



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 45, NO. 3

FEBRUARY 2004



*Dr. Tucker's "Cottage," One of
Erastis Carpenter's Jewels.*

Cottage City Secedes. Was It Worth It?

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

(Chapter Eight)

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

Gay Head Gets a Wharf in 1883: The Beginning of the End?

by HOWES NORRIS

Why Was the Professor So Upset About Cottage City's Water?

Four 1880 Hotel Ads in Cottage City

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February 2004

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

(Chapter Eight)

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

Secession: Was It Worth It? Cottage City Wonders.

THE CIVIL WAR was over. The South had surrendered and once again, the Union was whole. Secession was no longer dividing the nation.

But in one of the strange coincidences of history, on the island of Martha's Vineyard another battle over secession was just beginning — a battle without bombs, only bombast.

The seeds of secession had been planted thirty years before with the creation of a campground on East Chop, the northern tip of Edgartown, in an area uninhabited except by William Butler's sheep. There, Methodists had found peace and God. In a shady oak grove, they gathered every August to pray for salvation as scores of preachers warned them of Hell. Each night after soulful prayer, they went to their tents and slept fitfully on a layer of straw.

It became the favorite camp meeting among the many held in New England. At first, Methodists by the hundreds came, soon they were coming by the thousands. All took home pleasant memories of a beautiful spot under the oaks, a spot that came to be called Wesleyan Grove.

One of those who came in 1865, the year the Civil War ended, was Erastus P. Carpenter of Foxboro. He was not a typical pilgrim, not one happy to give up his comfort to find his God. He was accustomed to the good life, to good food and a good bed. A wealthy straw-hat manufacturer, he hadn't expected that to be saved he would have to sleep in a tent, eat poor food on a crowded table and line up to use a smelly privy. But he had no choice.

There were no hotels. Outside the campground, one or

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is Editor of this journal. He is grateful to Jack Authelet and the Foxborough Historical Commission for research in the life of Erastus P. Carpenter.

two vacant farm buildings were used during camp meetings as boarding houses. At night, sleeping space was rented in them, complete with a bundle of straw tossed on the floor for a bed. The guests were mostly non-pilgrims: the service workers, the food handlers, the teamsters and porters who met the crowds as they came off the steamboats, seeking transport into the grove.

Crude accommodations like these were not Erastus Carpenter's style. He employed thousands in Foxboro, lived in a handsome mansion. His success had come from straw (the factory was the largest straw-hat factory in the world, it was said), but he didn't enjoy sleeping on a bundle of it on a bare floor.

He loved Wesleyan Grove and its serenity. Surely, he thought, such a place should be enjoyed by more than the throngs of God-fearing Methodists who came for a few days in August. His entrepreneurial mind saw an opportunity: he would make East Chop available to all. He talked his plan over with a friend, Boston merchant William S. Hills, and the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company was born.

Acres of land stood vacant east of the campground. Most was high ground, stretching along the bluffs, overlooking the ocean. It was owned by Capt. Shubael L. Norton of Edgartown, whose father had bought it from the estate of William Butler years before. Shubael was a retired mariner who had sailed square riggers in the China trade. Carpenter and Hills invited him to join the company. Two other captains from Edgartown, Ira Darrow and Grafton Collins, were invited, as was William Bradley, a wealthy Tisbury merchant.

Under Erastus Carpenter's leadership, the new company bought the land from Captain Norton "for a song." Norton and Darrow were made trustees, authorized to sell building lots, a thousand of them.

Nobody realized it then, but these six men were the advance guard of the battle for secession.

The next year, 1866, the company built a wharf, extending into the Sound at the northern end of its property. It was the first such wharf ever built out into Vineyard Sound where severe winter storms made the ocean tumultuous and wharves

useless. Many Vineyarders thought it was folly, the wharf wouldn't last until spring.

When the wharf made it through the winter, a primitive hotel was built at its head. It was a multi-purpose building, housing a hotel of sorts, a store, a restaurant and a sales office for the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company.

Watching all this activity, the camp-meeting folks became worried and quickly built a seven-foot-high picket fence around the 35 acres of campground to keep out the heathen. The editor of the *Vineyard Gazette* saw trouble arising:

It is reported that when the high fence around the Grove, now in process of erection, is completed, direct communication with the East side, owned by the [Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf] Company is to be cut off. . . the idea of constructing it without convenient gates and any opening on that side is an indication . . . [of] the spirit of opposition . . . [by] those who control the campground.

The campground folks were so concerned that they bought 300 acres on the west side of Lake Anthony, opposite the Oak Bluffs land. It would be a retreat for them should the secularism of the Oak Bluffs Company become overpowering.

It wasn't long before the campground directors realized that the fence was unnecessary. The company was not so heathen after all. Its owners were all good Christian men who agreed to adopt the restrictions proposed by their Methodist neighbors. Within a few years, the fence had fallen into such poor condition that residents living alongside it asked to be allowed to maintain it themselves or else to tear it down.

Bonnet-maker Carpenter was not a typical get-rich-quick land speculator. He wanted his development to be a "jewel" of which he would be proud and so he hired Boston landscape architect Robert Morris Copeland to draw up a plan. It may have been the first planned residential community in the United States. Copeland and his men visited the Island, surveyed the land, and laid out 1000 small lots along curving roadways. Each lot was marked with four stakes; a fifth stake was driven in its center with the lot number on it.

After studying Copeland's proposal, Carpenter went to

the Island to see how it looked on the ground. He didn't like what he saw. There were too many stakes. More open spaces, more parkland, were needed. "We must give the people more breathing space," he was quoted later as having said.

Walking across the areas that would become Ocean Park and Waban Park, he ordered the men to pull up the stakes. There would be no buildings there. At his insistence, more parks were added in the revised plan, a total of ten. The largest would be Ocean Park at the head of the new wharf. The arriving tourist's first view would be of an expanse of open parkland. Carpenter knew what would sell.

On the Fourth of July 1867, the revised plan was ready. Hundreds of copies were posted in train depots and hotel lobbies around New England. A bold advertisement ran in the *Vineyard Gazette*, July 5, 1867:

Home by the Seaside:

"Oak Bluffs"

A new summer resort.

One thousand lots for sale

laid out by Robert Morris Copeland, Esq.,
of Boston,

the well-known landscape gardener. Cheap and quiet homes by the sea shore during the summer months. Plans available for beautiful cottages, costing from \$300 to \$1000.

Ira Darrow

Shubael L. Norton

Grafton N. Collins

William Bradley

Erastus Carpenter

William S. Hills

It was the first time the name, "Oak Bluffs," had appeared in print. The *Gazette* liked it:

The Land and Wharf Company have given their grounds the unique and taking name of "Oak Bluffs," upon which they offer a thousand lots for sale. They have now completed the most substantial and convenient wharf that could have been erected in this vicinity, within 40 rods of the Camp-ground proper.

The *Gazette* saw the wharf as a convenience to the campground, replacing the more distant one at Eastville. But that

wasn't what Carpenter had in mind. He hadn't built the wharf to serve the campground; he had built it for his "baby," Oak Bluffs. Sales were brisk. In the first three years, Shubael L. Norton sold more than 500 lots from his office at the head of the wharf. In the following two years, 300 more.

But Shubael didn't sell the choicest lots. They were sold personally by Erastus Carpenter to a selected group of men he knew would build impressive "cottages" that would make him proud. He offered them the best water-view lots, bordering on the park at the head of the wharf. He wanted that large expanse of open land, the first view the tourist had, to be a park framed by expensive "cottages" with spires and piazzas. He built the first one for himself.

Among those he solicited was Dr. Harrison A. Tucker of Brooklyn, N. Y., who had been visiting the Island since 1858, renting cottages in the campground. He wanted a summer home on the Island, but not one of those tent-like cottages in the campground. Made wealthy by sales of his patent medicines, each "tailor made" for a precise illness, he could afford to build what he wanted.

Carpenter met with the doctor in 1868. Tucker described their meeting some years later:

I lived at that time on the campground. [Carpenter] said: "I would like to take you outside and show you what we have here." We walked on to the bluffs. He said they had formed a company for the purpose of organizing a summer resort and, "I would like you to have a selection of some of the best lots as there is only two now sold, one [is] where my cottage is."

Tucker quickly signed on, buying a house that had already been built near Carpenter's. He wasn't content with the view and soon decided to build his own cottage on a better spot. He bought several lots and combined them to have space for a larger cottage, the one known today as Doctor Tucker's house.

Carpenter sold lots to other wealthy men from Connecticut and Massachusetts, members of the *nouveau riche* of the post-war industrial boom. Among them were Philip Corbin, the lock manufacturer, and Timothy Stanley, the tool maker. As word spread, other new entrepreneurs, too new to be ac-

ceptable to places like Newport, bought land and built impressive houses. By selecting such buyers, Carpenter created the Oak Bluffs he wanted with Ocean Park as its centerpiece.

Erastus Carpenter began the annual "Illuminations." On the weekend before the 1868 camp meeting, to call attention to his development, Carpenter brought the Foxboro Town Band to the Island to parade and give a concert in the park. He asked the owners of the few cottages already built to hang Japanese lanterns on their piazzas. It was the first of the annual Illuminations.

Later, he added fireworks. Soon, the event spread to Clinton Avenue, on the edge of the camp ground, and finally, some years later, into the campground itself. It was not a campground event in the beginning. In fact, in its early years, the Methodists considered it ungodly. The crowds that came to admire the lighted fairyland stayed for the weekend and were so disrespectful of the Sabbath that the campground directors passed a resolution requesting that steamers not run on camp-meeting Sundays. Furthermore:

... we respectfully request all persons to refrain from visiting the Camp Ground on the Sabbath.

The resolution didn't work; the steamers kept running, the crowds kept coming, as word of the Illumination spread. Carpenter had been right. Ocean Park, where the fireworks and Illumination took place, was the drawing card. His insistence on open space was paying off.

