near to, as part of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, where the Inhabitants could annoy them at pleasure; and on the other, were liable from their insular situation to every incursion either from King's Ships or Privateers.

Beriah described Islanders as neutral, neither on the side of the colonies nor on that of England. Nervously neutral, they were. With good reason. The English navy, along with thousands of soldiers, was based in Newport, Rhode Island, only 35 miles away. His Majesty's warships regularly sailed in Island waters. Vineyarders watched the tall, powerful ships, their cannons at the ready. They knew how vulnerable they were. Neutrality was the best course.

Not all Vineyarders agreed. There were some who were loyal, who preferred the known to the unknown. The Vineyard wasn't alone in that regard. John Shy, historian of the Revolution, estimates that one-fifth of all the colonists were loyal to the Crown. John Adams, himself active in the uprising, thought there were more — about one-third.

The leading Vineyard loyalist was William Jernigan of Edgartown, representative to the General Court. His memoir describes how he was threatened by Edgartown rebels for his opposition to the rebellion. So the Vineyard did have its hot-heads, its rebels, but, as elsewhere, they were a small minority.

Even those hot-heads in Boston were not demanding independence, not at the start. They weren't in revolt against a king, only in rebellion against a Parliament that ordered them to pay duty on necessities. They were in rebellion against laws that allowed soldiers to search their homes without a warrant and to be housed in them against the owners' wishes.

These were the legitimate complaints of colonists who considered themselves free men. That was why they had come to the colony. Their fight was only with the Parliament, where laws were passed that affected them, but where they had no voice, no representation.

The rebellion had been born in 1763 when Parliament voted to tax them to pay for maintaining an army in the

ARTHUR R. RAILTON, the Editor of this journal, invites members to send in corrections to this ongoing series of Island history.

colonies. James Otis from Barnstable on Cape Cod, the king's advocate general in Boston, resigned to become counsel for the Boston merchants who were opposed to the tax. Otis coined the expression "taxation without representation," a battle cry that would last for years.

Next came "The American Revenue Act," known as the Sugar Act. It was a tariff, the first time duties were used to raise revenue instead of to protect business. Sugar, textiles, coffee, wine and indigo, were subject to the duty.

In 1765, Parliament levied an even more unpopular tax: the Stamp Act, requiring that stamps be bought and affixed to all printed materials, including legal forms, invoices and even playing cards. This tax hit the professional class hardest, the lawyers and businessmen, uniting them in opposition. It was, some say, the beginning of an organized revolt throughout the colony. The justices of the courts were so strongly opposed to it (affecting as it did most of their work) that it was rarely enforced. So widespread was the evasion that the next spring Parliament repealed it.

But England still needed money. In June 1767, Parliament passed the Townshend Acts, setting duties on glass, paint, lead, paper and tea. The duty on imported paint might have had some mild support on the Island. In 1764, there was a paint mill at Gay Head. A letter written by W. Whitwell to his father, who was involved in Indian missions and was going to the Island to preach to them, documents it:

... have just time eno [enough] to inform you of my desire to have a barrel of yellow & red paint from Gay-head, & will pay whatever Charges may accrue from the same. Please to let the barrel be filled  $\frac{1}{4}$  with Red &  $\frac{3}{4}$  with Yellow; if it can't be procured, fill it up with such Colours as you can get. Yr. dutif. Son, W. Whitwell.

Rebel Sam Adams had no interest in protecting a tiny paint mill on the Vineyard nor paint mills anywhere. He was totally opposed to the Townshend Act. Encouraged by his friend Otis, he drafted a letter for the General Court to send to all the colonies urging them to disobey the law. The General Court voted its approval and the letter was sent.

Governor Bernard, the king's appointee, called the letter a "treasonous" act, one that incited others to disobey a law. He ordered the General Court to rescind it at once. A vote was taken and the legislature refused to rescind the "treasonous" letter, with 92 voting "No," and only 17 voting to rescind.

Two of those 17 "loyal rescinders" were Vineyarders: William Jernigan of Edgartown (mentioned earlier); and Matthew Mayhew of Chilmark. James Athearn of Tisbury, the Island's third representative, voted "No" with the majority.

Governor Bernard was so upset by the defiant vote that he dissolved the General Court, giving the rebels an issue around which to gather. The 92 who had opposed the governor were "raised to sainthood," wrote historian Robert Middlekauff in his book, *The Glorious Cause*, while the 17 loyalists who voted to rescind were attacked as enemies of the people.

More united than ever, the colonies voted to embargo all English goods until the repeal of the Townshend Acts.

Jernigan, one of the two Vineyard "loyalists," explained his vote in his memoir, written much later. He phrased the question differently (writing, at times, in the third person):

... in the year 1768 at the time when that most important Question was before the House, which was, "Shall we or Shall we not, ingage in a war against our Mother Country" (or words to the same effect) in order to obtain our Liberties and Indipendance; he [Jernigan] then considering the matter to be very siours [serious?] in our infant state and doubtfull on our side, all circumstances considered at that time, and the Particular situation of the Vineyard, gave his Vote in the negative with the 17, acting according to his best skill and judgment for the good of the whole, and he did not run with the current, nither with the 92 ...

Jernigan claimed that what he was did was what was best for the Island. He cited another example: his opposition to an Island militia. When the General Court was debating an act that required every town to form a company of militia, men who could be called upon to serve in the colonial army when needed, Jernigan argued successfully for exempting the islands. He said that the Vineyard and Nantucket, isolated and vulnerable, could spare neither the men nor the money:

a chance to live as they had for generations.

But that wasn't going to happen. In retaliation for the colony's embargo, Parliament passed the Restraining Act of 1775, closing the North Atlantic fishing grounds to all New England fishermen and prohibiting New England from trading with any nation except England.

If the act was enforced, it would bring New England to its knees. In England, serious opposition to the act was quick in coming. The English had become dependent upon fish from New England. Edmund Burke, the British philosopher, spoke against the measure in Parliament:

For some time, Mr. Speaker, has the Old World been fed from the New. . . when I know that the Colonies in general owe little or nothing to any care of ours. . . when I see how profitable they have been to us, I feel all the pride of power sink and all presumption in the wisdom of human contrivances melt and die away within me.

As Tom Paine wrote later in *Common Sense*, trading with the colonies could not be stopped as long as "eating is the custom in Europe." Both sides were eager to end the rebellion without bloodshed. But the mood was too heated for that.

Early on the morning of April 19, 1775, the first blood was shed. It was a mere skirmish, over in minutes, but it was, as the poet later wrote, "heard round the world." British troops, marching to confiscate a suspected ammunition depot in Concord, were met by a small, unorganized group of rebels on Lexington Common. The gunfire seems to have been almost unintentional. The Americans were dispersing, faced with overwhelming British strength. But an order to fire was given, ill-advisedly it now seems, and eight Americans were killed, ten others were wounded. One British soldier was wounded.

The column of British then continued on to Concord, where another confrontation occurred. British and Americans were killed in a disorderly, impromptu exchange of shots. The British searched the town for the cache of arms they had come to seize and there was plundering. Several buildings were set afire. Only a small amount of ammunition was discovered, making the entire operation of little consequence, except to the dead and for its rallying effect on the Americans.

Among those fighting at Concord bridge was a chaplain, behaving like a soldier. He was Rev. Joseph Thaxter of Medford, who later began a 40-year reign as the distinguished village pastor of Edgartown.

Marching in formation back to Boston, the British faced disaster. With time to organize while the British troops were in Concord, hundreds of American patriots lined the road to Boston, crouching behind stone walls and firing at the marching column. By the time the British arrived in Boston, they had suffered nearly 300 casualties. The Americans, despite the stone walls, had 100.

Inadvertent, almost accidental, though it had been, that day's action aroused the entire colony, creating, as Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend, "a phrenzy of revenge."

Governor Gage, the king's new leader of Massachusetts, saw the action as a direct attack on the Crown and placed the colony under martial law. On the Vineyard, the mood was starting to change. A meeting of town delegates was gathered in Tisbury to decide what should be done now. The rebellion was not going to end peacefully, as they had been hoping. An incomplete document in the Society archives indicates that Islanders no longer considered themselves neutral in the struggle. Now their concern was defense:

There was a very learge majority in favour of appling to General Court at Boston for soldiers. . . all our arms were particularly inspected & now the minds of many were sounded amongst the young men to see who would Join the Volinteer Corps of Edgarton. We soon found the number of active young men, say 12. Some had call afterward to leave and go [to] sea but their number was soon replaced.

