



# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 48, No. 4

MAY 2007

## LOBSTER PLOTS

IN WHICH STORIES are told  
of the good old days of commercial  
lobstering, when the catch was (often)  
plentiful and a man's secret fishing  
grounds sometimes remained undiscovered  
by others for years.

WITH THE TESTIMONY of Donald Poole and Herbie Hancock,  
and an overview by Dorothy Poole.



**The Summer of '41:  
Radio News of the Vineyard**

**The Chadwick Collection:  
A Hobbyist's Gift to Us**

PLUS

**The Son of Sojourner Truth, and  
His Death on a Whaling Voyage**

by MARY BETH NORTON

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The *Intelligencer* welcomes contributions to its pages. If you have a story idea, write the editor at the address below. If you have an outline of a manuscript, or a manuscript itself, send it by post office or e-mail; we do respond to correspondence. Letters to the editor intended for publication are also welcome.

Write:

John Walter

c/o *The Dukes County Intelligencer*

P.O. Box 1310

Edgartown MA 02539

E-mail:

jwalter3337@yahoo.com.

Put "*Intelligencer*" in the subject line.

# THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

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## THE LOBSTERING LIFE

### For More Than a Century, A Job, and a Passion

THIS WAS A SPRING of discontent in the lobstering world. Lobsters were scarce and expensive throughout New England; the *Boston Globe* called it "an unprecedented shortage."

Lobstering, of course, has always gone through cycles. In 1916, a Boston newspaper said lobsters were 75 cents a pound, "the highest price ever known in New England." Six years after that, a northeaster swept lobsters high and dry on the south shore of the state; passersby gathered them by hand.

But plainly we are a long way from the days of the easy catch Henry David Thoreau reported after a visit to Long Point, Provincetown, about 1857. "The lobsters catch themselves, for they cling to the netting on which the bait is placed," he said.

As another summer season begins, the *Intelligencer* offers three stories about the human side of Vineyard commercial lobstering over the years. It is an industry that demands hard work, but one that also inspires a love and a passion among its practitioners. The first story here is a journalist's account of conversations in 1984 with Donald Poole, a Vineyard fixture. The second is an excerpt from a history of lobstering at Nomansland and Lobsterville written by Donald's wife, Dorothy, and first published in the *Intelligencer* 33 years ago. And the third is a piece of oral history — the voice of the late Herbert Hancock of Chilmark; he was interviewed by Linsey Lee.

We hope you'll find them an interesting, informative record of the way it was, in a time before, for better or worse, the days of intense government regulation — and \$30 lobster dinners.

— Ed.



In this photograph from the 1930s, the gentleman working with lobster pots at Menemsha is believed to be Harry Reed.

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## THE LOBSTERING LIFE

... an interview

### It's a Gambler's Existence, Donald Poole Would Say

by RICHARD SCHWEID

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**L**OBSTER FISHING is a dangerous business. Heavy traps, and rambunctious lobsters, are not the easiest things to work with, particularly if there is a little weather causing the boat to roll and the deck to be slippery and treacherous. A hand can easily get caught in a winch hauling up pots, or a line wrapped around an ankle, so that when a trap is thrown overboard the lobsterman goes with it. Nevertheless, a surprisingly large number of lobstermen go out alone, and many of these do not know how to swim. If such a man goes overboard, his last sight in this world is going to be his own boat, drifting further and further away. In most instances when a lobsterman is lost at sea, however, knowing how to swim would not make a difference.

"Why should I know how to swim?" asked Donald Poole, who had been out on the water fishing for something or other almost every day of his 79 years, and never learned to swim a lick. "Nine months out of the year, it's so cold in that water that you're just going to cramp up and drown. The other three months you just hope not to fall overboard. Knowing how to swim is not what makes the difference out there; it's knowing what you're doing. And some luck."

I first met Donald Poole in the spring of 1984, a few months before his death. His wife of more than half a century, Dorothy, had died the previous year.

RICHARD SCHWEID is a journalist from Nashville who lives in Barcelona. He is co-founder and senior editor of *Barcelona Metropolitan*, a city magazine; a producer of documentaries for Catalan public television, and author of seven books of nonfiction. In the mid-1970s, he tended bar for Loretta Balla at the Seaview Hotel in Oak Bluffs.

We met in his homeport of Menemsha. He moored his boat — a 34-foot fiberglass lobster boat built in Maine and named the *Dorothy and Everett* — just across the boardwalk from the back door of Poole's Fish Market, then owned and operated by his son Everett. Beside the market was Donald's one-room, gray-shingled fishing shack. It was his refuge and workshop. The door was open on that spring morning I was wandering around the dock, and something about it invited me to stick my head in for a quick look.

What I saw was the organized chaos that is particular to the shops of old men who have spent a lifetime working with their hands. Many things, each with a use, casually ordered. In one corner, rope was piled in coils, and in another a tall lobster buoy leaned against a wall. Running along another wall was a broad wooden worktable, the surface of the dark wood polished smooth by years of labor. A wood stove sat in the middle of the room, a straight-backed armchair beside it, with well-worn cushions for back and butt, where Donald sat mending net while we talked. The door of the shack faced the water and was always open when Donald was there, even if there was a fire in the stove and the harbor was frozen over. He liked fresh air.

The breeze coming through the door still had a bite on that late-April morning, but there was also a hint of warmth in it, and the feeling that the world around us was preparing, once again, to bloom. It was, in fact, beginning to feel as if lobster season were just around the corner, and Donald Poole was excited. "They've been working on my boat down-Island, at a yard in Edgartown. I'm going down later this week to bring her up here. It's not too soon, either," he said happily.

"Fishing gets in your blood and you're never quite satisfied on shore. Oh, there's plenty to do during the winter just getting ready for the coming season, but there's a part of me that can hardly bear waiting to get back out on the water. In addition, there's something special and peculiar about lobstering, perhaps because we go alone. I just can't wait for it to come daylight each morning."