During the winter of 1870, he wrote to Captain Norton, the sales agent, urging him to fertilize the parkland grass in a way that would be considered unsanitary today:

Would also [ask you to] finish up the 2 parks where you have been grading, by carting on a sufficient quantity of soil . . . for grass to grow . . . Why not clear out all the privies and cess-pools and make a compost heap on [the] Parks with what stable and hog manure you may find on the premises and have it in readiness to spread in the spring. Taking all the privies, stables, etc., with some loam, it would make quite a large quantity of most desirable compost to spread for the growth of grass.

By 1871, everybody, it seemed, was going to the Vineyard. At least so *The Whaleman's Shipping List*, a weekly marine newspaper published in New Bedford, thought:

HO FOR THE VINEYARD!

A large stream of travel is now rushing through this city [New Bedford] to the Vineyard. Every conceivable kind of vehicle groans with its freight of humanity; men and women of all nations and all natures, of all sections and complexions – the Portuguese, the Englishman, the Frenchman, the Southerner, the Easterner – all going to the Eden-like city by the sea. What a wonderful transformation! Forty years ago, it was a barren waste, and now it is one of the most fashionable watering places on the Atlantic coast.

These years were the most frenzied in Vineyard history, unequalled before or since. More than a thousand buildings were erected in the small area bounded on the east by Vineyard Sound, on the west by the campground and on the south by Farm Pond. These were not the tent-sized cottages of the campground. They were large and expensive.

The largest was the Sea View House, built in 1872. Five stories high and 225 feet long, it had 125 guest rooms, many public rooms, a large ballroom and a steam-powered elevator, the Island's first. Owned by the Land & Wharf Company, it was valued in its 1873 financial statement at \$95,000, making it Carpenter's largest single investment (see p. 124 for more).

As Henry Beetle Hough wrote in *Martha's Vineyard: Summer Resort*, the Sea View House made a statement:

It is a legend . . . One saw it from the steamboat, dominating the waterfront; one walked past it on the plank walk, or sat on the broad verandas which completely encircled it; if one was lucky, one stopped there, and was conscious of enjoying the finest accommodations and the finest society that the resort afforded. . . it was a colossus, a marvel not only in itself, but because it transformed the whole aspect, the whole character of the community. Its towers were an imaginative flight, its whole effect was that of a fantasy, a wish-fulfillment, of the time. Like some chateau of dreams it stood, magnificent.

It was a 19th Century Disneyland. Its magnificence exuded

confidence, a feeling of success. Soon, ten more hotels had been built, each less majestic than the Sea View, but large and impressive nonetheless, with scores of guest rooms, broad piazzas and spacious ballrooms.

Eager land developers moved in, buying up all the empty spaces they could find. Virtually the entire peninsula of East Chop, which only a few years earlier had been pasture, was divided into thousands of tiny lots, with each subdivision carefully plotted and promoted by Island real-estate agents.

One new developer, the largest, was the campground which had long opposed such speculation. When the association realized a "retreat" would not be needed, it decided to sell its 300 acres in a development called Vineyard Highlands. Some in the campground objected, but it went ahead despite them. The new company built a wharf and put up the Highland House at its head, following the pattern that had been set by the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company.

There were now two large wharves only a few hundred yards apart, both extending into the Sound. Steamboats from the mainland stopped first at Highland wharf to unload the "religious" passengers and then proceeded to the Oak Bluffs wharf to let off the "seculars."

The Highlands Company built a long wooden walkway above the muddy shore of Lake Anthony so arriving pilgrims could walk directly into the campground. Later, a horse-drawn railway was put in service, running into Wesleyan Grove. Pilgrims were thus spared the temptations of Oak Bluffs.

A former Methodist minister was hired to sell the lots on the Highlands to make certain they went only to the "right" people. He described the somewhat strained relationship between the secular Oak Bluffs Company and the religious Highlands Company:

There was considerable competition, pretty sharp competition, between the two companies at the time. . . we fought rather shy of each other, but we had civil acquaintance.

In 1873, there were 18 subdivisions advertising in the *Seaside Gazette*, a short-lived newspaper of the day. In addition to the Vineyard Highlands, there were Bellevue Heights, Lagoon

Heights, Oklahoma, Prospect Heights and smaller developments such as Forest Hill, Englewood, Oak Grove and Oakland. On the Holmes Hole side of the Lagoon, C. C. Hines bought an entire peninsular and divided it into 98 lots, three-quarters of them with water frontage, to form Cedar Neck. The mood was so buoyant that nothing seemed impossible. Tarleton C. Luce announced he would build a large Opera House on his Bellevue Heights in time for the 1873 season. Construction was delayed only by a shortage of lumber. A steady stream of schooners from Maine couldn't keep up with the demand. On the Highlands, a steam-driven planing mill was busy dressing the boards as soon as they were unloaded.

The boom was even spreading toward Edgartown. A new development, Ocean Heights, was laid out overlooking Sengekontacket Pond, soon followed by another on Trapp's Pond. The *Gazette*, ecstatic to see activity moving in its direction, asked: "Who comes next in the line of new enterprises? Welcome all!"

Edgartown needed new enterprise. The oil manufactory of Daniel Fisher had closed down; only his candle factory continued in operation. "The Fort," as the land on upper Main Street where Fisher had stored his whale oil was called, had been bought by the county. Oil-stained and odiferous, it would be the site of a county jail, the only new construction in town.

A major fire had crippled the old village. Starting in Richard Shute's photographic studio on lower Main Street below Four Corners, it quickly spread to adjoining buildings. The Shute building, the Munroe store and the office of Dr. John Pierce were completely destroyed; badly damaged were four other buildings. It was Edgartown's worst fire since 1807.

With so many developments seeking buyers, none was doing well. Sales on the Highlands were so slow that the campground association gave the Baptist association land to set up a campground, hoping more Baptists would follow. Lots were given to Baptist ministers who agreed to build cottages on them. By 1880, both denominations were holding camp meetings in August. There was no conflict with schedules. The Baptists always held theirs first, the Methodists retaining their

traditional date at the end of August.

More than 2000 acres on East Chop had been subdivided. There was little left to develop. Edgartown businessmen, pleased with the Ocean Heights and Trapp's Pond developments, wondered how they could keep the movement coming south. There was plenty of open space around Old Town. In decline for years as whaling moved from New England to California, it now had little more than the Court House and County Jail to provide jobs. Attempts had been made to start new businesses, but none had lasted.

What was needed, the businessmen proposed, was a direct road from Oak Bluffs to Edgartown. Instead of making a long circle around Sengekontaket Pond, it would run along the beach, cutting travel time sharply. The road wouldn't be cheap. A bridge had to be built across the opening into the pond from Vineyard Sound. At town meeting, Edgartown businessmen praised the plan and they persuaded residents to invest \$40,000 of the town's money in the project. It would be money well spent, bringing jobs and prosperity.

In the summer of 1872, the road was finished, just in time for the dedication of the majestic Sea View House. A gala party was held in its ballroom. Edgartown native, Joseph Thaxter Pease, son of Jeremiah Pease who had started everything when he laid out the campground in 1835, gave the welcoming address to the dignitaries from the mainland, calling himself "someone who is native here, and to the manor born." He was treasurer of the Oak Bluffs Company that owned the hotel and much more in Cottage City. He may have been the only Edgartown resident who rode along the brand-new Beach Road to the party. He predicted that the Sea View House would bring prosperity to the whole Island, creating a new business of recreation and recuperation. When honored guest, Judge Thomas Russell, customs collector of Boston, spoke, he praised the company and Joseph, closing with: "May Pease be with you always."

The next morning the dignitaries boarded a chartered steamboat and left for Katama. As the vessel steamed into Edgartown harbor, a cannon was fired from the steamboat wharf,

hoping no doubt to attract the illustrious group to shire town. But the visitors never got any closer than that. Katama was their destination, the site of Erastus Carpenter's latest grand plan. With East Chop now taken over by competitors, he had discovered a new opportunity at South Beach.

He, with other investors, formed the Katama Land Company, buying 600 acres on the western shore of Katama Bay, about three miles south of Edgartown village. Again, Carpenter hired Robert Morris Copeland of Boston to design the subdivision. Dominating the plan was a huge hotel to be called Mattakessett Lodge, even larger than the Sea View.

An imposing gatehouse would stand at the head of a wharf to impress arriving visitors with the grandeur of Katama. The gatehouse was quickly built and began taking guests in August. Carpenter promised that the much larger hotel would be built the next year. It never was and the 50-room gatehouse was slightly modified to become Mattakessett Lodge.

The directors voted to give Carpenter a waterfront lot for his cottage. It was quickly built, followed by a clambake pavilion with a bowling alley and a wharf in Katama Bay.

Katama's remoteness was its handicap. Land sales were slow. Only one other cottage was built after Carpenter's. Despite the loveliness of the setting, the pounding surf at nearby South Beach and the calm bay for swimming and fishing, Katama was just too far away. The company bought a small steamboat that ran from Oak Bluffs to the new wharf carrying potential buyers. It was a pleasant boat ride on good days, but it took too long. There had to be a faster way.

Carpenter, president of a railroad in Framingham, decided what was needed was a railroad. It was the era of railroads. Tracks were being laid everywhere. Trains now ran from New York to California. Why not from Oak Bluffs to Katama?

He convinced several Edgartown businessmen to join him. Samuel Osborn Jr., Edgartown's leading businessman and politician, agreed with the plan. They were a most unlikely combination. Carpenter's Oak Bluffs was the boom town that Osborn despised as it pushed Edgartown into the shadows.

In March 1874, the two men met with potential investors.

Among them were Capt. Nathaniel Jernegan, Capt. Jared Jernegan, Capt. Richard Holley, Capt. William S. Lewis, Capt. John O. Norton, all former whaling masters from Edgartown, plus William Wing of New Bedford.