Twelve "active young men" could hardly defend the Island against the British. Money, too, was in short supply. The General Court, after receiving the Island's request for soldiers, named Joseph Mayhew of Chilmark to head "A Committee of Safety for Dukes County." He was ordered to report back to the legislature what funds would be available. Only one of the three villages replied to Mayhew:

Tisbury reported that. . . they were under great Difficulty with respect to raising Money for that purpose as they have great

occasion for Money to procure a necessary supply of Bread, Corn, and Money was very scarce amongst them thro' the failing of the whale-voyages last year, and thro' their having no Market for the Oyl they have since obtained.

Mayhew's plea of poverty rested on the Island's whaling industry. From 1770 to 1775, the Vineyard had 12 active whale ships, employing 156 seamen. Annually, an average of 1200 barrels of oil (mostly sperm oil) was produced. The Island ranked fifth in Massachusetts in whaling, after Nantucket, Dartmouth, Wellfleet and Boston.

The General Court was informed that the Island had neither the men nor the money to defend itself. Meanwhile, the shooting was drawing closer. From late 1774 until October 1776, His Majesty's sloop *Falcon* was on patrol out of Tarpaulin Cove, on Naushon Island of the Elizabeths, just across Vineyard Sound. She was enforcing the act that prohibited the colony from trading with any nation except England. Her cannons were heard often, reminding Vineyarders of their vulnerability.

The Society has a copy of a *Falcon* log that covers about two months of those years. In one month, she "brought too" fourteen vessels, seizing several as prizes and impressing eight seamen to replace some of her own crew who had deserted. She often sailed into Holmes Hole. One day, while in the harbor, she fired her cannon and seized two suspicious vessels. No longer were Vineyarders able to feel isolated.

No longer did they believe that the struggle would be settled peacefully. Prospects of peace had vanished. Bunker (Breed's) Hill made that clear. Unlike Lexington and Concord, the battle of Bunker Hill was not inadvertent. Americans were dug into entrenchments on the hill when the British Redcoats charged up, their bayonets flashing.

When it was over, the Americans were forced to retreat and the British occupied the hill, at great cost to both: more than 1000 British and 400 Americans killed and wounded. The war had become deadly serious.

A few weeks before Bunker Hill, the Second Continental Congress met in Watertown. Beriah Norton of Edgartown and James Athearn of Tisbury were there as delegates. Chilmark

did not send a representative. The Congress voted to form a Continental Army and it chose Col. George Washington of Virginia to command it.

It also voted to supply coats for local militiamen. Edgartown was to receive 36 coats, Tisbury 32 and Chilmark 44. It is unclear why Chilmark, with the smallest population, was to get the most coats. There is no record of the coats ever being received or of there being a need for them. There were no local militia units on the Island, according to William Jernigan, as we have seen.

Militia were more than a defensive home guard. They were a reserve force to be called up when General Washington needed men. There was no public support for this on the Vineyard. Nor was there any way that the number of men needed to fill those authorized coats could be raised. Most men of military age were at sea, even with a war going on.

Those sea-going activities, sometimes illegal, brought suspicion and serious charges against both islands. There were rumors that some vessels leaving the Vineyard and Nantucket were taking provisions to the British. The Massachusetts General Court in December 1775 stated:

. . . that supplies of provisions, more than are necessary for internal consumption and for such voyages as may be prosecuted. . . have been lately shipped from this and the neighboring colonies for the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, and there is great reason to suspect that the inhabitants. . . [have been] supplying our enemies with such provisions. . . And the Select-Men. . . of each Town on Martha's Vineyard are directed forthwith to make strict enquiry into the importation of provisions into their respective towns since the 28<sup>th</sup> of September last, and of all provisions now in said towns, and to make returns thereof on oath to the Court. . . And the inhabitants of this colony and of the other United Colonies are desired to withhold further supplies of provisions, fuel and other necessities from said islands.

This was serious. It meant, if the colonies complied, that the Vineyard would be without necessities. It was dependent on imported grain, butter and cheese, the basic foodstuffs that made up most of the calories in colonial diets.

Fortunately for the Vineyard, the General Court soon voted to annul its action, but only so far as the Vineyard was concerned. Nantucket was not included. And Vineyarders were not totally cleared. "Many" were innocent, but not all:

. . . [having learned] upon inquiry. . . that it doth not appear that many of the inhabitants of the island of Martha's Vineyard ever had a disposition to supply the enemy with provisions, and. . . that they were suspected of corruptly doing the same, and such measures having been taken as (in all probability) will prevent the enemy from being supplied from that island, and the inhabitants thereof must suffer while under the aforementioned restraint, Therefore, Resolved, that the order of this Court. . . so far as it respects Martha's Vineyard only, be and hereby is annulled.

Nantucket, while still subject to the embargo, strongly denied providing the British with provisions.

On the Vineyard, there continued to be great concern about how it could possibly repel an attack. With the few men and arms they had, residents would be forced to surrender. Outside help was essential. So on March 8, 1776, Tisbury petitioned the General Court "to see if they will grant us A further Supply of Men, Arms & Ammunition for the Defence of the Island against any Invasion." What was meant by "A further Supply" is unknown. As far as our records show, none had yet been provided. The court's response was slow to come.

That spring, the colonial congress authorized the arming of ships to intercept and capture any vessel carrying supplies to the British. These were privateers, legal pirates, required to post bonds and take their conquests to "prize" ports. For Vineyarders and others it was a way to make a patriotic profit.

The capture of enemy vessels by patriots had been taking place for some time without authority. What may have been the first naval "battle" of the Revolution was one such action in April 1775. Charles E. Banks describes it, citing *History of American Privateers*, Maclay, as his authority:

What was probably the first naval skirmish of the Revolution took place. . . in one of our harbors, probably Homes [sic] Hole, as the party was under the command of Captain Nathan Smith. In a whaleboat, mounted with three swivels [small

cannon], and a small crew of volunteers. . . he undertook the capture of the armed schooner *Valante*, a tender of the British cruiser *Scarborough*. . . after a struggle, the enemy struck colors and the victorious Captain Smith brought his prize into safe harbor.

That was a year before the Massachusetts colony legalized privateering and there is no certainty about the location of the capture. Another act of privateering by Vineyarders, this one well documented, also took place before such action was legal. The victim was Capt. Wemyss Orrok of London, whose ship *Harriot* had been driven onto the shoals between the Vineyard and Nantucket during a fierce gale in early March 1776. Orrok regularly carried goods between London and Jamaica, but this time in London he was unable to find a cargo for Jamaica and so he agreed to take a cargo of provisions to the British in Boston. He knew little about the situation there.

After a day or two on the shoal, he managed to get *Harriot* off with little damage. While he was waiting for a favorable wind and tide to continue to Boston, his predicament became known in Edgartown. Soon a sloop loaded with armed men and accompanied by several smaller craft sailed up to the anchored *Harriot* demanding that Captain Orrok surrender. Shots were exchanged and the captain was wounded. The Edgartown men took him and his vessel into port as the Island's first documented prize of war.

We have a letter that Captain Orrok wrote to General Washington describing his capture. It is addressed, "To His Excellency Geo. Washington Esq., Generale of the Continentale Army at Cambridge." Orrok states that Beriah Norton of Edgartown had agreed to deliver the letter to him in Cambridge. Somehow, it ended up in our possession. It may, of course, be a copy, but it looks like the original. He wrote:

May it Please your Excellency,

Having this oppertunity by Colonel Norton; I must beg leave to trouble you with this letter – Tho an intire Stranger, I flatter myself you will take compassion upon me when you hear of my preasent citation, which I must beg leave to lay before you.

I have been a constant trader from London to Jamaica for

this some years back and no freight offering this voyage out, I was prevailed upon to take a Cargoe of Coals, Porter, etc., by Messrs. Morse & Company, the Shippers, for Boston where I was to be immediately Discharged, & from thence to proceed for Jamaica.