Donald Poole spoke of the life of a Vineyard lobsterman with some authority.

He first went out fishing with his father in 1910, when he was five years old. They would sail out to pull lobster pots in a catboat, as was favored by inshore New England fishermen in those years. "The weather pattern then was completely different. In those days, my father and I could count on three weeks of good weather in a row. Each day we'd have a northerly to sail out by, and then we'd row with the sweeps when the wind died at noon. Then, in the afternoon, we'd get a southwesterly and sail home with the fair wind. Finest kind."

Poole was a man of average height, built broad and sturdy, with big hands, an open face and a sharp, beaked nose. A stubby, stoked, and smoking pipe seemed to be a permanent appendage of his mouth, and he had no trouble talking or laughing around it. He was dressed in old gray woolen pants, and a couple of torn sweaters under a threadbare, red-and-black plaid lumberman's jacket. He wore one of the long-billed caps favored by older New England fishermen, and from his right ear hung a small circle of gold, one of a pair of earrings that his wife, Dorothy, had given him on their fiftieth wedding anniversary, eight years earlier.

Earrings on a man in 1976 was still something unusual, particularly on a man in his seventies, but Dorothy Poole was saying something loving and deep to her husband. The earrings were a symbol of the profound attachment that both Dorothy and Donald had to the history of their families and their community. In the days of sail, captains of the whaling barks that went out to hunt sperm whales used to get one gold earring when they had rounded either Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope, and a second when they rounded the other. Although he had not sailed the oceans of the world, like his great-great grandfather, great-grandfather or grandfather, Poole was a man of the sea down to his cells, and his wife recognized it with her anniversary gift.

"My people, and my wife's people, were all sperm whalers up to my grandfather's time. He was the last. I remember the old man with his two gold earrings and his full, white beard cut off square at the bottom. At one time there were fifty masters of whaling ships living here. They went out for three to five years, sailing all over the world, and they made good money. The law required them to put in shore once every six months so the men could see this or that kind of woman. Usually that kind," he laughed around his pipe.

WHAT DONALD POOLE LIKED to do during the summers was get up at dawn to leave his house in Chilmark — the same property where his grandfather and great-grandfather had lived, and an eighth of a mile from where his great-great and great-great-great grandfathers had lived — in time to arrive in Menemsha before any tourists or summer residents were even awake. He would load up the *Dorothy and Everett* and head 15 miles or so off the southern end of the Island to where, more than 100 feet below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean, his traps were waiting to be hauled.

In Menemsha, the openings of the lobster and tourist seasons pretty much coincided. Poole's workdays were structured so that he rarely crossed paths with the summer visitors. Yet it is pleasant to contemplate the surprise of an off-Islander who took his family out for an evening stroll along



the dock and came on Poole, just back from a day of hauling traps. It's easy to imagine the vacationing urbanite stepping protectively in front of his wife and children as he caught sight of a grizzled old pirate with an earring, in a stained shirt and a pair of pants that appeared not to have been washed in a while, climbing into a beat-up pickup with a rear bumper sticker reading: "When marijuana is legalized I will be on welfare — Key West Pharmaceutical Shipper's Association."

Poole laughed. "Some fool thought it was funny to put that on my bumper, five years ago, when I was out hauling traps. I just haven't gotten around to taking it off, yet."

Poole's fish shack was surrounded by lobster traps built of wooden slats, standing on end, with a small path through them to the doorway. He had a couple hundred of them, waiting to be baited and set when the season opened. His traps could not be piled one on another because they were built with a curved top, an old-fashioned design rarely seen these days. Not only are wooden traps being replaced by wire ones, but for many years lobstermen have favored wooden traps with flat tops, which could be stacked more easily on land, or on a boat. Round-topped wooden lobster pots were not available for money; no one manufactured them to sell. That was fine with Poole, the last lobsterman on the Vineyard still building his own traps.

"I think traps with a curved top fish better," he said, his hands tying new knots in their netting as he talked. "They are taller and hold more bait and, most importantly, I was brought up using them. I like using the same type of gear that my father used. Old-timers, especially Yankees, tend to live more and more in the past. The present never has suited the older generation. You don't have much future left, so you stick to the things of the past."

Each year, Poole needed to replace about a third of his traps. Storms would drag them away or the big fishing boats that ply these waters, draggers and trawlers, would haul their big nets right through a set. "It's a year-round job to be catching lobsters five months a year. Whenever I have a minute during the winter, I'm working on getting the gear together for the coming season."

"This year I'll set out 225 pots and I'll pull them all in three days. So, I'll pull about 80 a day. If I brought in 300 pounds of lobsters it would be a big, big day. In the old days, that was nothing. I remember hauling 150 traps by hand, with my father, and we had a little over 4,000 pounds of lobsters. We got ten cents apiece for them."

Most fishermen, perhaps by virtue of the independent nature of their livelihoods, deeply resent government intrusion into their lives. Poole was no exception. "The price of a license now in Massachusetts is \$200 a year,

just to begin with. Then the wardens bother you to death. They can come aboard your boat any time they feel like it. And they can tell you to only sell to a licensed dealer, so that if someone wants to buy a lobster off your boat to take home and cook, it's against the law.

"In my grandfather's day it was something else again," he said. "What a life it must have been. Finest kind. Those whaling masters always referred to the Indian and Atlantic Oceans as, 'This side of the land.' The Pacific Ocean was, 'The other side of the land.' They'd say, 'On this side of the land I'm responsible to my owner and God Almighty. On the other side of the land, I am God Almighty.'"

"Even when the old man retired from his whaling, he couldn't keep still. He would say, 'Give a man room to move his strength in.' When I was just a boy, I remember he would go to New Bedford to get some of the salt beef they sold there, the kind they soaked in brine for four or five years. 'Corned beef has authority,' he used to say."