The *Vineyard Gazette* was enthused about the plan:

If the railroad is built, \$20,000 will go into the pockets of our laboring men. . . Every spare horse will be employed, and all will feel the magical influence of new, prosperous and vigorous undertakings. . . Go to the Town Meeting on Saturday and give your vote for the railroad. You will never regret it. . . When we have a railroad, we shall see improvements made in our village never before thought of. The "snort of the iron horse" will arouse men from their lethargy and infuse new life into their veins.

At the special town meeting, Osborn proposed that the town put up \$15,000, provided that another \$25,000 was raised privately. Bonds would then be issued for \$35,000 so the total capital would be \$75,000. Nine miles of narrow gauge railroad could be built for that, Osborn said.

It did seem like a poor time to be investing in a railroad. Nine months before, in September 1873, Jay Cooke & Company, which had financed the Northern Pacific Railroad, had failed, triggering the Panic of 1873. Over 5000 businesses had gone broke. Such financial cycles rarely affected the Island and Carpenter and Osborn pushed ahead. The railroad would, they were sure, bring prosperity to Edgartown.

At the town meeting, the residents, saddled with debt for the construction of the Beach Road, were hesitant. The road would bring prosperity, they had been told, but it had not. Why should they believe this promise? Ichabod Norton Luce, Gay Head lighthouse keeper from 1862 to 1866, was critical:

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

Capt. Nathaniel M. Jernegan had a different view. He was hardly a disinterested observer, being sales agent for the

Katama Land Company. He was sure the railroad would be a success. It would, he said, bring "a handsome profit" and the town would make money on its investment.

Osborn joined in Jernegan's optimism:

I expect a net return of ten percent.

A two-thirds majority was necessary to pass the proposal. The vote was close: 72 No, 149 Yes, only two more than the 147 required. Critic Ichabod N. Luce was not pleased. It was not the town's business, he wrote in a letter to the *Gazette*:

. . . take care of your poor, your schools, your roads: these are the legitimate functions of a town government. Let private projects take care of themselves. . . the work will be done with imported Irishmen. . . when you take into the account the number of men and horses employed [now] in carrying passengers to the South Beach. . . [with] all to be done by the iron horse fed with fire, it is to the laboring man a very serious matter.

Edgartown borrowed the \$15,000 from two off-Island banks and the railroad company began spending it. No time was wasted. By the first week in August, all but one mile of the nine-mile track had been laid along the short and level route the builders had chosen, a decision that proved disastrous. The track ran along the beach from Oak Bluffs to Edgartown, turned south across the fields to upper Main Street, where a depot was built, and then to Katama, skirting the cemetery.

The first run was made in late August. A remarkable accomplishment in such a short time. The locomotive proved to be too weak. It was a so-called "dummy engine," a passenger car with a steam engine in it, the kind used in cities for rapid transit. A standard locomotive was ordered. When it arrived in Woods Hole on a flat car, a somewhat humorous accident occurred. The new locomotive was knocked off the end of the wharf and sank to the bottom in an unplanned salt-water christening.

Pulled up the next day, it was taken back to Boston for repairs, finally arriving at Katama on August 27, 1874. It went into service at once.

Its arrival coincided with that of Pres. Ulysses S. Grant, the first president ever to visit the Island. Though he slept three nights in the campground cottage of Methodist Bishop Haven, Grant showed little interest in the Vineyard or its residents. He went to Nantucket and Hyannis one day and on the next to Naushon, where he met with Boston financier James Forbes. He arrived back in Oak Bluffs late Saturday afternoon in time to rest briefly before attending a gala in his honor at the Sea View House.

It was the most elegant function the Island had ever seen. Several hundred men and women attended, most in formal dress. Thousands of curious folks lined the hotel piazza, peering into windows and wandering through its corridors, eager for a glimpse of the president. For more than an hour, he and Mrs. Grant stood in a receiving line, shaking hands with Islanders and off-Islanders. When the weary president and his Methodist hosts left for bed at midnight, those remaining picked up the tempo, dancing until dawn.

Newspapers in Boston, New York and Washington spread the news: the president had found a new national "watering place." The Vineyard's future looked bright.

The next morning, Grant and his wife attended a service under the camp-meeting tent, but he never saw any more of the Island than Oak Bluffs and the campground.

His visit had brought a few problems. During it, a New York woman staying in the Highland House had jewelry valued at \$1000 taken from her room. Two men were arrested for breaking into the Edgartown home of Mrs. Eunice Coffin. Constable James Pent was stabbed as he tried to break up "a party of roughs" who were fighting outside the Sea View House while the gala was taking place. The "real" world had come to the Vineyard, along with the president and the railroad. It was a more complicated world. The Island was changing.

These were minor crimes compared with one that took place that same summer. When Oak Bluffs mariner, Almar F. Dickson, returned from a seven-week coasting voyage, he discovered his cottage empty. His wife had taken most of the furniture and moved in with Deputy Sheriff John N. Vinson, to live in what then was called "criminal intimacy." Mrs. Dick-

son's sister, Mrs. Phoebe Dexter, was also living in the house with Samuel K. Elliott of Worcester. Mrs. Dexter had been separated from her husband for several years. The two women said they were there as housekeepers.

The distressed Dickson tried to convince his wife to return home. She refused. One Saturday night a few weeks later, he and his brother-in-law, Caleb C. Smith (brother of the two "housekeepers"), with four other men arrived at Elliott's cottage at 89 Tuckernuck Avenue in a wagon. With them in the wagon were a bucket of tar, a feather pillow and some rope.

Caleb knocked on the door. When Elliott opened it, Caleb ordered him to get into the wagon. Elliott, apparently expecting such an event, drew a gun and pulled the trigger. The gun misfired. Caleb's friends, seeing what was happening, joined the struggle. They dragged Elliott out of the house. During the fracas, Elliott again pulled the trigger. This time the gun fired and the bullet hit Smith in the chest. It did not stop him. He helped load Elliott into the wagon. They drove into the darkness, apparently to tar and feather their captive.

Weakened by loss of blood from the wound, Smith fell off the wagon. The others went to help him, but he soon died. In the confusion, Elliott escaped. Sheriff Howes Norris was notified and he arrested Elliott, as well as mariner Dickson and his accomplices. A grand jury was convened and it indicted Elliott. The next day, he was acquitted in a jury trial. The shooting had been in self defense.

The man who had "stolen" Almar Dickson's wife, Deputy Sheriff John Vinson, missed all the excitement. He had hurriedly left the Island when he learned his "housekeeper's" husband was home from the sea. Later, when he returned to the Island, he resigned as Deputy Sheriff to nobody's surprise.

The threat of a lynching, the sex scandal, the flight of the deputy sheriff, all sent shock waves through the community. For the first time, the Vineyard was getting publicity it didn't want. Metropolitan newspapers, including those in Boston and New York, had sent reporters to the trial. Bold headlines proclaimed the lurid story of a religious campground mired in sin.

The editor of the *Seaside Gazette* pointed out that the

violence had nothing to do with the campground or the camp meeting:

The parties all resided off the campground; the fracas occurred in another part of the city, on land in no way connected with the campground. The fair fame of our camp meeting is in no way imperiled.

That same year, 1874, Nathaniel S. Shaler, who later created Seven Gates Farm in North Tisbury, described Edgartown in the *Atlantic Monthly*:

the pretty village of Edgartown. . . in a commercial sense is a place far advanced in decay: of all its whale-ships, which got from the sea the hard-earned fortunes of its people, there is but one left. This lies upon the ways, stripped of its rigging, looking like a mere effigy of a living craft. . . As soon as a mariner comes to fortune, his first effort is to get a comfortable home, a big, square, roomy house, which shall always be ship-shape and well painted. . . These comfortable homes, like those of New Bedford, mark a period of prosperity which has passed, never to return. Little by little, the population is drifting away; some houses stand empty, and the quick agents of decay which make havoc with our frail New England houses will soon be at work at them.

Shaler was a geologist who found little to interest him in the sandy, rock-free eastern half of the Island. An elitist, he had little respect for the summer visitors in Oak Bluffs:

So far, the new-comers [to the Island] have displayed the admirable lack of discrimination so characteristic of those who haunt the shore in summer; there are two or three great resorts for summer visitors growing up on the low shore of the eastern end of the island, whose interminable sand – its barrenness scarcely veiled by a thin copse of scrubby oaks – is engaged in a give-and-take struggle with the sea. Oak Bluffs, where oaks and bluffs are both on average less than ten feet high, has grown to be a pasteboard summer town capable of giving bad food and uneasy rest to 20,000 people.

To Professor Shaler, Oak Bluffs may have been a “pasteboard summer town,” but thousands liked it. They were happy with the “bad food and uneasy rest.” On “Big Sunday,” the fi-

nal weekend of the 1875 camp meeting, ten steamboats were needed to carry those tasteless multitudes to Oak Bluffs. The editor of *The Seaside Gazette* described the crowds:

“Camp meeting is playing out,” was a phrase that became quite the fashion a few years since. . . No clearer refutation of such an egregious falsehood could be derived than was manifest in the immense crowds that poured into the city yesterday, transported hither by every conceivable naval conveyance from the palatial steamer *Plymouth Rock* to the more democratic sloop or fishing smack . . . They came from all conditions of life. The wealthy millionaire and family . . . the rustic Romeo with his verdant Juliet from off-Island . . . the mechanic, the storekeeper and the clerk all unite in making the pilgrimage.

The diverse crowd was orderly. Sixty special policemen were on duty in the village that day, but only one arrest, that of a boisterous drunk, had to be made.

There was no denying that Erastus Carpenter and his Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company had created a success. So much so that East Chop property owners had taken over the top rankings among Edgartown taxpayers. In 1872, the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company paid \$1242 in taxes, the Vineyard Grove Company paid \$1351, Tarleton C. Luce, who had created Bellevue Heights west of the campground paid \$522. All this on land that not long ago had paid little or no taxes.