But unfortunately for me, was Drove upon Nantuckett Sholes, but Got off with Very little Dammage – soon after, I was attacted by an armed vessel from the Vinyard – and I being Not willing to part with my property without making some defence – But being unfortuneatly Wounded, was oblinded to submit to superior force .

I am very Weak at preasent but as my wound is not Mortale I hope to have the Honner of waiting on you personally in a few weeks --At preasent I have the greatest reason imaginable to expect (without your Excellency interfiers on my behalf) that my private property which consists of a few ----[?] & some other trinkets which was intended for sale in Jamaica and likewise my wearing apparrell which they are fully determined to Plunder from me. At Preasant I have nothing at my Command.

Should your Excellency be so very obliging to permit me to Depart for Jamaica, I should not so much regret they [sic] loss. But if it is my lot to be Detained here I would wish to appear a little Deasent, but that I cannot doe without your Excellency will take compassion upon me & send orders for them to restore what they so ardently wish to keep.

I beg your pardon for giving you all this trouble but can see no way of my having redress but by this method I shall patiently relly upon your goodness. – I sincerely wish you health & happyness. I remain your Excellencys Most Obediant humble Serv't, Wemyss Orrok

What Orrok didn't know was that even had he made it to Boston, he would have found the city in disarray as the British were preparing to leave. No doubt, his cargo would have ended up in American hands anyway.

We have no records to close the Orrok incident. The fact that his letter remained on the Vineyard suggests that it never left the Island. If his captors eventually set him free without the *Harriot* (she had been taken to Dartmouth as a prize), we hope they gave him his "wearing apparrell" so he would "appear a little Deaseant" as he made his way down to Jamaica.

One month later, a schooner, also en route to Boston, sailed into a Vineyard harbor to ride out a gale and received similar treatment, according to a Providence, R. I. newspaper:

She was properly taken care of by some boats from thence. One Master, the master's mate, and a son of Commodore Loring. . . with two passengers on board, were brought to town [Providence] for examination on Saturday last.

Privateering was profitable. The value of the prize was divided among the owners of the capturing vessel and her crew. The division was controlled by law. But with the *Harriot*, the armed men had no official status. The law had not yet been passed and letters of authority [marque] were not yet being issued, nor was any bond required. There were no rules.

The *Harriot* capture was piracy, nothing more. The men involved were just an excited bunch of armed men eager to seize her. The fact that she was said to be carrying provisions to the British made her fair game they thought. The sloop they used did not belong to them. She was a transient vessel from New York whose captain agreed to take them out to do battle. The fighting was all carried out by the Edgartown men and they disputed the captain's rightful claim to his share of the prize. We don't know how the dispute was resolved, but it is clear that profit was the motive not patriotism.

That was usually the case in privateering. And why not? Money was scarce, any source of it was welcome. English naval vessels harassed mariners, preventing many from working at fishing, whaling and in coastal trade. Money was so hard to get that on April 30, 1776, Thomas Cooke petitioned the General Court to abate Vineyard taxes, listing four reasons:

1<sup>st</sup>: [When these taxes were assessed] the town had 1000 tons of whaleships. . . at this time not one Vessel in any employ except one to the Eastward [to Maine] for Lumber.

2<sup>nd</sup>: Because a great Number of Pilots that used to have Almost constant bu'ness [business] in Piloting Vessells that frequented [the] Island in abundance, is entirely lost.

3<sup>rd</sup>: Because diverse Publick Houses in different Harbours of sd County, purpose to entertain Ship's Company, etc., was profatable, in consequence. . . their yearly income was set on sd County by the Assessor & enlarged their proportion of Taxes at the Valuation, which at this time [is] useless.

4<sup>th</sup>: The great expense the Inhabitants of sd County are at by reason of obtaining Supplies from the Main Land, which it convey's in small Cedar Boats, said Island being incapable to produce not more than one half of a Supply for its inhabitants who are general seafaring Men & poor.

Cooke's petition tells us that the Island was producing only one-half the items it needed to exist. It has often been stated that the Vineyard was self-sufficient during these early years, but Cooke seems to contradict that.

There also are contradictions in the role Islanders actually played in the war against England. William Jernigan, as we have seen, persuaded the General Court to exempt the Vineyard and Nantucket from enlisting a company of militia, saving "each Island more than \$1000 per annum and in case of war I am in hopes will save our Towns" from retribution.

After the war, Col. Beriah Norton stated, while seeking restitution from England for the losses Vineyarders suffered in Grey's Raid in 1778 (details of which will be in our next chapter), that no Islanders were called up to serve in the colonial army:

When Troops were levied in every other place to serve against the King, not an individual was raised upon that Island [Martha's Vineyard] for that service.

There were two seacoast-defense companies on the Island in 1776, totaling about 150 men. Such companies, unlike militia, were not subject to being called up to serve in Washington's army. They were a defensive force.

Realizing that two seacoast-defense companies were not enough to repel an invasion, Islanders in the spring of 1776, as we have seen, petitioned the General Court to provide militia from the mainland. The state sent about 100 men, adding a third company. The Island began to feel a bit more secure.

In July 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed. The thirteen colonies were now officially at war with England, a war they seemed unlikely to win. The British had a trained army plus the Royal Navy; the colonies had a motley crew of poorly trained militia who served a few months and then went home. Washington's Continental Army had relatively few regular soldiers and there was not enough time to train the

militia because of their brief tour of duty, 90 days.

For help, the Americans turned to France, England's long-time enemy. France, itself a monarchy, had no enthusiasm for encouraging rebellions against kings, but it was willing to make an exception. Damaging England was more important than principle. But the help must be secret, undercover.

Despite having money problems of his own, the French king authorized one million *livre* for the Americans. A sham organization was created to transfer the money and arms in secret. Silas Deane of Connecticut went to Paris as agent for the colonies. He and his French counterpart soon managed to manipulate the accounts so that not just a little of the money ended up in their pockets.

With the English navy controlling Vineyard waters, the state Board of War stationed lookouts on one of the Island's hills to sound an alert when British warships approached. It also provided six whaleboats and three cannon. A feeling of security was building among Vineyarders.

That feeling was short-lived. When the English drove Washington's army out of New York, taking control of the Hudson River, the Americans suffered many casualties. Washington called for more militia. Each town was ordered to send men. The off-Island militia protecting the Vineyard were recalled. The Island, as usual, petitioned for special treatment:

. . . . We are much alarmed at the Dismission of the soldiers which were allowed as a Defence for our Island as the Kings Army is so near us [in Newport] – and as we find. . . we are called upon to tack [take] one quarter of our men and send them . . . to joine the Continental Army. . . your Petitioners humbly pray that your honours would. . . Tack [take] one thought on our awful Surcustances – and grant that we may be Released as to Rasing our Men to go of [off] the Island on any ocation . . .

The General Court granted the request, but added:

. . . removal of stock, &c, to the main-land is recommended.

That shocked Vineyarders. How would they survive if their livestock were removed? A number (35) of Chilmark residents, who owned thousands of sheep, signed a petition to

the General Court, declaring they would have to move if their sheep were taken away. The lengthy document stressed the Island's importance to the rebellion. The colony's privateers depended upon its harbors for provisioning and refitting. If Vineyarders were forced to leave with their livestock, British forces at Newport, "no further than twelve leagues" away, would move in:

... if nothing better than this can be done with the stock belonging to Marthas Vineyard, in what a state of wretchedness must the owners thereof be reduced! For if that stock be removed where will they find pasture or Hay for it? And if for want thereof they are obliged to sell it, where will they find Buyers who will give them anything near the value thereof? And in this way the People of this Island would be likely to suffer almost a total loss of their Stock.

They would suffer also ... the loss of their Houses and lands, which they must depart. For without stock they will not be able to till it. And if this Island be forsaken by its inhabitants, it will ... in all Probability be taken possession of by the Enemy.