Poole's was a respected voice in the field of whaling history, as was that of Dorothy, who wrote numerous articles on the subject. Poole served for many years as a consultant to National Geographic. He kept abreast of the literature, and any new book on an aspect of the New England whaling industry came to him for review. His standards were exacting. He was not likely to miss errors, or to extend much charity toward authors who made them. The whaling industry has always appealed to armchair history buffs, and a number of people, both inside and outside New England, specialize in studying the period. However, Poole's interest was of a different sort. His connection to the subject was rooted in living tissue; he was linked by memory to it.

"The whalers were self-educated men, but they were extremely well-informed and well-read to a man. They had been everywhere in the world and seen everything, and they had a wide body of knowledge. People don't realize how intelligent you have to be, to be a fisherman, even today. These tourists and off-Islanders that come here treat fishermen with contempt,



Donald Poole at work in Menemsha, summer of 1969.

and think they're dumb. They're wrong. A fisherman must know and practice five or six different kinds of work well. He has to know a lot about his job, the season, the weather, the water and the lobsters."



POOLE INVITED ME to accompany him, later in the week, when he went to Edgartown to pick up the *Dorothy and Everett* at the boatyard where she had wintered, and bring her back to Menemsha. He was the first lobsterman on the Vineyard to use a fiberglass boat. Most of his colleagues didn't think fiberglass would hold up like wood, but Poole studied the matter and decided to try it. At an age when most men would be considering retirement, he had gone to Maine and bought a boat, and a fiberglass one at that.

It was a windy, cool morning when we drove in his pickup down to Edgartown, with a chop on the water and blue sky with a scud of clouds to the north from where the wind was coming. As we pulled away from the dock at the Edgartown boatyard, Poole turned the *Dorothy and Everett* in a small, slow circle. "I'm not superstitious," he assured me, "but I always make a revolution with the sun when I'm leaving the dock. It brings awful bad luck to go out against the sun."

Those were the last words he spoke for the next hour. Once we cleared the Edgartown lighthouse, the boat began to pitch and roll as we made our way across the front of the eastern half of the island, heading into the face of the wind. Donald stood straight at the wheel, pipe clenched between his teeth, peering intently through the *Dorothy and Everett's* spray-covered windshield. An hour later, as we rounded the point where the West Chop light sits, the water grew calm. Behind us I could see rolling waves and whitecaps, but in front of us was smooth water all the way to Menemsha. Donald pointed us southwest for the up-Island leg of our journey.

"Finest kind," he spoke around his pipestem, breaking the silence and perching himself atop a high stool next to the wheel, the first seat he'd taken in an hour. "That's the hard part behind us. It's all downhill from here."

He told me that each autumn, after lobster season finished, he and Dorothy had taken a vacation. They always went to stay on Monhegan Island, off the coast of Maine. "On Monhegan, they don't start lobstering until the dead of winter. New Year's Day is the beginning of their season. They work when the temperature is down around six or eight degrees. There's eighteen lobstering families there and hardly anyone else," he said, admiration in his voice.

"I'll tell you how they are Down East. After we'd been going to Monhegan every year for nearly 30 years, we were thinking about buying a piece of land there that had come up for sale. I told one of the fellows there that

we were considering it. He waited a good bit, then said, 'So I heard.' Then he waited a good bit more and said, 'I've given it some thought, Donald. You've been coming here a long while; you're a Yankee, a Republican, a Methodist and a lobsterman. If you buy that property and live there five or six years, and I was to pass you on the street, I'd say 'good morning' to you.' That's a true story," He tilted his head back and laughed.

The trip from Edgartown to Menemsha took two and a half hours. After we had the *Dorothy and Everett* tied up at her usual mooring, Poole pronounced himself well satisfied with the boat's performance and ready for the season to begin. Before we parted, he urged me, "Come back here and go out with me this summer, go down to Monhegan next winter, and then you'll have an idea of what the life's all about."

"The fisherman's life is a gambler's life. Every time I go out past that breakwater I'm taking a chance that I won't come back, just to begin with. The man who wants a safe, steady life won't make a fisherman. But the fellow who's willing to work hard and take his chances can do okay. To me, it's the best life there is. I've always been called to the sea and it has been a fine life. I had 57 years with a wonderful woman, I have a successful son, and I've had good boats. What more could a man ask?"

Donald Poole died in his bed, early the following summer.

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## THE LOBSTERING LIFE

... a brief history

### Before Menemsha Harbor: Nomans and Lobsterville

by DOROTHY COTTLE POOLE

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**I**N THE LATE 1800S, fishermen from the Vineyard sometimes spent half the year on Nomansland, codfishing in the spring and fall, and lobstering in the summer.

Nomansland then, as now, was a part of Chilmark. The land was mostly held in "sheep rights," but this was construed to include the right to build and occupy a shack for seasonal fishing. Annie Wood said the fishermen were given "verbal rights to erect dwellings upon the northern shore, close to the beach."<sup>1</sup> At one time about 70 fishermen and their families camped there in two groups, known as Crow Town and Jimmy Town.

Living there was considered a "vacation" for the wives because house-keeping was minimal. A few families lived on Nomans all year, fishing and farming. Some of the fishermen lived on Nomans only from Monday to Saturday, returning to the Vineyard for Sunday. Each Monday morning they would be accorded a royal welcome, as they invariably returned with crocks of doughnuts and cookies, freshly baked bread and other food-stuffs that could not be prepared with the facilities at Nomansland.

The shacks were close together and all activities, except the actual catching of fish and lobsters, were communal. When a boat had to be hauled out, everyone lent a hand. Together the men set gill nets for herring for use as lobster bait and traps for conchs, bait for codfish.

Frequently, the wives prepared a collective dinner, serving it out-of-

<sup>1</sup> *Nomans Land, Isle of Romance*, by Annie M. Wood.

DOROTHY COTTLE POOLE was an Island schoolteacher and historian, and a longtime member of the Dukes County Historical Society Council. This is an excerpt from an article on the lobster industry she wrote for the *Intelligencer* in February 1974.

doors when the weather was clement, or commandeering the largest building if necessary.