These new taxpayers displaced such successful men as Dr. Daniel Fisher, who owned an elegant house on Edgartown's upper Main Street and a candle manufactory on the waterfront. His tax bill was \$619, half what the new Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company paid.

Now providing more than half of the town's revenues, East Chop taxpayers began demanding more benefits, most of all, better fire protection. With so many buildings so close together, Oak Bluffs had a great risk of disaster. The huge hotels were potential firetraps.

Edgartown's leaders were weary of the demands made by Oak Bluffs. It was getting too big for its britches. It wasn't a year-round place, it was just a summer colony. Yet, it was get-

ting all the press attention. To off-Islanders Oak Bluffs had become "Martha's Vineyard." When *Porter's American Monthly* sent a writer to describe "America's newest watering place" in 1877, his report barely mentioned Edgartown. It was filled with praise for Oak Bluffs:

Oak Bluffs exceeded our anticipation. . . the walks along its borders next to the ocean having no equal, within our knowledge, except that of The Cliffs at Newport. The cottages are numerous, large and attractive. . . spacious, tasty and expensive mansions. Here too most of the large and well-appointed hotels are located, including the "Sea View," the "Pawnee House," "Island House," "Grover House" and others too numerous to mention. The "Highland House," a large . . . hotel. . . is situated upon the Vineyard Grove bluffs, adjacent to the Baptist camp grounds. . . But the hotel of Oak Bluffs and of this great watering-place is the Sea View House. . . nearly three hundred feet in length, four stories high, has some two hundred rooms . . . directly upon the ocean shore. . . Some eight or nine miles below Oak Bluffs is . . . "Katama." . . [where] the hotel, whose special name is "Mattakeset Lodge," was erected two years ago. . . a fine narrow gauge railroad connects this place with Edgartown and Oak Bluffs.

That was his only mention of Edgartown. The once-proud shire town was now merely a place the train went through on its way to Katama. Where was the prosperity that was supposed to have come with the railroad?

The railroad hadn't made Edgartown prosperous. Nor had it made a profit. It seemed as though every summer when it looked as though it might make a profit, a winter storm would come along and wash away the track that ran along the beach, requiring expensive repairs. Sam Osborn's 10-percent dividend forecast never materialized. Edgartown taxpayers had run out of patience. At a town meeting in January 1877, they voted to sell the town's stock for whatever it would bring. It brought little. Antone L. Sylvia of New Bedford bought all the town's shares for \$315 – shares for which the town had paid \$15,000 only a few years earlier.

Despite its losses, the railroad kept puffing along without Edgartown's support. It managed to settle with some of its

major creditors and to get rid of much of its debt by bankruptcy. Somehow it kept its track in repair. It even bought a new passenger car and extended its track from Mattakeset Lodge to the sand dunes of South Beach. Erastus Carpenter's railroad might not make money, but it could spend it. (Sam Osborn sued the company later for money he had lent it to buy track for the South Beach extension.)

With its new spur running to within a short walk of the ocean at South Beach, the railroad began promoting moonlight excursions on those balmy summer nights when the surf was high and the moon was full. In 1878, the *Island Review*, another short-lived summer newspaper, described their romantic appeal:

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

Other special trains carried hundreds to dances and clam-bakes at Katama, where, far from hectic Cottage City, visitors found themselves in a dream world of natural wonder. These excursions boosted passenger business so much that in the same year Edgartown sold its stock, the railroad made its first profit.

There may have been romance on moonlit South Beach, but the taxpayers of Cottage City felt none. Politically, they were helpless. A collection of buildings most of them empty all winter, they did not have the votes to influence how their tax money was spent.

In summer, 15,000 persons lived in Cottage City; in winter, about 500. Control of town meetings was securely in the hands of old Edgartown, guaranteeing that most of the tax money was spent there.

Cottage City pointed to the unfairness of the two recent expenditures that were approved over its objections. One was the building of the beach road between Cottage City and Edgartown at a cost of \$70,000; the other was investing \$15,000 in the railroad from Cottage City to Katama. These two expenditures had put the town deep in debt with no advantage to Cottage City. In fact, both were attempts to drain business

from Cottage City to Edgartown. The *Island Review*, itself struggling to survive, proposed a solution in August 1878:

This [Beach] road cost \$40,000 more than it ought and the non-resident taxpayer is called upon to pay one-half of the expense of this great tap (we were about to write swindle). Edgartown next, in direct opposition to the voters of this section, added to the town debt by sinking, in hot haste, in less than three years, the sum of \$15,000 in the Railroad, or "Tap No. 2," and at the same time utterly destroyed [the value of] the Beach Road, just then completed, as for nearly the entire length they are side by side.

Our citizens and corporations light and clean our streets, build our sidewalks, make all new roads needed except through or "trunk" roads, and . . . pay the greater part of the Police expenses of the district. . . our conclusion is inevitable. . . [we must] have separation. . . Let us depart in peace.

The battle for secession had begun. It wasn't the first time it had been proposed. Cottage City had been trying for years to get the state legislature to make it a separate town, but the state had done nothing. The Island's representative, Beriah T. Hillman, although from Chilmark, was safely in the pocket of the Edgartown establishment, having been elected with its support. There was a long-standing Island protocol in which the three towns, Edgartown, Tisbury and Chilmark, rotated the state representative's office. Nominations were controlled by the county leaders in Edgartown. When the Cottage City petition to secede was brought up in the state house, Representative Hillman opposed it and so no vote was taken. The following year, another petition was sent. Once again, it died, as did a third petition the next year.

After three failures, Cottage City had had enough. A meeting was called of those "Non-Resident and Resident Tax-Payers in favor of a division. . . and an incorporation of the Town of Cottage City [made up of] Oak Bluffs, Vineyard Grove, Vineyard Highlands, Eastville, Lagoon Heights and vicinity. . ." Twenty-five major taxpayers signed the advertisement, mostly off-Islanders. Only three were year-round residents: Howes Norris of Eastville; Joseph Dias of Vineyard Grove; and Ichabod N. Luce of Eastville. At the meeting, the

crowd was told that,

One thousand dollars had been raised to defray expenses of the [secession] movement. Several prominent gentlemen addressed the meeting, giving urgent reasons for the division of the town. The attendance was large and the spirit. . . hopeful and determined. . . the opposition are already weakening.

With the one thousand dollars, the secessionists bought the print shop of the failing *Island Review* and soon began publishing the *Cottage City Star*. The name was more hope than reality, there being, as yet, no town of Cottage City. A former Methodist minister was hired as its editor, Rev. Edward W. Hatfield. In the first issue, Hatfield wrote:

The *Cottage City Star* has its local abiding place at Vineyard Grove (the place aspiring to the name of "Cottage City"). . . It is owned by an Association of persons more interested in having such an organ existing among us than . . . pecuniary advantage.

What he didn't say was that the real purpose of the newspaper was to make Cottage City a separate town, no longer a satellite of Edgartown. Hatfield, with the help of Howes Norris, created a newspaper that was far superior to Edgartown's *Vineyard Gazette*. The secessionists knew that they would need the support of the whole Island and so they published news from everywhere: Lambert's Cove, Gay Head, Squibnocket and even Nomans Land had regular news columns. Only Edgartown was missing. For a year, the *Star* was unable to find anyone living there who was willing to be its correspondent. The political pressure was too great. Soon, the *Star* was out-selling the *Gazette* everywhere except in Edgartown.

The Edgartown "clique," controlled by Samuel Osborn Jr., knew it must do something to stop the rebellion. It may have been only coincidence, but when Edgartown's first Board of Health was appointed in the summer of 1879, its first action was aimed at "that part of Edgartown known as the Camp Ground, Oak Bluffs and Vineyard Highlands." It warned of,

the importance of maintaining strict sanitary regulations during the heated season now upon us, and in a locality so densely populated in the months of July and August.



H. M. BROWNELL, Proprietor.

This elegant Hotel, situated on the edge of the Bluff, commands an extended view of island and sea. The dining rooms are large and commodious, conducted on the European plan, and will seat four hundred people. The halls are wide and airy, the rooms large and well ventilated, and lighted throughout with gas. A steam elevator connecting with the different floors, makes them all equally accessible, and speaking tubes from each room bring the guests in immediate communication with the office. The house is heated with steam throughout, insuring at all times uniform and comfortable temperature.

GUSTIN'S BAND and ORCHESTRA are engaged for the season. Public Stables in close proximity to the hotel, and good accommodations furnished for private teams.

This far-famed and attractive Summer resort cannot be excelled on the New England coast, combining every advantage to be desired for a Summer residence by the sea—an abundant supply of pure water, with the excellent facilities for bathing, fishing, boating and driving, make this the most delightful and healthful watering place in the world.

COTTAGE LIFE AT THE VINEYARD!



MRS. A. A. HILL'S
NARRAGANSETT COTTAGE,
NOW OPEN FOR THE SEASON.

This elegant and fashionable cottage has recently been put in thorough order, and with the additions and many improvements, Mrs. Hill is confident of being better able to accommodate her patrons than ever before. Free Carriage from the boat. For terms and particulars, address
MRS. A. A. HILL, 62 Narragansett Avenue,
P. O. Box 494. Cottage City, Mass.

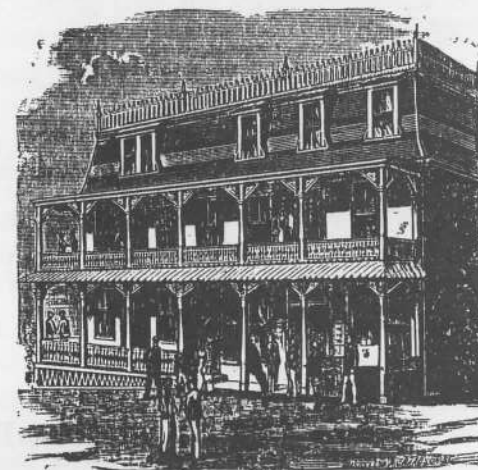
HIGHLAND HOUSE, SMITH & McELROY, Proprietors.