The petitioners regretfully explained that all Chilmark men did not support the revolution, many were still loyalists and would not accept the Court's recommendation:

... There are yet (we are sorry to find ground to say it) some here who have manifested at least a Doubt of our being in the Right, in taking up arms and fighting against the Forces of the King of Great Britain, and they with others have openly expressed a Belief that Britain will conquer & subdue America, and have labored to infuse such a belief into others. ... there is a considerable number of men here who appear to be very Doubtful which side will finally overcome ... and who therefore chuse to be as stil and inactive as possible ... and are accordingly averse to doing anything towards the Defending of this Island by arms.

That was, as we have seen, William Jernigan's position, neutrality. But that spirit was weakening. The war was getting closer. Shortly before the Chilmark petition, there had been fighting on the Island. A letter written on the British ship *Diamond* in January 1777, describes the Vineyard's first taste of gunfire, with deaths on both sides, in November 1776:

We sailed for New -York on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November on a cruize. We put into Martha's Vinyard and sent our boat on shore with a flag of truce. The rebels let the boat come within gun-shot and then fired upon them and wounded one man in the boat; to revenge this insult, we landed our marines and a party of sailors under fire from the ship; the rebels posted themselves on a hill and fired very briskly from behind the rocks and bushes; however, we drove them off the island. We had in the action one man killed and one wounded; the rebels lost four killed and many wounded. We got some plunder such as oxen and poultry; then burnt their houses and barns, etc. From thence we sailed to Rhode-Island. . .

That letter, published in *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, is the only account of this action we have seen. It is possible that the writer was wrong about the place. Surely, if four Vineyarders had been killed and many wounded, as he wrote, it would have been recorded elsewhere. The remark, "we drove them off the island" adds to the mystery. It could have been one of the Elizabeth Islands, but that is a guess.

The Chilmark petition stated that colonial privateers often left their captured prizes in Vineyard harbors until they were able to sail them to a "prize" port. The law, passed in 1776, required prize vessels to be handed over to designated officials to assure that the prize money was shared correctly. There seemed to be no prize officer on the Vineyard so the vessels were held there only temporarily.

Another report in the *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* lists 49 American prisoners held in Newport who were exchanged for captured British sailors on January 17, 1777. Six are listed as from Martha's Vineyard:

Josiah Stelton, Seaman, *Wolf*.

Dan Kenney, Master, *Greenwich Packet*

Thos. Coffin, Master, *Sea Horse*, brig, Seamen John Green, Emanuel Decker and Emanuel Coffin, on the same vessel.

Of the six, Thomas Coffin is the only one we can find as a Vineyard resident at that time. The Coffins were an important family in Edgartown and the capture and later the exchange of Captain Coffin by the British must have been major news. The document doesn't describe the circumstances of the capture.

Vineyard harbors were not always secure havens for prize vessels, as we learn from a report in March 1777, in the *London Chronicle*, a paper that obviously was biased towards England:

Letters from Rhode-island say that two of our frigates, belonging to the squadron there, being on a cruise, looked into the harbour of Martha's Vineyard Island, where they saw a large ship which they took to be a prize carried in, and also another vessel, a sloop; on this they stood as close as they could and in the evening cut them both out and brought them safe off without the loss of a single man.

With British warships roaming coastal waters freely, the Americans needed a counter force. They had no illusions that it would ever be a match for Britain's fleet. Instead, it would be, like the privateers, a guerilla force, intercepting the flow of supplies to British bases. At first they were "state" owned; the Connecticut State Ship *Oliver Cromwell* was one. She spent several weeks in Vineyard harbors hoping to enlist a crew.

It was not an easy task. Mariners preferred privateering to serving on a naval vessel, either state or colonial. Privateering paid more, was less disciplined and less dangerous, preying as it did only on unarmed merchant vessels. The crews of both privateers and naval vessels were given a portion of the prize money, but the navy sailors received less.

Privateers from either side were welcomed by some Vineyard farmers and merchants, who sold them provisions. One such transaction was recorded when the American privateer *Clarendon* stopped at Edgartown in the winter of 1776-77 and paid Wm. Daggett £1 10 shillings for "Fresh Meet at Marthes Vinyard."

Gradually, as Vineyarders began moving away from their neutrality, some of the younger, more eager, patriots began harassing loyalists. William Jernigan was one such victim. Jernigan, you will recall, was one of the 17 "disgraced" representatives who voted on the king's side in the failed attempt to rescind Sam Adams's letter. He never made his opposition to the rebellion secret. When it was reported that "Jernigan and his son, Thomas, had sung and danced when they heard that the British Troops had landed at New York," the eager patriots responded. On the night of January 30,

1777, they surrounded his home in Edgartown. Years later, Jernigan described the episode (at times in the third person):

On the Night preceding the 30<sup>th</sup> of January in the year of our Lord 1777, between the hours of one and two o'clock in the morning, I, William Jernigan, then being up with his daughter Sally in his arms, his wife Mary then being very unwell, Ebenezer Smith then coming into said Jernigan's House, informed him that his House was surrounded with fifty or sixty men with guns, swords and clubs, and he, the said Jernigan, was ordered forthwith out of his own House amongst those armed men in the ded [dead] of the night and ordered to march with them to the House of Peter Norton, Esq., about four miles through the woods and when we arived at Mr. Norton's House, he being then in bed, asked what is the matter?

Some of the Company answered that the said Jernigan and his son Thomas sung and danced when they heard that the British Troops had Landed at New York; the said Jernigan then answered that there was not one word of truth in the Report and that it was a ley [lie], etc.

And then some of the armed men insisted that the said Jernigan should write and signe a Papper which he did; but I never heard of it afterwards. The armed men then fil [filed] out among themselves and desappeared, etc., and the said Jernigan returned to his own House about seven o'clock in the morning. But what must the anxiety of his wife and children at the time to have him carried off by force of armes in the ded time of the night, etc.

Certainly, as Jernigan wrote, it must have been a very frightening event, not only for himself, but more so for his wife and children. He listed nine men who led the posse:

Samuel Look, Samuel Daggett, Stephen Cunneham, Zaphaniah Chase, Timothy Chase, George West, Ebenezer Roger, Elijah Butler Jr., and William Daggett.

He cited eight others who were in the mob "and a number" who saw what happened and would testify. It isn't known if any of those enthusiastic rebels signed up a few weeks later when the Connecticut Navy brig *Defence* sailed to the Vineyard seeking recruits after finding none in New London, as her commander, Lt. Samuel Smedley wrote:

I have therefore Got the Brig Ready for Sea so that there is Nothing Wanting but Men, which there is No Chance of Getting here [New London]. We have not More than forty Men now belonging to the Brig & but few Seamen Amongst them, but Shall not be Detained any on that Account As I think there is Great Prospect of Getting our Compliment at the Vineyard soon . . .

The war became very real for Gay Head residents in September 1777, some of whom took part in a deadly gunfight, according to a journal kept on His Majesty's Ship *Cerberus*:

. . . saw a Sloop off Montack [Montaug]. . . Gave Chace. . . at 2, at Gay Head. . . Run the Chace on shore, who proved to be a schooner Loaded with Rum, Sugar and Warlike Stores, Anch'd within gun shott of her and kept a constant fire upon a body of Arm'd Men lurking about the Beach while our Boats went and Burnt the Vessell. Had 1 Man kill'd and 1 wounded.

British vessels sailing into Vineyard harbors seeking fresh food and water sometimes found what they were after, but there were times when they met a most unfriendly reception, as this one did, according to a Boston newspaper:

[From] a Gentleman of undoubted Veracity, who arrived in Town last Sunday from Martha's Vineyard, we learn that the British Pirate [privateer] Ship. . . *Ambuscade*, of 32 Guns. . . lay at Anchor in Holmes's Hole . . . [the captain] sent several Flags [of truce] on Shore begging that his Crew might be supplied by the Inhabitants with fresh Provisions. . . he was refused, receiving an Answer that they had no Traitors there, nor should they be provided with any Thing, but what they got at the Point of a Bayonet and Mouth of the Cannon. . .

The Island didn't have a surplus of "fresh Provisions" to sell, either to friend or foe. The embargo the British had placed on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket forced some residents to rely on the "black market." Men from Connecticut and Long Island would load small boats with flour, corn and wood and sail to the islands during the night to avoid capture by the British in Newport. They charged exorbitant prices for the provisions. It was not an easy time to be an Islander.