After a large lumber schooner was wrecked off the island, the men built a church (also used as a school) from the salvaged lumber. They had no minister, but met together in a dignified service of hymn singing and prayer. But title to the land on which the church was built was questioned and a lawyer was to come from Boston to take formal possession of the property for his client. The fishermen learned of the impending visit and put the church on planks and rollers, moving it to an undisputed site.

For many years, each family brought its own supplies from the Vineyard or from New Bedford, although sometimes the "smacks," small schooners that came to buy fish or lobsters, would bring a supply of staples or a small cargo of fruit.

The fishing around Nomansland required a special boat, sharp at both ends, open fore and aft, and small enough to be rowed by one man when the wind failed. These boats were fitted with two masts, which could be unstepped, and were strongly built with an oak keel and stem, and with cedar planking, usually lap-straked. Some fishermen built their own boats, but Delano of New Bedford built the majority of them.

There was no real harbor at Nomans and the boats, built with iron shoes on their keels, were hauled up each night over a track with a groove, well greased with tallow or cod-liver oil, into which keels fitted. Several men on each side held the boat upright while a pair of oxen pulled it — with catch and gear still aboard — up the beach beyond reach of the tide. Israel Luce, a deaf mute, owned the oxen and charged each fisherman five dollars a season for this service.

One of the men from the Vineyard who fished from Nomansland was Capt. Ellsworth West. As a boy, West went lobstering summers with Capt. Francis Cottle, a retired whaling master. Young West had to walk from his home on the Middle Road to Menemsha very early every Monday morning. Then he and "Captain Frank" would go lobstering. Captain Cottle's lobster pots were set all the way from Gay Head to about ten miles southwest of Nomans. He would haul gear all day, but when night came, he'd beach at Nomans instead of beating his way back to Menemsha. It saved much time to use Nomans as a base, but Captain Cottle went home each Saturday.

Welcome and William Tilton, John Pease, Charles Cleveland, the Butlers, Luces, Looks, Nortons and Henry Davis were others who spent several years at Nomansland. A number of others — William Vanderhoop, Charles Ryan, John Belain and Frank Manning — fished from Nomans, but kept their boats at Cooper's Landing (Gay Head).

Most of the lobstermen were also codfishermen and their catches nearly all went to market as salt fish.



During the latter part of the time that Nomansland was a fishing village, another was being established at Lobsterville. Great mussel beds on Lucas Shoal and the Middle Ground were excellent feeding grounds for lobsters but, west of Lambert's Cove, the only shelter for boats was behind Dogfish Bar, the Gay Head side of Menemsha Bight. Except in a northeaster, this provided excellent anchorage so lobstermen, trapfishermen, and handliners used it as "homeport" from April until September. They fished not only along the Bight, but also off the entire north side of the Vineyard. They built nethouses for their gear along the shore and some of them ate and slept in these cramped quarters. Others built two, three or even four-room houses and brought their families to Lobsterville for the summer.

Many of the men tended their pounds very early in the morning and then went lobstering. For others, lobstering was a full-time job. Most of them owned woodlots in the center of the Island where they went in winter to select and cut the stock for their lobster pots. This was hauled to their winter homes where, through the cold months, each man cut his own laths, steamed his bows and built his pots.

After the pots were lathed, the bait spindles in place, and the doors hung, the pots had to be weighted so that they would stay on the bottom. It took much time to find rocks the right size and shape so sometimes bricks were used. Stones or bricks had to be fastened by tying them on or nailing laths across them. Lines, whose length varied with the depth of the water in which they were to be used, had to be dipped in tar or copper paint to retard fouling, and two buoys had to be fashioned and painted for each pot.

The finished pots were baited and stacked on the boats, ready to be set soon after daybreak. The pots were allowed to fish two or three nights before being hauled, but most fishermen had several strings to haul each day. It was necessary to "catch the tide," that is to reach the gear at slack water, when the buoys would show. Most of the men used Nomansland boats or dories, but a few catboats were owned and they anchored behind Dogfish Bar. The anchorage used for the small boats is all dry land now. In bad weather, and at the end of the season, the boats were hauled up the beach by oxen. The fishermen crated their catches for a week or two and then sailed their catboats to market: Oak Bluffs, New Bedford or Providence.

Lobster smacks came from New York and Long Island, Providence, even Boston to buy lobsters. One buyer accustomed to pay the odd change for a catch in dimes and it became the custom for the men at Lobsterville to give those dimes to their wives. After a while, one of the wives told the buyer of this habit and the next trip he paid each man for his entire catch in dimes.

At that time, ten and one-half inches from the tip of the snout to the end

of the tail was the legal size for a lobster in Massachusetts. The skippers of the smacks bought the lobsters by the piece and, if a lobster were exactly ten and a half inches long, some buyers would take two for one.

Ten and a half inches was the legal limit in Massachusetts, but in Rhode Island it was nine. Massachusetts maintained a boat named the *Lexington*, in which Detective Proctor patrolled the waters of the state to enforce this and other regulations. Some of the Lobsterville men saved their nine-inch lobsters, in crates sunk off the shore, until there was a good north or northeast breeze. Then they would sail to Rhode Island, where the nine-inch lobsters were legal. The crates so used became known as "Proctor pots."

Despite its difficulties, life at Lobsterville was remembered nostalgically. In 1904, Menemsha Creek was dredged to make a fine harbor and the lobstermen deserted their colonies at Nomansland and Lobsterville, lived at home, and fished from Menemsha.

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## THE LOBSTERING LIFE

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... an oral history: Herbert Hancock

### 'I Was Stupid for a While, But I Wasn't Stupid Forever'

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**T**HE LATE HERBERT HANCOCK, *Chilmark selectman, decoy carver and longtime contractor, became a commercial lobsterman. In a conversation Jan. 11, 2000, with Linsey Lee, he described how he happened, late in life, to stumble into this second career.*

~

I was bluefishing out to Nomans. There was one guy, Stuey Knight, out there bluefishing all the time and he also had ten lobster pots he'd put out. He'd put them here, he'd put them there, put them wherever, and he'd pull his pots. He'd bluefish all day and, boy, it seemed like he had the life.