CAMP MEETING LANDING, MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MASS

WESLEY HOUSE,

Cottage City, Martha's Vineyard, Mass.



Persons visiting Martha's Vineyard will find this hotel one of the best. It is located on the borders of Lake Anthony, and has a pleasant view from its rooms and verandas.

EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN PLAN.

Open all the year.

A. G. WESLEY, Proprietor.

It had a point. So many thousands crowded into that small area during the summer that there was indeed great danger of the contamination of wells by human waste. With more than 10,000 day trippers, the problem was critical.

Human waste had long been a campground concern. There just wasn't enough space for every tent or cottage to have its own privy, so communal toilets were built under the preachers' stand. In an obtuse regulation aimed more at modesty than sanitation, the protocol for using the privies before curfew each evening was spelled out:

The Walks for Retirement are, for the Ladies, in the direction in the FRONT OF THE STAND (being a South Easterly direction therefrom, and including the space between the Road leading from the Ground to the East, or nearest Landing, and that leading to the Pond, directly in the rear of the New Bedford County Street Tent), and for the Gentlemen, in the direction in the REAR OF THE STAND, being a North Westerly direction therefrom, and including all the space on this side of the encampment between the two roads above named.

Larger crowds required more toilets. The need became so great that when the Oak Bluffs Company gave the campground a half-acre of land near Lake Anthony to straighten out a disputed boundary, the land was used for more privies. That did not please the Company:

On it, [the Campground Association] built or placed their public privies. It was and is a nuisance and injury to the Oak Bluffs Company, but there was no redress. Expensive stables and sheds were built to cover this nuisance from public view.

The privies were built along the shore of Meadow Lake (now Sunset Lake), a low land used for years as a "dump" for swill and human waste. On Siloam Avenue near the lake on land leased from the campground, Capt. Joseph Dias, a leader in the secession drive, ran the Vineyard Grove House. The Edgartown Board of Health decided his well should be one of the first to be tested.

The test was done in a most casual manner. A water sample was pumped into a jug with no tight seal on it and taken to Edgartown where it was held overnight before being sent to

Boston for testing. There, a Professor Nichols tested the sample and declared the water contaminated, unfit for human consumption. Notices were printed and handed out to passengers on arriving steamboats to warn of contaminated water in the campground, where most were planning to visit.

The *Cottage City Star* editor was furious. There had been no complaints about the hotel water. Nobody who had stayed there, drinking its water, had become ill. The whole thing was, the *Star* charged, an act of retaliation against Captain Dias for his support of secession. The worried hotel keeper took two samples of water from the well himself and sent them to Boston to be tested. No contamination was found.

Convinced that this was retribution, Cottage City decided that there had to be a major change. It must elect a state representative who would support its petition to secede.

It being Chilmark's turn in the representative's office, the secessionists put Stephen Flanders of that town on the primary ballot, opposing Chilmark's Beriah T. Hillman, the "machine" candidate. They also ran candidates for County Treasurer and County Commissioner. None of them won in the primary so the three candidates were made candidates of "The People's Ticket" and placed on the election ballot.

The *Cottage City Star* asked the rest of the Island, Edgartown excepted, to support of its candidate, Flanders:

The people of Edgartown . . . believe that Edgartown is the world, and they are the inhabitants thereof, and that all outsiders are from the moon or some unknown corner of space and are not entitled to any consideration at their hands either by right or by courtesy. . . Voters, break the yoke placed about your neck by this grasping old town. . .Vote the People's Ticket.

The election was close. But it was a victory for the secessionists. Two of their candidates, the State Representative and the County Commissioner, were elected. Their candidate for County Treasurer lost only by 20 votes out of 840 cast. It was a great victory. The *Cottage City Star* proclaimed:

Sound the Hogag!! The People Victorious!! Glorious News!!

For the first time, the power of the Edgartown establishment had been broken. The *Star* gloated:

Mr. Samuel Osborn is said to look as if a heavy white frost had struck him.

The election was notable for another reason. It was the first time the Indians in Gay Head had been allowed to vote. All but one of their 24 votes went to Stephen Flanders, the pro-secession candidate, providing more than half his winning margin of 40 votes. The Gay Head vote was even more decisive to the election of County Commissioner Lorenzo Smith, another pro-secession candidate. His victory margin was only four votes. The secession candidate for County Treasurer lost by 20 votes. It was one of the closest elections in Island history and the Gay Head Indians, voting for the first time, had played an important role.

There was another reason why the election of 1879 was memorable, as the *Star* pointed out:

It was the first time the citizens of Edgartown ever witnessed the sight of ladies (?) publicly electioneering [for] votes . . . It showed how desperate the leaders had become.

To celebrate their victory, the secession forces held a gala dinner at Capt. Joseph Dias's Vineyard Grove House where the drinking water had been declared unfit for humans.

The Edgartown machine didn't take the results without protest. It demanded that the election of Representative Flanders be revoked, asking the state to investigate several improprieties it said had occurred. The claim was made that the required notices of the election had not been posted in Gay Head. There were, it was said, irregularities on Gosnold (the Elizabeth Islands) and in Tisbury, where some voters had not paid their poll taxes until after the election.

After many weeks, the state ruled that there had been a few minor errors in procedures, but they had not been deliberate and did not warrant overriding the clear intent of the people. Flanders was confirmed as the winner.

Trying to close the Island's widening split, the *Star* editorialized after the decision:

Every [body] knows that to build up Cottage City is the salvation of Martha's Vineyard. . . All sensible people know there is no hope of turning the tide from Cottage City to Edgartown or Gay Head. . . Already this place [Cottage City] furnishes a market for our farmers . . . diabolical newspaper men and people . . . are engaged in constant endeavors to create strife. . . Show by your acts that you disapprove.

With a friend now in the state house, the secessionists quickly sent a fourth petition to the legislature. With the support of Representative Flanders, it passed both houses quickly. At 4 p.m., February 17, 1880, the governor signed it.

Cottage City was no longer merely a hopeful name on a newspaper, it was the name of a real town. The *Star* reported:

The quill with which the bill was signed was presented to the local committee and will be preserved.

Lobbying in vain against the bill had been several of Edgartown's leading citizens, as the *Star* reported, satirically:

A touching sight – the trio from Edgartown, Messrs. Osborn, Clough and Dunham, with arms interlocked, passing up Washington Street on Saturday afternoon, apparently seeking a little harmless diversion from the trials at the State House amid the gay frivolities of an afternoon on Boston's great thoroughfare, or, possibly they were off for the children's matinee at the Globe [theater].

A month later, in March 1880, many members of the state legislature, supporters of secession, went to Cottage City to celebrate. The Old Colony Railroad, added a private car to the train that carried them to Woods Hole. It was a joyful occasion. After a splendid meal in the Vineyard Grove House, no doubt with much banter about the dangerous water being served, the group moved to the chapel on the campground, where many local residents had gathered. It was a big crowd, eager to celebrate, but as one speaker pointed out, there were noticeable absentees:

I'm happy to see old friends and acquaintances and happy to see your union of feeling; but I should have been more happy to see some of my old friends from Edgartown here, too.

Not present also was Erastus P. Carpenter, the man most responsible for the celebration. He probably was on a trip to Europe to study the latest styles in straw bonnets. Surely, had he been in Foxboro, he would have attended this victory gala. He and his associates had opened up acres of pasture land, creating a lively village that now had 1106 taxable buildings valued at \$1,212,527, among them 18 hotels and 44 stores, shops and restaurants. The village had been paying 60 percent of all the tax money collected by the old town of Edgartown. Now a separate town, Cottage City was ranked in the top half of the 306 towns in Massachusetts in real-estate valuation — that's how much it had grown in a dozen years.

The victory celebration lasted well into the night. Many light-hearted speeches were given. One, more serious, was by a Melrose lawyer who advised the assembled residents that the time for division was over:

Let there be no divisions among you. Treat Eastville well — it is all Cottage City now, no Eastville. . . Let a general broad-handed liberality rule this town. Let divisions go. Let Eastville, the Highlands, the Grove, Oak Bluffs, all go . . . they are all Cottage City now.

The new town, consisting as it did of many disconnected and competitive land companies, would have to come together. It wouldn't be easy.

There was another more serious problem ahead, one that none of those celebrating could have imagined: Erastus Carpenter was getting ready to cash in his chips. Perhaps that was why he wasn't present.

The first hint was an advertisement in the *Boston Journal*: the Katama Land Company was offering its property for sale:

MARTHA'S VINEYARD

For Sale for One-half of the Cost or,
Lease for a Term of Years
At a Low Price.

Seaside hotel of 60 rooms . . . two cottages, *clam-bake pavilion*, *billiard room*, *bowling alley*, *servants' quarters*. Also, 450 acres good farming land, farmhouse, farm buildings and wharf. . .

Erastus P. Carpenter was admitting that Katama had been

a mistake. Even with his railroad, the clambakes and moonlight excursions, it could not overcome the handicap of remoteness. He was getting out. He was beginning his total withdrawal from the Vineyard.

For most Vineyarders his withdrawal would matter little. They were living just as they had before Erastus arrived with his dream. Life was still a struggle for them. It wasn't easy before he came and it wasn't easy now. They had to work hard to get by. There were few steady jobs.