Occasionally, the Vineyard would become a safe haven for sailors whose vessels were captured or destroyed in the vicinity. Here, two American crews apparently escaped onto the Island

after enemy action near the Vineyard:

A privateer sloop of 6 guns was sent this day [into Newport] by the *Unicorn* [British warship], who took her yesterday near Martha's Vineyard, on which Island she run another of the same force on shore, and burnt her. Crews of both escaped.

The American privateer *Hampden*, setting out on a long cruise, ran ashore at Cape Poge in October 1777 and "soon bilged" in the surf. All hands, guns and stores were saved by people on shore. Another brig, *Fox*, did the same a week later. The war was getting closer and closer to the Island.

Vineyard men were often recruited to serve on rebel war vessels. In June 1777, Marine Lt. John Trevett, aboard the American Navy Sloop *Providence*, 12 guns, wrote:

. . . we are under sail bound to the Vineyard to get a few men. [stopped] at [New] Bedford and pressed one John Scranton, one of my townsmen . . . sailed for Old Town [Edgartown], arrived the next day & got what men we could; lay there 2 days and then ran for Sandy hook.

In December, a large privateer, starting on a five-month cruise with a crew of 125 and 20 cannons, did the same thing:

Rhode Island privateer ship *Marlborough* anchored in Tarpaulin Cove on the evening of 25 Dec. and the next day put into Holmes Hole. . . seeking seamen. She returned to Martha's Vineyard on 29 Dec. to recruit more men before departing on her Cruise on 2 Jan 1778.

Washington, after his impressive victory at Saratoga in October 1777, moved his army into Valley Forge for the winter. But the war at sea continued. A British fleet anchored in Holmes Hole in February 1778, while sailing to Boston from Newport, carrying provisions to the Convention Troops who were waiting in Boston to be shipped back to England. They were the 5700 men of Burgoyne's army who had surrendered at Saratoga. Under a "convention of war" (hence they were called Convention Troops) they had been marched to Boston to be sent back to England under oath not to return.

The English wanted to be sure Americans had no excuse to attack the unarmed "mercy" fleet. Frederick Mackenzie, a British officer in Newport, details the precautions taken:

The Transports for Boston . . . are to go, over the Shoals, as it

is termed here, to Boston; that is, they are to go between Martha's Vineyard and the Main, and so close around Cape Cod, into Cape Cod harbour . . . If they were to go round the Nantucket Shoals, they would be in danger, as light ships, of being blown off the Coast this boisterous season.

All the transports go as Cartel ships and the utmost care has been taken by Lord Howe to take out of them all Cannon, Arms and Military Stores. Not even a Cutlass is allowed to be taken on board. All this is necessary to prevent the Rebels from having any pretence for detaining the troops or Molesting the Ships. There are 2000 barrels of Flour on board . . . to be landed for the use of the Convention troops. . . if the troops are permitted to embark [for England] immediately the flour is to be sent back here for the use of the troops on this Island [Rhode Island], who have been served with Biscuit for five weeks past.

The trip was a slow one. Three weeks after the fleet left Newport, it was still anchored in Holmes Hole. Such were the problems of sailing, especially in Vineyard and Nantucket Sounds with their strong tidal currents, shoals and contrary winds. Newport got the news from two men from Sandwich:

These men say that the ships for Boston sailed from Holmes's-hole in Martha's Vineyard only two days ago, having waited there for many days for a fair wind to take them over a particular part of the Shoals.

The presence of such a large fleet of enemy vessels and sailors, unarmed though they were, in Holmes Hole must have given Vineyarders much to talk about. Two days after the men from Sandwich arrived, two more visitors sailed into Newport:

9<sup>th</sup> March: Two men came in yesterday in a small boat from Martha's Vineyard.

The journal tells us nothing about why the two men from the Vineyard had sailed to the British naval base at Newport or what news they might have carried. The matter-of-fact tone suggests such visits were not unusual.

France, encouraged by the diplomatic skills of Benjamin Franklin plus the British defeat at Saratoga, made known its support of the colonies when it signed a treaty of alliance with the Americans in February 1778. The action told England that the colony was recognized by a major power as an independent

nation, the first such recognition. The move forced the British toward conciliation. They had no desire for the "minor" rebellion to become a war with France. The Americans, sensing that victory was possible, turned down their overtures.

The news from France was especially welcome at Valley Forge where a cold winter and food shortages had brought on depression. France's alliance with them was something to celebrate. Washington ordered an extra ration of rum, banquet tables were set up. The troops, their spirits lifted, only in part by the rum, paraded before a reviewing stand where General and Martha Washington sat with the army's newest and youngest general, Marquis de Lafayette.

Washington, showing a "countenance of uncommon delight and complacency," rallied the soldiers, showering praise on Louis XVI and ending with "Huzzah! Huzzah! Long live the King of France!"

For the first time, Washington believed the war could be won. The powerful French fleet would destroy the British, cut the enemy's supply lines and bring victory. So certain was Washington that he told his brother the odds were 100 to 1 in his favor.

The British also celebrated – what, it isn't clear. When London learned that a French fleet had left Toulon for America, a fast vessel was dispatched with orders for the English in Philadelphia to evacuate that vulnerable spot and join the other English in New York. There was no panic, no rush. There was time for a few farewell parties. The Redcoats had been enjoying the social life of Philadelphia, where the upper class was overwhelmingly loyal. Before leaving, the army hosted "a magnificent entertainment to grace his [Sir William Howe's] departure," with a banquet, a fancy dress ball and fireworks. They were celebrating a retreat, it would seem.

Washington's plan was for d'Estaing to sail into Delaware Bay before the English knew they were coming. The stronger French fleet would destroy the surprised enemy, perhaps ending the war. But the plan failed. By the time d'Estaing got there, the British had left. The French fleet seemed to be in no hurry, taking 87 days to cross the Atlantic, twice the normal

time. Even with their enthusiastic partying, the British had no need to hurry. The French admiral, whose attitude throughout the entire campaign seemed to have been tentative, blamed the long voyage on poor winds and the time he needed to train his new crews in their battle stations.

The English now had only two bases in the northeast: New York and Newport. Newport was the more vulnerable. On an island (the original Rhode Island), it was blockaded by a large rebel army under General Sullivan on the mainland. Provisions had to come by water, either from England or from Block Island (300 to 400 wildfowl were delivered daily, in season), Long Island (grain and wood), the Elizabeth Islands (fresh lamb) and even, it is said, an occasional shipment from the Vineyard and Nantucket. The people in those places were not so much loyalists as entrepreneurs. It wasn't an easy time to make money.

When the English in Newport learned of plans to move the livestock on Naushon Island in the Elizabeths to the mainland (the similar suggestion for the Vineyard had been dropped), they sent ships over to Naushon to confiscate the animals. Mackenzie, the English officer in Newport whom we have quoted before, wrote on May 9, 1778:

The transports from the Elizabeth Islands arrived last night in the Seconnet passage. The troops have been very successful and met with no opposition. The two transports have brought 884 Sheep and Lambs, 150 of them were bought from such of the Inhabitants as were well affected [loyal] and willing to sell them. The rest, being the property of noted Rebels, were taken without payment. The party has also secured [safely left] about 1000 more sheep and lambs on a small Island under the protection of the *Unicorn* until the transports can return for them. The whole were taken from Nashawn Island, which is the largest of the Elisabeth Islands.

A Company of Rebels were posted upon it [Naushon], but they retired upon the appearance of our fleet. Our people burnt the Barracks they had occupied and destroyed two pieces of Cannon.

The entry reveals the guidelines the British used when paying for confiscated items: loyal residents were paid, rebels were not. It also makes clear that the war was drawing closer to

the Vineyard. The diary of an American confirms that:

May 31. Last week, a party of British troops from R. I. . . made a descent upon. . . Bristol and Warren. . . plundering and destroying all they could lay their hands on. . . another party from the same place, consisting of 150 men. . . landed at the mouth of Fall River. . . to burn Tiverton and the mills.

If the wind was from the northwest, smoke from those burning buildings might have been visible to Vineyarders, bringing the war closer than ever. Little did they know how much closer it would be in a few months.