So I decided, well, why don't I put some pots out there, too? Nobody had pots out Nomans except him, so I put some out there and we'd go bluefishing, we'd haul pots, and we'd get lobsters. I don't even know if we sold them. We ate them; we might have sold a few.

And then my brother-in-law said, "This is the last year you can get a commercial license if you want one. After that it's going to be limited entry." So what I did is write for a license and they sent me one. That's why I got a commercial license; it was the last year you could do it that way.

I kept taking out more pots. I had 30 pots out there and after a while I'd take off a day from contracting and go lobstering in my skiff. I got 70 pots. I was pulling them by hand. I'd go out there and pull those pots and I'd go home. In the middle of the night, about one o'clock, both my arms would be tingling so I couldn't sleep. Nothing I could do, just get up and walk around, get the circulation going again, but the muscles would just tighten up on the veins.

I finally decided I'd better put a hauler on my boat. You could easily

LINSEY LEE is Curator of the Vineyard Oral History Center at the Martha's Vineyard Museum. She has been collecting oral histories from people of the Vineyard for more than 20 years, and is the author of *Vineyard Voices — Words, Faces and Voices of Island People* and *More Vineyard Voices*, which feature photo portraits and excerpts from interviews with 150 Vineyarders.

see how much money you could make with 70 pots or 100 pots, so I said, "Well, those guys are doing pretty good. They go out on a nice day, if it's a bad day they stay home." And I knew they made a fair amount of money.

My father — Hariph, he was a contractor, like I told you — I worked for him for seven years, I think, and then I went on my own, and started my own contracting business up here in Chilmark. My father died of a stroke, mostly, I think, because he had too many worries, too much pressure on him, so I says, "Well, that's going to happen to me if I don't do something different, so why don't I go fishing?"

It used to be good fun building houses, but it got so it wasn't so much fun. I had it made, but there's a lot of headaches that — well, there may not be so many now, because people have got more money than they know what to do with — but in those days you had to bid on houses and you had to work like hell to do them for what you told them you'd build them for. And then you had to get permits and then it got to be so there was a lot of work and you couldn't get subcontractors to come and do things when you needed them. It just got to be a pain in the neck.

I said, "I'll go lobstering and have a good time, not have the headaches." I paid off all my bills. I gave all the equipment, trucks and tools to the guys working for me. I told them six weeks ahead of time that I was going to quit. I bought a real lobster boat. People thought I was crazy.

So I don't have any headaches at all, lobstering. I go when I want to, and if I catch a lot of lobsters that's good. If I don't, I can survive because I've got houses that I rent. And I don't have anything to worry about but myself. That's pretty good.

~

WHEN I STARTED LOBSTERING everybody was getting their bait from the fish markets, the stuff left after they cleaned the fish; they had neck and tails and they'd used that, plus skates, and that was it.

But then I decided I'd buy menhaden from off-Island. You could buy them all salted. I always thought menhaden were a lot better than herring, but one year all I had was herring, so I started using herring and I got a lot of lobsters, so I figured they couldn't be all bad. Oily fish, like mackerel or menhaden, they say are better. But herring catch lobsters. It's hard to tell. You use what you can get and it almost always catches lobsters, but who knows? I like to mix it up. I always put in a skate and some menhaden or some mackerel or some herring at different times.

I have Carroll Trucking bring me 20 barrels of bait at a time from Sandwich. He takes garbage over in their truck and goes over and picks up my bait, and brings it back. He takes them off with his forklift, puts them on my pickup truck, and it takes me three trips to get them all. So it would take a day to get my bait, but then that lasts two or three weeks. If bait is

salted you can store it a long time in the shade. I use about a barrel and a half a day, or two barrels a day at the most, usually a barrel and a half of herring or porgies and half a barrel of skates.

There's a lot of work to it. I get a small rubbish can, a 30-gallon rubbish can, take a pitchfork — a bait fork they call it — and pitch it out of that into the rubbish can. I built a platform up in the woods that's the same height as the back of the truck, so I can just slide the rubbish cans onto the pickup truck, drive down to the harbor. In the summer it's hard to find places to park. Sometimes you have to take it down there in the middle of the night when nobody else is around. Just back it down there and put it in the boat. Then go over in the morning and take off.

I STARTED OUT with a hundred or 150 pots and then after a while I got 300. Well, there wasn't room at Nomans for 300 pots; at least I didn't think so. So Louis Larsen said if you put pots out here to the west in the mud, it didn't matter how many pots were there, there were always plenty of lobsters. So I started putting pots out there and there were a lot of lobsters for a while. Now there's probably 500 pots around Nomans all summer. And I used to think that a hundred was more than enough, you know?

Nomans was always good, but actually, it was restricted. You weren't supposed to lobster there because they were bombing, but I never worried about that. The bombers used to dive down, right for the boat, and then go up and let go of their exhaust, you know, the jet. It could make you deaf. Helicopters would usually come out and try to drive you out of there; we used to wave to them like we were friendly, you know, and thought they were waving at us instead of telling us to get out of here. I used to tell my wife, "Just wave, we're almost done anyway."

On the north side of Nomans the restricted area was pretty close to the tip end, so sometimes we'd just go in and just shut off the engine and get just outside of where we were supposed to be and then watch them. One time we were watching them, they were trying to get rid of that nice dock they had there; they were bombing the buildings and trying to flatten them all out. This dock was a beauty, government-built, so they had a hell of a time to smash it to pieces. One plane came in and dropped a bomb, and it missed, hit the water, and just hunched along under the water and then settled right at the end of the dock. I was thinking it would be interesting to go get it, but I never did.

SETTING POTS, I'd take out 30, 35, 40 at a time and put them out, then go get another load the next day. Takes quite a while just to get them on the boat, get lines on them, bait them. You keep taking them out, finally get 300 and some out there.