The Island's largest employer was the R. W. Crocker Harness factory on Main Street, Vineyard Haven. About 25 persons were working there in 1880 (at its peak, a few years later, there were 60), producing more than 1000 sets of harness a year, almost all exported to the mainland. A new Vineyard Haven enterprise, only a year old, was an overall factory, employing 16 young women. It was innovative. The sewing machines were powered by a steam engine, with Eugene L. Chadwick in charge. Another factory in town was busy:

S. T. Meara, the celebrated Boot and Shoe Manufacturer, is receiving large orders. His factory is running on full time.

Sherman T. Meara was a young Irish immigrant who somehow ended up on the Vineyard. He enlisted in the Union army as a volunteer from Tisbury early in the Civil War. In April 1864, on his second tour of duty, he was captured and held in the infamous Andersonville Prison, escaping from it in February 1865. After being mustered out, he returned to the Island where he married the daughter of Bayes Norton of Tisbury. He owned two shoe and cobbler shops and now had started a boot and shoe factory in Vineyard Haven.

For most Islanders, the sea was their "factory." They were mariners, either in whaling or in commercial shipping. At least 25 were pilots, guiding vessels through the treacherous Vineyard and Nantucket Sounds. They lived aboard vessels at the entrances to the Sounds, waiting for a call from a passing ship.

Up-Island, where there was water power, a number of grist mills provided employment for a few. A paint mill on the North Shore used water power (later it was powered by steam) to grind clay of various colors into very fine powder that was

shipped off-Island to be turned into paint. A seasonal operation, it employed five or six men. Nearby were the brickworks, also seasonal, that with the help of a steam engine produced 800,000 bricks a year, almost all exported.

Cranberry bogs along the North Shore shipped more than a thousand barrels of the berries to the mainland annually. In West Tisbury, the textile mill on Mill Pond, made various felt fabrics from Island wool, employing a half-dozen.

The largest employer in Edgartown was Dr. Daniel Fisher's candleworks (his oil refinery had closed). For a short time, a woodworking shop on North Water Street had produced trim for the gingerbread cottages in the campground.

In all the villages, a few men worked at herring runs seasonally, loading thousands of the tiny fish into barrels for shipment to New York. Other fishermen tended fish traps along the North Shore and went scalloping, quahauging and eeling. A number of men from Lambert's Cove went to Naushon every year at sheep-shearing time and a surprising number from the Cove spent the summer codfishing on Normans Land.

Cutting and harvesting ice during the cold months was also a source of employment. Ice was essential on fishing boats as well as in stores and homes as the new-fangled iceboxes started to become popular. Ice had to be imported from Maine after a mild winter.

There were few jobs that would be considered steady today. House painting was perhaps the most common for men. For women, the steady jobs were teaching school and clerking in retail stores. Few teachers were needed, but Edgartown and Vineyard Haven each had more than 20 stores open all year.

Struggling as they did to make a living, Islanders must have wondered how thousands of off-Islanders could afford to take vacations in Cottage City. Vacations were something Vineyarders had little knowledge of.

But vacationing off-Islanders were what the Island was increasingly dependent upon. It had become a "Pleasure Island" for those who came to indulge themselves in the gaiety of Cottage City in summer, a gaiety at a level never seen since.

Central to it was the skating rink built on the bluff next to the Sea View House by Frank Winslow of Boston. He was the inventor and manufacturer of the "Vineyard Skate." Roller skating was becoming popular and unlike today it had to be done indoors. Streets and sidewalks were not smooth enough to skate on. Winslow's huge rink was ugly on the outside, but a wonderfully spacious building inside with a smooth hardwood floor lighted by hundreds of lanterns hanging from the rafters. The rink itself was octagonal and surrounded by rows of seats for as many as 1000 spectators. Skates were rented for 10 cents (15 cents in the evening). Admission was 25 cents (35 cents in the evening). There were three sessions a day, morning, afternoon and evening. Evenings, Winslow scheduled special events to boost attendance: Bon-Bon Parties, Calico Parties, Costume Balls, Hockey and Polo Matches, Fancy Roller Skating and Bicycle Riding. His rink was the center of entertainment at Cottage City.

Excursions were run from Edgartown and Vineyard Haven. Tickets included a round-trip on the train from Edgartown, admission to the rink and rental of skates, all for 65 cents. Excursions from Vineyard Haven cost 70 cents, including a carriage ride both ways.

With no recorded music available, the rink hired musicians, many musicians, from off-Island. During the busiest periods, Winslow had three bands taking turns on the stage, each with 20 or more musicians. They were playing for more than the skaters, their performances were "concerts" for hundreds seated on benches around the rink, watching and listening. The repertoires of the bands were mostly light semi-classical works, usually by European composers.

Music was everywhere. The large hotels provided their own bands for dancing and performing from piazzas to entertain the crowds of strollers. Guesthouses put on productions with singing, recitations and skits, many of the performers being vacationing guests. The village was alive with these activities. There never was a time when so much music, played by live musicians, filled the Island air.

Ocean bathing was, of course, part of summer, but a rela-

tively minor part. Sun-bathing was unknown. A tan was something a fisherman or a farmer had, not a woman. Bathing costumes covered the female body. One letter writer demanded that short sleeves be forbidden. Another insisted that men wear shirts, not merely long pants to go into the water.

Many went to the beach to watch rather than to swim, as the *Cottage City Star* made clear:

The bathing-houses at Oak Bluffs and adjacent beaches are a scene of liveliness and frolic every day, especially between the hours of 10 and 12 a.m. Hundreds of people, old and young, fat and lean, avail themselves of this delightful and profitable pleasure daily and it is hard sometimes to tell who enjoys it most, the bathers in their varied and unique costumes, or the throng of spectators who assemble each day on the balconies of the main building of the bathing houses.

Bathers changed into their "costumes" inside crude bath-houses. It was indelicate to be seen in bathing attire, except while on the beach. Women "bathed," doing little swimming. Most boys had learned to swim at an early age, but girls had not. It was the young men who demonstrated their manliness by jumping or diving from the wharves and rafts.

Gradually, women began to take up swimming. Late in the summer of 1883, one wrote to the *Star* requesting a second diving raft be anchored off Highland beach just for women:

. . . many women would like to dive from the raft, but do not like to have to fight for space on the present raft overloaded with men.

Bicycle races were popular, with thousands lining the streets to watch as the wheelmen pedaled around Ocean Park and nearby streets at high speed. The racers were mostly from off-Island cycling clubs, although a few summer people (men only, of course) took part. There were even walking races:

On Saturday next there will be a walking match – go-as-you-please – at the Base Ball Grounds. These matches are interesting and usually attract quite a number of spectators.

Croquet was the principal sport around the campground. During camp meeting, visiting ministers and their Methodist

brethren would play between services (except on the Sabbath). There were some complaints that preachers shortened their sermons during camp meetings so they could have more time to play. So enthused were the preachers about the game that in 1875 they formed the Five-C Club, standing for Cottage City Clerical Croquet Club.

They became so skilled at the original game that some took up a new and more sophisticated version, called roque, a name formed by removing the first and last letters of croquet. Some say roque was invented in Cottage City. It may have been, but we can find no proof. It certainly was popular there.

A "Martha's Vineyard Roque Club" was established in 1890 by 13 men, all summer residents in Cottage City (only one was a minister). The first roque courts had been built in Waban Park ten years earlier by James W. Tufts, a soda fountain manufacturer from Boston, who was one of the 13 founders of the club.

Roque was played with short handled, heavy mallets with smaller balls. The court was of clay, extremely smooth and level, framed by a border of wooden planks (later, faced with rubber) so the balls could be caromed, as in billiards.

The Society has a copy of an agreement between Alfred E. Cox, president of the Roque Club and a George [last name illegible]. The agreement hired George to maintain eight "Roque courts" from May 21 to September 8, 1906, for \$12 a week. The courts were all in Waban Park, a public park, under an agreement with the Board of Park Commissioners of Cottage City. Gazebo-like open buildings were placed near the courts so spectators could sit in the shade and watch the matches. Tournaments were held each summer and attracted many players from off-Island.

Baseball games at Waban Park attracted hundreds of spectators. The teams were "semi-professional," being made up of college players who worked in the hotels as waiters. Aware of the promotional value of the popular sport, hotels organized a Cape and Islands league.

One of the best players was Walter C. Camp of Yale, captain of the Cottage City team who later became famous as

"The father of American football." He turned down an offer of \$200 a month to umpire league games, preferring to play for Cottage City. A multi-skilled athlete, he was also hired by Frank Winslow to captain one of the two roller-skating hockey teams he maintained. Their weekly matches drew hundreds of spectators to his skating rink.

In 1884, a new form of entertainment arrived when F. O. Gordon of New York built a carousel behind the skating rink:

The pavilion will contain not only the revolving horses, but will be fitted up as a first-class place for affording light entertainment.

In a month, it was ready to operate, powered it would seem by a steam engine, with "Free Rides for All" on opening day. This is the same carousel, "The Flying Horses," operating today on Circuit Avenue, a site it was moved to years later.

Soon after that, a toboggan slide was built behind the carousel. The area along the bluffs, the serenity of which had so charmed Erastus Carpenter, had become a carnival ground.

There was another innovation in the summer of 1884: electricity came to Cottage City. A dozen or so electric lights were mounted on poles to illuminate a few outside areas. One was installed inside the Sea View and several inside the skating rink. Some Methodists thought the Tabernacle should have signed up, but it preferred its oil lamps. Despite occasional failure of the two generators, it was a major advance.

A water line that would feed several fire hydrants in the campground and along Circuit Avenue was being installed. However, it was not yet in use as the pumping station at Meadow Lake would not be in operation for another year.

While these advances were taking place in Cottage City, Vineyarders in other towns showed little interest. Especially uninterested must have been two Indian women who, from 1881 to 1884, were often in court. Their problems were unrelated and not criminal; the only thing they had in common was that both were Indians and both were women.

The first case involved riparian rights to Tisbury Great Pond. Riparian rights were a valuable source of income as they were leased by their owners to fishermen. Those on Tisbury

Great Pond were especially valuable. Priscilla Freeman was an elderly Indian widow whose ancestors had owned land on the pond for generations. Gradually, she had sold portions of it to support herself and her family, but she retained a house on Deep Bottom Cove as her home. More recently, she had moved to Cottage City, but she still owned the Tisbury land.