Frustrated by finding no English ships in Delaware Bay, d'Estaing sailed to Sandy Hook at the entrance to New York harbor. Across that sandy spit of land, on which the British had mounted some cannon, the French admiral could see the enemy's ships lined up, ready for battle.

This will be, the Frenchman thought, the decisive battle, the one he had crossed the Atlantic to wage and win. His larger ships with greater fire power would destroy the English. Meeting with his captains and pilots to plan his attack, he was told that their size was a disadvantage: the men-of-war were too big to enter the harbor. They drew too much water.

He refused to believe it and offered any pilot who would take his ships inside the harbor, a huge bonus (the story says it was his own money). No pilot took up his challenge. Still unconvinced, d'Estaing sent some small boats out that night to sound the depth of the channel. They came back with the news that the pilots were right. There wasn't enough water for his ships to enter the harbor. The British fleet was safe.

A council of war was held by the French admiral and American aides of General Washington (the two leaders never met face-to-face). It was decided that the French fleet with its 4000 soldiers would sail to Newport and attack the English naval base.

The attack would combine the French force and the 5000 Americans under General Sullivan already there, plus troops that Washington would send under forced march from New York. The Americans would cross over to Rhode Island from the northeast at Howland's Ferry while d'Estaing's marines would storm ashore from their ships on the southwest. It would

be a classic pincher attack, with the cannons of the war ships pounding the Newport defenses to protect the advancing troops. All that firepower would surely bring victory, perhaps even end the war.

In London, the British were worried. And no wonder. The entry of the French had changed everything. The king wrote to Lord North from Windsor Castle to express for the first time doubts about victory. Negotiation was now his goal:

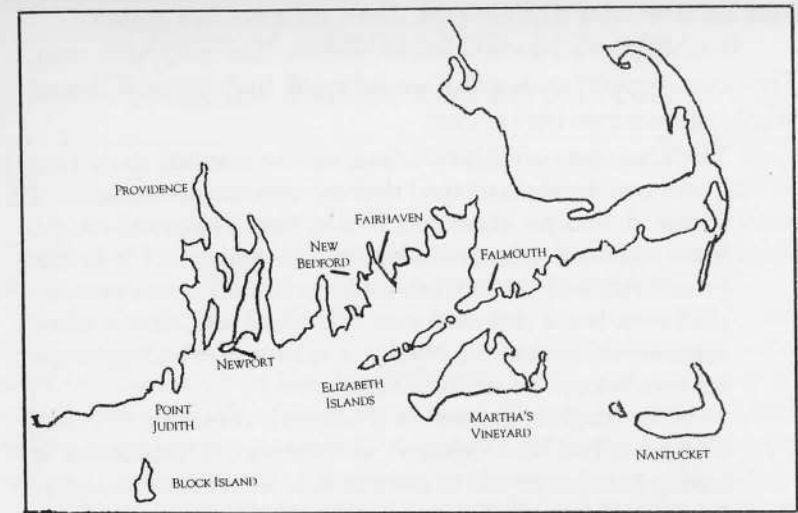
... we must content ourselves with distressing the Rebels and not think of any other conduct until the end of the French, which if successful will oblige the Rebels to submit to more reasonable [terms] than can at this hour be obtained.

Parliament began debating whether to abandon the war in order to concentrate on defending the West Indies, Florida and Canada to prevent the French from taking them over. The great power of England was trembling.

Admiral d'Estaing, now with his third chance to destroy the English fleet, arrived off Point Judith at the mouth of Narragansett Bay on July 29, 1778. The troops General Washington had sent from New York were still on a forced march in eastern Connecticut. The attack had to be delayed, giving the British time to move their soldiers from the northern end of Rhode Island down to Newport, where they dug strong defensive positions.

The two allied commanders, Sullivan and d'Estaing, agreed to attack on August 10; by then Washington's troops would have arrived. For unexplained reasons, Sullivan sent his troops across onto Rhode Island one day early, August 9. The Frenchman was furious. His ships were not yet in place to land the 4000 men for the pinching maneuver. Frantically, he tried to speed the movement, but a thick fog had blanketed the bay. By the time the marines were ashore on Rhode Island, the fog was so dense that neither commander knew where the other was. The allies, ready to attack, had to wait for the fog to lift.

When it cleared the following morning, a lookout atop the mast on d'Estaing's flagship spotted a fleet of British warships approaching from the south. It was Admiral Howe, coming from New York to defend Newport. Told of the approaching enemy, d'Estaing recalled his marines. He was



The setting where the war was fought in the waters around the Vineyard.

concerned about being trapped inside the bay, unable to defend himself. He sailed his ships into open water to prepare for a naval battle. The American soldiers on Rhode Island were shocked to see the French depart, not knowing why. As the warships sailed past Newport, they fired 2500 rounds of cannon into the British dug in there. Not one important target was hit, later reports showed.

The two fleets were still jockeying for battle positions south of Point Judith when darkness fell. Both sides went into defensive positions until daylight. During the night, a powerful northeaster, perhaps even a hurricane, pounded the coast.

The two fleets were battered, both suffering great damage. The French, in more exposed waters, were hit the hardest. D'Estaing's flagship, *Languedoc*, was dismasted, her rudder lost, and she wallowed helplessly in the huge waves. Finally, during a lull in the storm, she was towed to a safer spot.

For the third time, d'Estaing had lost his chance. He sent a messenger ashore to inform General Sullivan that he was taking the fleet to Boston for repairs. With him, would go the 4000 soldiers Sullivan had been counting on. The attack on Newport had to be abandoned.

Seeing the French warships sail away to the east, Howe

took his fleet west to New York. Both sides needed repairs.

Washington's almost certain victory had not been won. The joint attack, so hopeful at its start, had failed. General Washington wrote his brother:

The whole [story of Rhode Island] may be summed up in a few words and amounts to this, that an unfortunate storm (so it appeared, and yet ultimately it may have happened for the best) and some measures taken in consequence of it by the French Admiral, perhaps unavoidably, blasted in one moment the fairest hopes that ever were conceived; and, from a moral certainty of success, rendered it a matter of rejoicing to get our own troops safe off the [Rhode] Island.

If the [English] garrison of [Newport], consisting of nearly 6000 men, had been captured, as there was, in appearance at least, a hundred to one in favor of it, it would have given the finishing blow to British pretensions of sovereignty over this country.

Although Vineyarders didn't know it at the time, they too had suffered a blow at Newport. If that battle, carrying Washington's "fairest hopes," had gone as he had expected, Grey's Raid, the most traumatic event in the history of Martha's Vineyard would never have taken place.

*(To be continued.)*

## Diary of Farmer and Teacher William Butler of Farm Neck

WILLIAM BUTLER (1761-1844) lived on a farm at Farm Neck, Edgartown, just south of today's Oak Bluffs. His property included the oak grove that Jeremiah Pease selected in 1835 to be the Methodist Campground. He first leased it to the Methodists, but later they bought it. He, like Jeremiah, became a devout Methodist during those revival days.

The Society has the diary Butler kept from January 1, 1792, until October of the same year. It was the year he married Rebecca Smith whose sister Ann was the wife of Rev. Joseph Thaxter. Though brief, it is one of our earliest diaries and tells us much about Island life at the end of the 1700s. William is more forthcoming than most diarists of that period. The diary begins while he is teaching school in Eastville on the east side of Holmes Hole harbor.

We have omitted the less interesting entries. It is expected that it will take two installments, perhaps three, to cover the ten months.

**Sunday, January 1, 1792.** Mrs. Daggett, on the East side of the Harbor on a visit, discoursing on Religion and the enjoyment of feelings resulting from the same. She said she thought herself a Christian & not a Christian ten times in a day. Cannot but have some Charity for the Old Lady yet thought it an odd way of expressing Christian feelings.