Once you get them all there, you go out and haul about a quarter of them a day, then reset them, and then the next day go and get another quarter, the next day another quarter, next day another quarter; by then it's time to start again. Usually there's one windy day in between, so that lets them set five days. That's plenty of time to catch lobsters, if there's any there.

You've got try different things. Some days you're better off leaving them out there quite a while. When there's a lot of lobsters, right after they shed, you can pull them in three or four days; they'll go right in. But most of the time, especially when the water's cold, the lobsters don't move around much and their metabolism slows down, so they're pretty groggy and they don't get hungry very quick. In cold weather, sometimes, I think guys leave pots out for two weeks.

The most I ever got was 23 lobsters in a pot. Sometimes pots had 18 and there was so many it was hard to get them out of there, a lot of claws looking at you. But that's a good problem to have.

If a big lobster is in there for a long time with a small lobster, he'll eat the small one after a while. And sometimes a female lobster with eggs on it, sometimes they're nasty. You get one of those in there and they'll bite all the claws off the other lobsters, just for sport, I guess. They're not very nice, but I suppose they're kind of unhappy being in there. I don't know.

I DID A LOT OF THINGS nobody did around here when I started.

It wasn't hard to figure if I could find some lobsters where nobody else was lobstering, I'd do better. If you go where somebody else is, there may be a hundred lobsters there; if one guy catches 50 and I catch 50, I'd do better where I could catch the whole hundred. So that's what I did, a lot. I'd try new places where I'd never seen anybody and I thought maybe there should be lobsters there.

Now maybe somebody else fished there at a different time of year, but I



Linsey Lee

Mr. Hancock with his pots: "It was a lot easier to haul a wire pot through the water than it was a wooden one."



started lobstering in March, when all the lobstermen in Menemsha didn't go lobstering until Memorial Day. Until they seen me getting a lot of lobsters, and then they all started going. Now everybody starts in March — March or April, and there used to be nobody out there. Now some of them are going all winter. I could put my pots anywhere I wanted and I could get a lot of lobsters, a lot of lobsters. Then they'd see me coming in with five boxes of lobsters; hmmm . . . pretty soon I had a lot of company.

I used to think I had to leave the pots in the same place where I started, but I'd usually pick up a pot or two at one end and put it at the other end of the line of pots. I'd always get more lobsters in the last two. I was stupid for a while, but I wasn't stupid forever, so then I'd move them around. I'd move every one of them. I never put them back in the same place.

You keep track of where they are with a Loran, an electronic rig that just reads off a bunch of numbers, lines on a chart, and I just leave the two numbers reading up there and put them on one Loran line. The Loran line doesn't change, it'll just go in one direction, the line on the number stays the same, you know? So you know where they are, then there's another line that kind of crosses it on an angle that's almost directly east-west. You just write that down when you set them out on one end, the north end, and then you write two numbers and you put the two numbers at the other end and how many pots you put in the middle, in a circle in the middle of the thing, north and south. If it's really good, I write down how many I got in there. Then every night when I come in I write it down in the book. I got a book for every year I went, so I know exactly what I did everywhere. But to most people it just looks like a bunch of numbers.

THE FIRST POT I had was wire. Everybody had wooden pots, but I was hauling them by hand. I ain't going to haul a wooden pot, so I got some wire pots. A guy in New Bedford just started making them. It was a lot easier to haul a wire pot through the water than it was a wooden one. Everybody said it was crazy as hell to have wire pots. That's all right. I could catch lobsters and that's all I was after.

I even started putting my wire pots in deep water and I had a few wooden pots that I bought from Louis Larsen, second-hand ones. I tried some of them and the wooden pots would always catch lobsters and sometimes the wire ones didn't have anything. I thought, "Hmm, I've got to do something different," so I bought myself 300 wooden pots. It turned out all it was, was in deep water some of my wire pots were flipping over on the way down. I wasn't smart enough to figure it out for a while, but a wooden pot, you put out and if the bricks are spaced right in them, one in each corner or something, it doesn't matter if you put them in the water upside down or on end, they'll flatten right out and go down to the bottom flat straight.

I never bought any more wooden ones after I finally figured out what I was doing wrong.

I CAN GO DOWN the North Shore in the fall and haul a hundred pots and be back by noon or one o'clock, because you just don't have to go far and you start hauling them 15 minutes from Menemsha. But most of the year I'm going out at least an hour, hour and a half, and late in the fall I go over two hours before I get to the pots — that's way off southwest of Nomansland — Cox's Ledge, they call it. Pretty well offshore, 25 miles. Late in the fall, unless somebody else has caught the lobsters, there's quite a lot of lobsters there, so that's where I go. You stay in here, you get a pound a pot. You go out there, you might get five pounds a pot. So I go for another hour. It's sometimes kind of a boring ride. I figure it's like commuting to Boston.

But ordinarily in summer I go out — like last summer, I went at five o'clock and came back in at five o'clock or four-thirty or something like that. My wife had an uncle down there wanted to go lobstering. Says, "When do you go? How long do you go?" I said, "Well, I usually go at five and come back at six." "Oh," he says, "that'll be fun. I'll go. Just an hour, that's nothing." It was thirteen hours, though. As I get older, I don't feel like staying as long, so if I haul eighty-five pots or something, I figure good enough.

WHAT I LIKE about lobstering is you get away from everything and have nothing to worry about but yourself. And you can get out of it exactly what you put into it.

If I was building houses, I'd give them a set price on a house and have to work like hell and hope I had some money left after I paid everybody. I could go lobstering and I could go out there and pull 50 pots, make some money, or I could pull a hundred pots, make a lot more, and I could leave them in one place and get a little money; or I could move them and figure out — it was fun to figure where I should be putting them, maybe from looking back at what I'd done other years or maybe looking at our chart and seeing what looked like it might be good. There was one place where nobody ever had any pots, and I just saw it on a chart and figured maybe I'd try it. That's where I got 23 lobsters in a pot. I keep it a pretty good secret. No one had ever put pots there and it wasn't very far. Absolutely unbelievable. I'd wait until everybody went out, then go and come back before they came in. I kept it a secret for six years, and I was getting so many lobsters, it was unbelievable.