Eighteen owners of riparian rights to the pond had formed an association and leased fishing rights for a fee. They refused to include Priscilla Freeman in their group despite her frequent pleadings. In 1871, acting on her complaint, the state awarded her \$200 in damages, far less than her share of the rights would have brought. The 10-year leases came up for renewal in 1881 and she again asked for her share. Again, she was denied.

Finally, after much pleading, her case came before the state legislature. The *Cottage City Star* took her side:

"Bulldozing" is always reprehensible, but when a poor, lone Indian woman in Massachusetts is seeking to obtain her rights, which an oppressive monopoly of white folks are defrauding her of, it is particularly alarming. . . Mrs. Priscilla Freeman has rights in the fishing of Deep Bottom Cove. . . She has many sympathizers and friends in the neighborhood . . . yet when she solicits their aid they say they dare not go and testify; threats have been made against all who do. . . Is it possible that this state of things exists in West Tisbury – a highly intelligent community where there is an academy and organized churches?

One year later, Priscilla was awarded \$500 as damages, but nothing was done about her riparian rights. She was then 72 years old and her case seems to have been dropped.

The second Indian woman who was often in court was Eunice Rocker, also a widow. She was born on Chappaquidick. Now in 1881, like Priscilla, she was living in Cottage City. Her grandmother was Love (Madison) Prince. Eunice and her late husband, Antone, had eight children. He had died some years before of a heart attack while working on a bulkhead at Lake Anthony, leaving her without any means of support. She became a town pauper in Edgartown.

After Cottage City separated from Edgartown, it claimed

that supporting her family as paupers was still Edgartown's responsibility. After long dispute, the case went to the state board, which ruled that because they were "chronic paupers," the family would be moved to the Alms House in Tewksbury.

When the constable and deputies went to the Rocker house to inform them of the order, a violent confrontation occurred. Eunice, her daughter Lena, her mother and sister, plus a friend, all took part, hitting the officers with an ax and throwing boiling water on them. The police eventually subdued the belligerent women and Eunice and her children were taken to Tewksbury.

The *Star*, which had been criticizing the Rocker family for months, was relieved:

Cottage City sent nine of her population to Tewksbury and three to jail on Friday.

The three who had gone to jail were Eunice's mother, her sister and the woman friend who had joined in the fracas.

The *Gazette* was on the side of the Rockers. The *Star's* editor, always eager for a verbal battle with the competition in Edgartown, took issue:

Does any intelligent person (except the editor of the *Gazette* -- admitting that a graduate of Tufts College and a full-fledged lawyer *must* be intelligent) for an instant presume that a family of pauper squatters can go into a town where they have no settlement and sit down on the taxpayers? . . . It does seem as if some folks' wits were dimmed by a blind desire to foist upon Cottage City this family of Rocker paupers in order that they may have a chance to crow over one victory won over us.

Eunice and daughter Lena sued Cottage City for injuries sustained during their removal. They claimed they were not paupers, as both were earning their living at the time. A long trial was held in New Bedford with 26 Vineyard witnesses testifying. The jury awarded the Rockers \$25, bringing a strange conclusion to a most confusing case. Were the Rockers (and Priscilla Freeman) victims of discrimination because they were Indians? And women who had married blacks? There is no way to know, but it is clear that they were treated shabbily.

In 1882, Erastus Carpenter's Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company was in financial trouble. It was not a surprise. In 1878, the *Boston Herald* had hinted at trouble ahead:

. . . the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company has expended several hundred thousand dollars in improvements, or considerably more than has ever been received from the sale of lots. . . the general shrinkage in value throughout the country has not left the Oak Bluffs Company unaffected. . . though the Vineyard has been exceptional in its prosperity during these hard times. . . the Cottage City of America is yet of the earth and liable to be stagnated like other things earthy.

Finally, in September 1882, the directors voted to take its losses and leave. It had already sold its pride, the Sea View House, to a pair of New Bedford hotel keepers, Bullock and Brownell, but there still were many other pieces of property it wanted to sell.

But selling wasn't easy. After the boom years of the 1870s, investors had been pulling back, property values had been falling. These declining values hit the new town of Cottage City hard. It had so many needs and so little money. High on its list of needs was a solution to its long-time sanitation problems. When it became a separate town in early 1880, the village had appointed its own Board of Health, but the board was still organizing and nothing had been accomplished. The *Cottage City Star* emphasized the urgency:

The out-door New England privy, located near the back kitchen door or window of one's neighbor, is a nuisance at best, and if they are to be tolerated they should be under wholesome regulations. . . Our Board of Health must begin operations soon if they would satisfy . . . the non-resident who pays our taxes.

Inertia seemed to have taken over. Then, suddenly, in December 1880, the Massachusetts Board of Health issued a 30-page report condemning the Cottage City water. Prof. Homer B. Sprague of Boston, a summer resident and the president of Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute, wrote to the *Star* urging that the town take quick action. He worried that the public's fear of

disease would cut his school's enrollment:

Now I am not an alarmist, but I feel that Cottage City will this very next season lose hundreds and perhaps thousands of visitors whom it would of had – visitors of the most desirable class – by reason of the failure to take prompt and wise measures for drainage and sewerage. (See pp. 147-8 for more on this.)

In March 1881, the Board of Health published ten rules for the disposal of waste of all kinds. None could be dumped into Lake Anthony or Meadow Lake. All privy vaults must be sealed and watertight. No longer could they be just holes in the ground. Times for cleaning privies were strictly regulated:

No privy vaults or cesspools shall be opened, or privies cleaned or their contents removed between the first day of June and the first day of November. . . [except] between the hours of ten in the evening and five in the morning.

All privies and cesspools must be emptied and cleaned between the first day of November and the last day of December; and those used during the winter months must also be cleaned before the first day of June.

Sanitation was only one of the problems the young town faced. With a growing population, a new school was needed. Where would the money come from? Tax revenues were not increasing. The new residents were not wealthy summer people, who left their cottages in the fall, taking their children with them. They were a different kind. Most were Portuguese, who had moved from New Bedford when jobs in the mills had become scarce. They worked in the Island's hotels and at other seasonal jobs all summer, but when summer was over, they stayed. The *Star* was understanding:

. . . of the scholars admitted and belonging to the primary school, nearly 25 percent are children of paupers or foreigners who pay no tax . . . [living in] shanties that are springing up with mushroom growth in the outskirts [of the village]. . . We must not deny school rights to paupers and foreigners, even though they pay no tax and can scarcely understand our language. . .

There was also the town's continuing worry about fire. In

one of its first expenditures, it had bought two fire engines, selling the ancient hand-pumper it had received from Edgartown years before. That engine had been much ridiculed, being called "The Elephant" because of its huge size and weight. It had proved to be totally inadequate and fortunately was never called upon to put out a major fire. The town sold it for \$600 to help pay for the new engines. They were "chemical engines," so-called because chemicals were mixed with the water in a sealed tank to build up gas pressure, forcing the water through the hose, eliminating hand pumping.

Though adequate for small fires, the two engines would be of little use in a conflagration. Work was continuing on the 10-inch water main from Meadow Lake, through the campground and along Circuit Avenue to supply a number of hydrants. The steam engine at Meadow Lake that would pump water into the main under pressure wasn't operating yet.

The town's newest problem had nothing to do with sanitation or schools or fire protection. It involved land, land that residents had always assumed was public. In March 1881, the Oak Bluffs Company, still disposing of its property, offered the town, at no cost, the four parks, Ocean, Waban, Hartford and Pennacock, plus nine avenues. Residents were caught by surprise. In a special town meeting, the offer was discussed and a committee of three appointed to meet with company officials and to recommend what action the town should take.

Two weeks later, the *Star* reported that the meeting had been held, "the result of which, we are led to believe, was not anything decisive."

Learning that the parks and avenues were not theirs had come as a shock to residents. From the start, it had been understood that they were public. Erastus Carpenter had made that clear when he sold the "choice" lots, those bordering the parks, to his carefully selected buyers. He had promised that their "cottages" would always face open land. But the company had never given up its title. Legally, it owned the land and could do whatever it wished with it. If the town didn't want it for free, the company would sell it to the highest bidder.

For three years, no agreement could be reached. Voters

seemed wary of the free-gift offer; there must be some hidden trick involved. Finally, the company's stockholders demanded to be paid for their property. They had lost enough money in the company. Carpenter withdrew the offer and put a price of \$7500 on the land, giving the town first option to buy. Again, the town did not respond. Late in 1884, another committee was formed, this one to meet with a lawyer to decide if a sale was legal. The *Star* explained:

The general feeling, or at least the predominant one, in the meeting was in favor of purchasing, if the company had something of real value to sell. If it had parted with its right to do as it pleased with the parks and avenues by its layout, and the later sale of lots. . . then the price was thought to be too high.

Erastus Carpenter was sure the property could be sold legally and that \$7500 was a fair price. He cited a Cottage City real estate man who said the land was worth much more:

I was aware that some of the stockholders [of my company] were dissatisfied that the management should offer the property at the low price of \$7500 when they had been told by a prominent real estate agent of Cottage City "that if the parks could be sold for building lots they would bring from \$50,000 to \$60,000."

He urged the town to move quickly. Another party was eager to buy. But the committee still did nothing, believing that the land was already public and could not be sold.

Carpenter offered to let the town pay the \$7500 over 25 years, interest free, at \$300 a year. Again, no action. Impatient, he set a deadline: decide by December 1, 1884, or the land will be sold to the other party.

A week before the deadline, the Cottage City selectmen asked for an extension. They wanted to "investigate the legal questions involved," as though the legality was a new subject. The extension was denied. Writing to the selectmen, Erastus Carpenter described his disappointment:

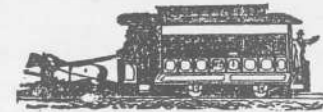
After spending so much time and thought on this matter, I need not add that I am more than disappointed at the failure of a plan so much in the town's interest and one which, as far

as I know, received the full and unqualified endorsement of a large number of the citizens and the non-residents.