**Thursday, January 5.** Esq. Athearn Call'd me out of school. . . said he heard that there had been landed here a Barrell of Sugar, wanted to get information concerning it.<sup>1</sup>

This evening there were a Collection of People at the Wido Davis's to partake of a Supper, Cost 9d [pence] for the Supper, a price of six pence for liquor. The Wido I

think made a good saving – Can't help thinking they did it for gain notwithstanding it was given out to the Contrary.<sup>2</sup>

**Sunday, Jan. 7.** At the West Side [West Chop?], Saw a French lady at D. Norton's from St. Marks, West Indies, bound to Boston. Supposed to be a Lady of fortune. There was also a French Gentleman with her. They were agoing to take their "Land tacks," as the Sailor phrases it, for Boston. She said she was a Wido, was of a swathy Complexion. Appeared far from Dellicate.

**Monday, Jan. 9.** Over [to] the Harbor [Holmes Hole], left 9 Dollars with Wm. Smith to go to Bedford for a Saddle. Set out for Mr. Smith's half an hour after 2 o'clock,

<sup>1</sup> This suggests that there was a great shortage of sugar, perhaps even a black market.

<sup>2</sup> Did you invite friends for supper and then charge them? Interesting.

up there [at] 4 in the afternoon. Miss Smith was down to her Brother's, brought her up to her Daddy's [at] eight of the Clock, evening. Spent the Night very Agreeably at her house.<sup>3</sup>

**Tuesday, Jan. 10.** Employ'd keeping School – felt very Sleepy in the first of the evening but thinking or geting into a train of thoughts caus'd it to forsake me not long afterwards.

**Wednesday, Jan. 11.** Very Cold. A Singular instance took place this day in School as the Scholars stood up Spelling, James Johnson Struck Jethro Coffin over the head with his hand being vext [vexed] with him he said for pulling his hair as he was hanging up his Slait [slate].

I think it was not owing to my not keeping Order in School but [to] the ungarded disposition of the Boy.

**Thursday, Jan. 12.** Cold weather. Took particular Care of Cattle, etc., find it will not do to trust to boys feeding & watering Cattle. Looks like snow – we have had no Snow as yet worth speaking of.

**Wednesday, Jan. 18.** A very severe snow storm. Tarried all night at Eliashim Norton's – bought a Colt of him, so gave 8 dollars for him in Cash & two Dollars on book for his wintering of him. An exceeding smothering snow. . . hard weather for Creatures.

**Thursday, Jan. 19.** Very Cold. no School.

<sup>2</sup> He will marry Miss Smith in September.

**Monday 23.** This day I think must be allow'd to be as Cold a day as ever was known in these parts.

It now appears to me that I make but small progress in my Studies. I have lately been applying myself to English Grammer – find that by a close application with the help of the second part of Webster's Institute I can make myself quite master of Grammer, but find it hard & most impossible to confine my mind wholly to that noble Science.

**Wednesday, Jan. 25.** The Weather moderates a little. Ephraim Butler arriv'd from Cape Cod, Was Cast on shore Jan. 19, about half way up from the Clay Pounds to Race point. There were 5 Sail cast away about the same time. N. Daggett Cast away on Plumb Island near the going in at Newbury. One at the Silver Springs, Boston Bay.

**Thursday, Jan. 26.** We have had for 10 Days severe weather. Moderate weather, employ'd cutting Wood.

**Sunday, Jan. 29.** Am Reading W. Woollaston for the second time, *Religion of Nature*. The young People muster'd & had a singing School.

**Monday, Jan. 30.** Begun School again. Warm . . .

**Wednesday, Feb. 1.** John Homes & Jeruel West arriv'd. They were blown off by the last driving snow storm. . . on the passage from this place to Boston. The greater part of them froze, some more & some less.

**Thursday, Feb. 2.** At Mr. Smith's.

**Friday, Feb. 3.** Major Norton died

this day, 12 o'clock in the morning.<sup>4</sup>

**Sunday, Feb. 5.** Mr. Mayhew appointed a meeting among the Indians [at Farm Neck]. He attended funeral at Major Norton's, preach'd a Sermon.

**Tuesday, February 7.** Mr. Thaxter preach'd at James Butler's.

**Wednesday, February 8.** Very hard weather for Sheep, being a great deal of Snow on the Ground. employ'd looking after Sheep, Cattle, etc. No school.

**Thursday, Feb. 9.** Rec'd news of the trial of Cooke & Athearn, That they was acquitted with Honor from the Charges brought against [them]. Athearn's was refer'd to a committee.<sup>5</sup>

**Tuesday, Feb. 14.** St. Valantine's Day. employ'd keeping School.

[A gap of more than a week then with no date:] She departed Jan. 8, 1792. Died with the Consumption.

**Saturday, Feb. 25.** Mother very Sick.<sup>6</sup>

**Sunday, Feb. 26.** I must confess that I am not able to Shake of meloncholly.

**Monday, Feb. 27.** A very great thaw.

**Tuesday, Feb. 28.** Begun School again.

**Wednesday, Feb. 29.** I am Still in a low frame of Spirits. A merry heart saith Solomon doith good like a

<sup>4</sup> Sheriff Peter Norton, a county leader.

<sup>5</sup> It would be interesting to know what this case involved. Later, Cooke is mentioned in a case involving excise tax. He was Customs officer at about this time.

<sup>6</sup> His mother, Hannah (Smith), is 68.

medicine. I should do well to think often of that Saying.

**Thursday, Mar. 4.** At Old Town. And up to Mr. Smith's in the evening – being alone with the old Gentleman & Lady. They mention'd, Concerning the lines left for their perusal – they said if we were agreed they had nothing against it. The old gentle woman added that she hoped we might endeavor to make each other's lives happy by our Conduct here after. . .<sup>7</sup>

**Friday, Mar. 2.** Employ'd keeping School.

**Saturday, Mar. 3.** On the West Side brought over a Saddle & a Barrel of flour. Over-hauled some West India hides left there to be sold at two dollars a hide. The Hides wou'd weigh about twenty Weight taken on an avarage. Had some thoughts of buying them, but darn't risk their being damaged by being tainted.<sup>8</sup> Flour is 35/ [shilling] a Barrel.

**Sunday, Mar. 4.** Very fine weather. Taken with a very hard pain in my teeth, lasted about two hours. Put on pepper & rum. It ceas'd.

**Monday, Mar. 6.** This day about a 11 o'clock A.M., Phillip Smith & his Son Oliver perish'd in a Pilot Boat off the East point from Nantuckett Wind East & to the Southward of it. Were Suppris'd. They

<sup>7</sup> The planned wedding is being discussed with his future in-laws..

<sup>8</sup> His father, Thomas, and Uncle Ebenezer had been tanners. His father died when he (William) was 20 years old. William is also a tanner, along with farming and teaching.

first over Set & righted again. The Boat drifted in against Lemuel West's [in Edgartown].<sup>9</sup>

**Saturday, Mar. 6.** The time is now near when I shall consider my self as being Connected with a very worthy Family – I cannot think but it must hereafter prove to be a happy choice. Let fortune turn as it may.

**Wednesday, Mar. 7.** On the West side [West Chop] at Funeral, Mr. Thaxter preach'd a funeral Sermon in the New Meeting House. . .

**Thursday, Mar. 8.** Employ'd keeping School.

**Friday, Mar. 9.** Stormy weather. This day on an Arbitration with Benj. Luce, Between Sam Norton & Prince Daggett.

**Saturday, Mar. 10.** Employ'd with Ansall [Ansel] Norton holing Posts. hard Rain, wind Easterly.

**Monday, Mar. 12.** At Old Town [Edgartown]. Deliver'd at Capt. Smith Formal Letter. Up at Mr. Smith's. Come Away early.<sup>10</sup>

**Tuesday, Mar. 13.** Left off running School.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Thaxter preach'd at Prince Daggett's.

**Thursday, Mar. 15.** Rode to New Town [West Tisbury] & from there to the Widow Bassett's [Chilmark]. Tarry'd all Night. There Compli-

ments were sparing. I imagine not on account of my Company's being disagreeable to them but rather a diffidence or the want of a taste [?] for politeness.

**Friday, Mar. 16.** Came down from Chilmark. Wet, Drizzly. Brought down from Bassett's 36½ & a half Flax, being the sixth part of what Came off 2 acres ground.