It's remarkable what you can do — but you've got to take a chance you're not going to catch anything sometimes. You haven't actually got to put a whole truckload of pots to find out if there's a lobster there. I mean, some people put what they call scouts, they put one here and one there and just

try around. Then if you find where the lobsters are, you put some more pots there. I think the guys from Point Judith use all my pots for scouts, because they seem to put them all over where mine are, way offshore. Nobody used to fish there. Anyway, that's part of it. But it's fun, it's really fun to get somewhere there's a lot of lobsters before anybody else gets there and get a lot of lobsters and come in and everybody else is growling because there's no lobsters around. They might get a box or two; if I get five boxes, I feel better. You feel like you've done something, you know?

I sell them all to the Net Result. I used to sell them to Harold Lawry when I first started, and then Louis started the Net Result down in Vineyard Haven, called me up, see if I'd sell him all my lobsters. He said he'd take them all. It's a hell of a lot easier than going to Edgartown with them, So he's bought every single one of them ever since.

You get what they pay. Some people bitch about price and pretty soon nobody in Menemsha will buy lobsters from them. It isn't worth bitching about the price, so, hell, I can make enough money. It don't make any difference anyway.

Talkative cuss, ain't I?

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## An Impulse to Save Things Left a Trove of Island History

### The Chadwick Collection Hopscotches 300 Years

by JOHN WALTER

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**A**mericans have always been collectors: baseball cards, stamps, coins, shells from the beach, postcards. And they have always been hoarders — show me a family that doesn't have Grandpa's Army uniform in the attic and I'll show you a family that doesn't have an attic.

The amateur collector of historical objects has always had a special place within these groups.

There was, for example, in Washington D.C., in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Osborn H. Oldroyd, who occupied 453 Tenth St. NW, the house where Abraham Lincoln was carried to die the night he was shot at Ford's Theatre, across the street. Oldroyd installed in the basement of the house a "personal museum, a ... cabinet of curiosities where preposterous relics of dubious provenance lay side by side with priceless historical treasures, all preserved under thick display glass in oak jewelers' floor cases ... an impressive but indiscriminate hoard of trash and treasure."<sup>1</sup>

And there was, on Martha's Vineyard, in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, James Chadwick.

Chadwick was a native, with one branch of the family going back to Thomas Mayhew. His grandfather, William P. Chadwick (1810-1883), operated a blacksmith's shop on lower Main Street in Edgartown, on the site of the present Wharf Pub.

An 1888 graduate of MIT, Chadwick was a director of the ill-fated Martha's Vineyard Railroad, and then, for 30 years, operator of a coal business. In 1883, he worked with his father, Edward Wells Chadwick, and a brother, Harlan C., to build the first three bathhouses on Chappaquiddick bathing beach. Five years later there were 35; by 1890, 50. Chadwick provided a

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<sup>1</sup> *Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer*, James L. Swanson, Harper-Collins 2006, page 244.



From the Chadwick collection, sperm whale tooth with scrimshaw design, "Guenevere on a horse."

free steam-launch service from Edgartown for his customers.

He was a tax collector and selectman, and he and his wife, Adelaide, were active in the Edgartown Methodist Church.

But this outline does not describe his life. For Vineyard history dominated it: He called himself a "hobbyist" on the subject, and it led to him gathering, over the course of 40 years before his death in 1938, all manner of artifacts from the Island's past.

Weapons, documents, objects of nature and objects manufactured by man — all of them interested Chadwick, and as he gathered them, by the dozens and scores until the items numbered in the hundreds, he jotted notes about them in what he called a "Catalogue of Curiosities" [sic].

His home, among trees and flower gardens on the corner of

Pease's Point Way and Cottle Lane, was the house where he had been born, and he added to it a sun parlor where he welcomed visitors to come view his collections — an ad hoc museum.

"I do not consider that the possessor of such objects of historical interest is really the owner," Chadwick said. "He is but the keeper, and has no moral right to refuse permission to see them to any person who is interested. I take a great deal of pleasure in showing my collection, and I have made many friends by doing so."

Hundreds of people a year apparently took him up on the offer. Entering the room, the thing they would see first was the firearms collection: stacked in racks along the walls, and hanging over doors and windows, were all sorts of rifles and shotguns. From there, they would work their way past cases of pistols, birds' eggs and sharks' teeth, and a coin collection started by Chadwick's father. Chadwick himself served as a personal tour guide, describing various articles as the visitors browsed through them.

"How would you like to feel along a timber in an old dark attic and find in your hand a pewter tip-up lamp of pre-Revolutionary period?" he asked, writing once about his hobby.

"At the present time I am chasing various articles, some of which I shall overtake, and some will escape me. One cannot expect to capture them all. The true hobbyist finds almost as much pleasure in others making a find as in being able to do so himself. For part of the joy of hobbying is in being able to compare your pieces of Sandwich or Chippendale, your semi-old document or 1847 stamp, your flint pistols or Revolutionary musket, your scrimshaw or whale irons, with those of other hobbyists and feel the thrill that comes over you."

He added: "Then again, there is a curative value in hobbying. I very much doubt if history tells of even one true hobbyist who has committed suicide since Adam ate the apple."<sup>2</sup>

When he died, the *Vineyard Gazette* said: "He was devoted to the tradition and history of the Vineyard, looking backward with a rich retrospect and seeking to preserve old records and old memories. . . . His historical collection will remain long after him."<sup>3</sup>

And so it has.

Turned over to the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society in 1986 as a bequest of the James Chadwick estate, the material — eclectic, wide-ranging, interesting — hopscotches through three hundred years of Island history.

It includes objects: walrus tusks, powder horns, multiple examples of scrimshaw, harpoons and ship models.