The deadline passed. The town still did nothing. In March 1885, two men from Boston, lawyer George C. Abbott and his financial backer, Alvin Neal, gave the Oak Bluffs Land & Wharf Company a check for \$7500. The parks of Cottage City now belonged to them. They would divide them into building lots and put them up for sale.

Cottage City went into shock. Its parks to be sold? Carpenter's "jewels," his open spaces, to be filled with buildings? Many residents must have wondered if secession had been such a good idea.

(To be continued.)



Vineyard Highlands HORSE RAILROAD.

Passenger and Baggage Cars will run DAILY on the arrival and departure of the New Bedford, Woods Hole and Nantucket Steamers, from Camp Meeting Landing, Highlands Wharf, to the Camp Ground.

Cars will run half-hourly, and oftener if necessity requires, from Camp Ground to Hotel and Bathing Houses at the Highlands Wharf.

FARE:

Single Tickets,	6 cents.
10 Tickets for	50 "
22 Tickets for	\$1.00

Freights, Merchandise and Baggage will be transported between the Camp Ground and Landing at lowest rates.

No wharfage charged on personal baggage.
C. L. ELLIS, Agent.

Gay Head Gets a Wharf in 1883: Is It the Beginning of the End?

*P*rogress is often hard to accept. Such seemed to be the case in 1883 when a steamboat company built a substantial wharf on the north shore of the peninsula of Gay Head. There had never been a wharf at Gay Head. How would it change the lives of the natives? That was the question one writer posed.

Steamboat excursions had been taking people to Gay Head for some time, but they had not been very popular. There was a problem getting passengers ashore. They had to clamber down into small boats rowed by the natives and taken ashore to the beach below the cliffs, sometimes getting wet in the process. It was inconvenient and at times unpleasant.

The wharf ended all that. Steamboat passengers walked down the gangplank onto the wharf and to the beach without getting their feet wet or undergoing the discomfort of a small boat in a tossing sea. The company was sure the change would make excursions more popular.

The change brought out the prophets of gloom. So many people would visit the Cliffs that its natural beauty and unspoiled life style would be despoiled. Or so the "thoughtful mind" of the editor of the Cottage City Star seemed to predict.

Here is what he wrote:*

GAY HEAD is entering upon a new era which is destined to change its future to a very great degree. The steamboat company have erected near the Cliffs a substantial wharf which extends into the sea some 300 feet and enables the passengers to land without the hazard of being carried ashore in open boats. This feature will popularize excursions to that famous headland.

The Friday's excursion was a success. It was the occasion of the opening or christening of the new "Ocean Pier," as it is called. It was deemed proper to make it an extraordinary one by taking along Hill's Band, the only one which ever visited the Head (this being its second visit). About 325 excursionists, armed with well-filled lunch baskets, sought the good steamer *Monohansett*, Capt. Charles C. Smith, and at 9:30 a.m., were

*HOWES NORRIS of Eastville, Editor of the *Cottage City Star*, probably wrote this. Some call him the "father of Oak Bluffs" because of his work in getting secession.



Wharf enabled tourists on excursion steamers to go ashore at Gay Head without having to be rowed in small boats. Photo was taken in the 1890s, soon spinning along the Vineyard sands almost near enough to toss a biscuit ashore, giving all a splendid idea of the extent and character of our Island.

The boat reached Gay Head a little after ten, when the entire party quickly wended their way up the circuitous hillside to the vicinity of the famous lighthouse. Here, the company scattered over Uncle Sam's grounds, and along the brow of the high cliffs, under the broad canopy of the heavens in full view of all the wonders, with a splendid cooling breeze from the old ocean upon them, where they sat down and spread their lunches; and each little party of friends seemed to enjoy the picnic most heartily.

After an hour spent in this way, the cliffs were duly visited and searched for treasures. Views from the tower of the light and an inspection of this beacon to mariners were taken by all, under the guidance of the urbane keeper, Mr. H. [Horatio] N. Pease, who carefully showed its mechanism.

A feeling of sadness came over the thoughtful mind as it

reflected what the possibilities of the changes which the introduction of this little pier may bring to this primitive people. New facilities suggest increase of travel, and increase of travel will bring in, of necessity, hotel accommodations; and once civilization sets her hand at work, it suggests a crowding and supplanting of the native colored people, now monarchs of this beautiful little promontory of the Vineyard.

However, the march in life is onward, progressive; steps cannot be stayed with sentimental reflections. If the little town of a hundred colored people is in ten years transformed to a summer resort of note and becomes as notorious and fashionable a resort as England's Isle of Wight's sand cliffs, with a score of big hotels and numerous elegant villas here and there on its summit between the two shores we shall not be surprised. We anticipate and predict something of the kind.

And all from the effects of the little pier. This place has become renowned by the writings of leading scientists and now it is available to the visitation of the masses, it is certain to be overrun.



Gay Head Indians made money hauling well-dressed, parasol-shaded tourists coming on steamers from Cottage City to the top of the cliffs in their ox-carts.

Why Was Professor Sprague So Upset About Cottage City's Water?

NO VILLAGE on the Island worried more about sanitation than Cottage City after the Edgartown Board of Health declared the water in one of its hotels was unfit for humans to drink in July 1879. It took steps to correct that problem. But many residents believed the charge had been retribution. Capt. Joseph Dias, the hotel owner, had been active in the struggle to separate Cottage City from Edgartown.

The uproar seemed to have subsided when a year later in December 1880 the Massachusetts Board of Health issued a 30-page report, repeating the allegations. When he read it, Prof. Homer B. Sprague, president of the Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute, wrote to the *Cottage City Star* demanding that the village, now independent, do something at once:

That report charges, and I am pained to say, it seems to prove, that there is, and must be, according to the present state of sewerage and drainage, very great danger of typhoid fevers and kindred diseases. . . . [Cottage City must take] decisive steps to counteract the enormous evils to which the State Board of Health declare that Cottage City is especially exposed.

The village reacted against Sprague. Many critical letters appeared in the *Star*. Who was this summer resident who charged it with "enormous evils." The facts are, the *Star* said:

On the thirty acres (mainly the old Camp Ground) that the report covers, there has never been a death of a resident from typhoid fever.

The *Star* said the state had been misled by the same men, jealous of Cottage City, who had fostered the earlier report:

It has been craftily misguided or misled by a local Board, constituted by the old town of Edgartown, of men who seemed determined to check our growth to the end that that town might continue its own municipal control of Cottage City. . . . Is it strange, under these circumstances, that the State Board should be misled into publishing to the world, as the general condition of Cottage City. . . the condition of about 30 acres of the four thousand or more in the town?

One letter pointed out that Professor Sprague was spending "thousands" of dollars to improve his summer residence in Cottage City. He didn't seem concerned about its water. A month or so later, when Mrs. Sprague came to the Vineyard to check into the work on their house, she stayed at the Vineyard Grove House, the hotel whose water had been declared unfit to drink. Neither he nor she acted as though Cottage City's water was dangerous. Why was he so upset?

Shubael L. Norton, a member of the Board of Health of the new village of Cottage City, regretted that the professor, before writing his letter, had not made some inquiries:

A little investigation into what has been done and is being done would have saved him from an apparent panical [sic] state of mind. . . Tight vaults and cesspools with pipes leading to chimneys to carry off the gasses are now being rapidly built and Lake Anthony will be cleansed by an outlet into the sea before the coming season. . . these will make our city more perfect in its sanitary arrangements than any other watering place on the globe. . . we have daily removal of swill and garbage during the two months the bulk of the population remain . . . not a single case of typhoid or other malignant fever has occurred during the entire year 1880.

Professor Sprague, reading the criticism, defended his action. He had written the letter, not to discredit Cottage City, but because of concern about the Summer Institute, which he ran. The American Institute of Instruction, a organization of 2000 teachers, had been planning to hold its annual meeting on the Vineyard that year, but after the state report came out, it changed its mind and went to New Hampshire. Sprague said:

I felt a personal interest in the matter, not simply from being a regular summer resident there, but also because I wished to draw some scores of those two thousand visitors into our Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute, whose five weeks' session was to begin after the great meeting.

A French adage seems appropriate here: "The more things change, the more they remain the same."

In Memoriam: Rudolph V. Kuser 1930 - 2004

Rudy Kuser, one of our dedicated volunteers, died February 10th. He was 73 years old.

Like many volunteers, Rudy found a new career at the Society, a most unlikely one in his case. He became "Cupid's Helper," an improbable job description for a man who had spent his earlier career in the Division of Taxation for the State of New Jersey.

It was one of those fortuitous events. Rudy, in the spring of 1998, volunteered to serve as our Saturday receptionist. Saturday people are not easy to find and he rarely missed a day.

It was just about then that the Society took over several of the Vineyard's lighthouses. And just about then, the Vineyard became "the" place to be married. What more romantic spot to hold a wedding than at a lighthouse on this Island? We suddenly found ourselves involved in weddings, an often traumatic world our staff was not skilled at or had much time for.

Then Rudy arrived. Kind, gentle, well-organized and computer literate, he had found his new career. He was the ideal person for that sometimes thankless task.

From the time he took over our "wedding program," there were no more breathless calls demanding immediate access to the lighthouse for rehearsals, or questions about electricity for the musicians, or where do we park? And scores more.

Rudy prepared an information kit, scheduled the weddings and the rehearsals on his computer, handled all the paperwork, all while continuing to be a Saturday regular at the reception desk.

Wedding consultants knew him as the Society's "Wedding Guy," but some of us thought of him as "Cupid's Helper."

Many couples owe him thanks for making their memorable day even more so.

But nobody owes him as much as we do. Thanks, Rudy.