**Saturday, Mar. 17.** Employ'd Opening the Farm Pond Crick. Got it arunning.

**Sunday, Mar. 18.** The Intentions published.<sup>12</sup> Looks like rain. Singing School at our House.

**Monday, Mar. 19.** On the west side, enclosing Little Neck, etc. Rain.

**Wednesday, Mar. 21.** Adjournment of the Proprietors of Sandy River meeting at Capt. Young's.<sup>13</sup> Yarding Sheep in Capt. Norton's place, West Side of the Harbour. Brought over 25 Lambs, 13 yet lacking of the number turn'd on the neck. . .

**Thursday, Mar. 22.** Up at Mr. Smith's.

**Friday, Mar. 23.** At Esq. Cooke's, talk'd over Town Affairs. Concluded that it was best to chuse Thos. [Cooke?] Town Clerk. He mentioned me for a Select Man. Call'd at E. Norton's. Proposed the matter to him. he declin'd for-

warding the matter. Ichabod & I must Settle the matter between us. We both stood fair, said he. Could not blame him for his Sincerity.<sup>14</sup>

**Saturday, Mar. 24.** Employ'd with Ansall Norton Cutting Posts, etc.

**Monday, Mar. 26.** Begun to plow by the burying hill.<sup>15</sup> Spring seems to approach fast with respect to the Weather. Esq. Norton arriv'd from Sandy River. brought a packet of letters.

**Mar. 27.** Employ'd mending fences.

**Wednesday, Mar. 28.** Reading the *Prompter*. It is really worth perusing. This evening Sarson Butler came to see me Concerning Notes.<sup>16</sup>

**Friday, Mar. 30.** Employ'd mending the meadow fence.

**Saturday, Mar. 30.** I find it best to look well to our Stock in the Winter. If Creatures once get low in the Spring it is hard to get flesh on them before grass comes. Rec'd a few lines from Thomas [Cooke?] intimating that he would wish to have me attend Town meeting & muster as many others as I can.

**Sunday, April 1.** . . . for a very short space [I have] put my former resolve in practice, I now shall endeavor to Read Eight Chapters every Sunday by myself & if possi-

<sup>14</sup> E. Norton may be Eliakim, who had a son, Ichabod. There was another, more famous Ichabod, Major Peter's son.

<sup>15</sup> "Burying hill" must be today's Oak Bluff cemetery. In 1792, of course, there was no such town.. It was part of Eastville.

<sup>16</sup> "Notes" probably refers to debts. Sarson was a cousin on Farm Neck, who moved to Maine shortly. Anyone know the *Prompter*?

ble by Divine assistance discover the true meaning & Spirit of the Gospel.

**Monday, Apr. 2.** This is the day of our Annual meeting for Chusing Town Officers, etc. There was a good deal of business done & a good deal [of] noise made. [William] Jernigan, the Old man, appears to me to be void of every principle of Goodness & Wholly given over to Work on iniquity. Hope he may be reform'd but doubt the Consequence.<sup>17</sup> The meeting Adjourn'd to Monday or Tuesday next.

Got up at Mr. Smith's 10 o'clock in the evening, found Miss retir'd to her lodgings, but she was Complacent enough to get up & Spend the remainder of the evening with me.<sup>18</sup>

**Tuesday, Apr. 3.** Came down from Mr. Smith's on fore part of the day.

**Wed., Apr. 4.** Employ'd shutting in the meadow. It is now as forward in respect to grass and weather as the first day of May in a Common Spring.

**Thursday, Apr. 5.** This day Peter Norton carried away a half a Load Sedge Hay. Gave 20/ [shillings] for the Same. . .

**Monday, Apr. 9.** Employ'd plowing at home. Sold 400 Wt. hay [to] An-

<sup>9</sup> They must have been passengers in the pilot boat as Philip was a farmer in Tisbury, husband of Eunice (Manter). Oliver was 20.

<sup>10</sup> Mt. Smith is his future father-in-law. Letter to Capt. Smith may relate to next entry.

<sup>11</sup> This is a surprise. No reason given. Who took over the teaching? No mention of that.

<sup>12</sup> Wedding intentions, obviously.

<sup>13</sup> Sandy River Plantation in Maine was organized by the Nortons of Farm Neck, mostly sons of Major Peter Norton. Six of his sons moved there a little later, along with other Nortons. We don't know who Capt. Young was.

<sup>17</sup> See "The Story of Martha's Vineyard," in this issue, for more about William Jernigan.

<sup>18</sup> Late hours these lovers kept. It is after 10 and she came down "for the remainder of the evening."

sall Norton. Bought 300 English hay of E. Butler, price 3/ a hundred.

**Tuesday, Apr. 10.** This day was a proprietor's meeting at Capt. Davis's Concerning the trunk thro' the Farm beech. Nothing alter'd from the former regulations.<sup>19</sup>

**Saturday, Apr. 14.** Yesderday [sic] Ben. Smith & Col. Norton was up in our neighbourhood. Their business was to muster up evidence against Esq. Cooke concerning Excise matters.<sup>20</sup>

**Tuesday, Apr. 17.** Inferior Court Sets at Edgartown.

**Wednesday, Apr. 18.** Last evening at Mr. Smith's. At Court in the Afternoon, a Criminal Case try'd between Col. Norton & Esq. Cooke. The Col. Clear'd. Came home this evening.<sup>21</sup>

**Thursday, Apr. 19.** Set out this morning for Chilmark. Return'd for fear of a Storm. Last night, Sail'd from this place Sarson Butler in Davis's Schooner with 3 Families on board bound for Sandy River. Eph. Butler, Wendle Davis & J. Spencer [?] from this place.<sup>22</sup>

**Saturday, Apr. 21.** Up at Squipnock-

ett yarding Sheep, found 26, left there last fall, 40.

**Sunday, April 22.** Mr. Mayhew preach'd among the Indians.<sup>23</sup> Did not go to meeting, neither [did] any of our folks, very Cold, N. East wind. I can't help having Serious or rather meloncholly thots at times - altho' don't allow myself to be any ways dejected. People shou'd endeavor to make the best of everything. Evil thoughts will come too often. Neither Shou'd we allow our Selves to foretell or prophesy ill to ourselves or others.

**Wednesday, Apr. 25.** . . A Singular Circumstance has taken place of late between Nathan Bassett & Lydia Norton, it [she?] was now his Wife. Not many days after Marriage it appears he was concern'd with other Women which Lydia perceiving, first reveal'd the Secret to his friends & Soon after to her's but previous to this he had concluded to Sell all his interests & go to Mohawk River. She finally agreed to take up with one Hundred dollars & return home.<sup>24</sup>

*(To be continued.)*

<sup>19</sup> Not easy to understand. Could this refer to the opening into Farm Pond?

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Cooke seems to be having more problems.

<sup>21</sup> Another night at his girl friend's. Again, we wish he would tell us more about the trial involving Cooke and Norton.

<sup>22</sup> The beginning of a major migration to Maine. It would be helpful if he would explain their reasons for leaving Farm Neck.

<sup>23</sup> This is Zachariah, the last of the missionary Mayhews, who was paid by a Boston mission society. He was visiting the Indian lands on Farm Neck. See Feb. 1993 *Intelligencer* for more about his work.

<sup>24</sup> Nathan of Chilmark had 7 children by his first wife, who died in 1790. He and Lydia (the daughter of Maj. Peter Norton) had married in Sept. 1791. He is now 57, she is 45. He never returned to the Island and died in Orange county, New York.



Above, at left, Leroy Tilton's "Paper Store," with its soda fountain, below, serving the famous home-made ice cream.



Morris Hall's Department Store. No T-shirts or Sweats visible. Men's goods in left window, ladies' in right. Green Stamps with every sale.

DEXTER'S

**M**OVING **P**ICTURES  
Town Hall Edgartown.

Saturday Evening, Jan. 8th.

**NAT C. GOODWIN**

AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS ACTOR,  
in a Wonderful 6-Act Film Production  
of the Gripping French Drama,

**BUSINESS IS BUSINESS**

Magnificent Settings and a Great Cast.

TOWN HALL, EDGARTOWN,

SATURDAY NIGHT, Jan. 8

*Moving pictures were first shown in Edgartown's Town Hall on Saturday nights by Mr. Dexter (ad above ran in January 1916). Alfred Hall built the town's first movie theater, shown below when new in late 1920s (see p. 74).*