And it includes documents: deeds dating back as far as 1688; legal papers including wills, probate appointments and indentures, as early as 1753, and almost three dozen personal letters. There's also an autograph collection of more than 100 signatures (Alexander Hamilton, William Jennings Bryan, H.G. Wells and 16 Massachusetts governors).

The document portion of the collection has been recently reorganized within the library of the Martha's Vineyard Museum. Herewith, a sample of some of this rich trove.<sup>4</sup> The Chadwick Collection provides an example of how an individual obsession can lead to something much greater and deeper than its simple beginnings.

### The death of a schoolmaster, 1794

The outside of the letter, folded over on itself, must have struck horror in the heart of its recipient: To "Mrs. Gray — Wedow To the Late Luke Gray,

2 Quoted in *Vineyard Gazette*, July 1, 1938.

3 *Gazette*, July 1, 1938.

4 Located in library Record Unit 155.



Liveing in Martains Vinyard." Inside, a New Jersey correspondent had the task of telling Mrs. Grey the circumstances of her husband's death.

The original spellings are preserved.

South Amboy, New Jersey

August th 22d 1794

Deare Maddam:

I am Sencerely Sorry that I am under the Necesety of Sending you the Disagreable Nuse of your late Husband[.] he came here som time last Spring with the South Amboy Packet: and Ingaged to Teach School in this Nabourhood for one Quarte wich he began the 12d may and continued his School with fathfullness and to the Sattisfaction of his Employers tell a bout the last of July when he was taken Sick and lay Tell th 8d this Instant when he Parted This Life a bout a levan oclock at Night and was buried the tenth day; I beg you to Reconsile your Self with this Misfortunate nuse and to call to mind the Transetoryness of this life and Remember that as Shure as whee come to geather whee must Part again[.]

Whee do expect there will be an overplush of his money after Paying his burying and all his Close[.] If you Could Send to me In what manner I shall Send to you what there is: both In money & Close[.] I will Do my Indeavour to Direct them Safe or If you Could get any one to Come I Should think it most Proper and Perhaps most Sattisfaction there is Ships that Come from Newyork here every Day: no more but Remains yours —

Yo[ur] Serv[ant,] James Morgan

N.B. he had to teach about 25 Schollars @9/ each his time would have bin out in 8 days when he was taken sick he lay at Mr. Culvers and was used with every Tenderness In his sickness --

### The guardianship of the Indians, 1811

A 1746 Massachusetts law, subsequently updated, authorized three Guardians to be appointed for every recognized Indian settlement.

The idea was that these overseers would "keep order as Justices of the Peace, channel legitimate Indian complaints to Boston, prevent Indian land from being sold without approval, and manage Indian resources by allotting planting grounds, renting out the surplus, and applying the proceeds to schools and poor relief. This well-intentioned system met its goals when its appointees were devoted to their task. Unfortunately, too often the guardianship was a means for avaricious men to line their own pockets."<sup>5</sup>

One of the handwritten appointment letters for such guardianship dates from 1811:

<sup>5</sup> *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community Among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard 1600-1871*, by David J. Silverman, Cambridge University Press 2005, page 172.



Model of a steam tugboat, 33 inches overall, collected by James Chadwick.

To Messrs. Samuel Smith, Elijah Stuart, and Isaiah Johnson of the Island of Chapequiddick [sic] in the County of Dukes County:

Greeting.

Whereas by an Act of this Commonwealth entitled "An Act to set off to the Patentees and other purchasers of Certain Lands on the Island of Chapequiddick in the County of Dukes County, and finally adjust and determine all disputes between the Patentees and other purchasers, and the Indians on said Island," passed the 26<sup>th</sup> day of January AD 1789, the Governor with the advice and consent of Council is requested and empowered to appoint three Guardians for the Indians on the said Island of Chapequiddick.

Wherefore, by and with the consent of the Council, I do hereby appoint you the said, Samuel Smith, Elijah Stuart and Isaiah Johnson, to have the care and oversight of the said Indians, and their Interest on the said Island, and require that you observe the duties specified or implied in the aforesaid Act, and render an Account of your doings annually, to us, the Governor of Council.

In testimony whereof I have caused the public Seal of the Commonwealth to be hereunto affixed this Tenth day of June, A.D. 1811, and in the 35<sup>th</sup> Year of the Independence of the United States of America

By His Excellency, the Governor,  
Benjamin Homans  
Secretary of the Commonwealth<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Like others before them, these Guardians ended up in controversy. Chappaquiddick Indians petitioned Gov. John Brooks in 1818, saying Johnson "for a Long time Past" had been away and was "not Likely to Return," and Smith was resigning; meanwhile their white neighbors were refusing to repair the fence that divided Chappy, and letting cattle and sheep "Distroy our Corn, Rye and Grass."

## Reports of the school committee, 1848-49

Annual reports to the town of those running the schools are nothing new; they date back as far as the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

State law at the time said such reports could be given orally at the annual town meeting, or in printed form. Edgartown's committeemen scorned the first approach: "Amid the promiscuous assemblage and the hurried transactions of an annual town meeting ... the report of a school committee has no fair chance of being even heard by a great majority of the inhabitants; still less of being duly considered by them."

So this account of Edgartown schools for 1848-49 was handset in type and printed on a one-page sheet that was distributed to each household.

Note the emphasis placed in the length of school terms — length being taken as a measure of serious intent and success, and the stated goal of the committee is to get ten months' schooling for each child.

Also worthy of note is reference to "the prevailing sickness" which hampered the Town District in the course of the year.

And long passages are devoted to a harangue of parents for their role in letting average attendance at the schools fall below 50 percent of the eligible number of students — "this blighting evil," the authors call it; they point out rural Chilmark does much better on a percentage basis. In the Town District, the authors note, the shocking rumor is that students skipped school in order to avoid final exams, or simply because they had been punished for violating rules.

March 14, 1849

### Chappaquiddick District.

The school in this district was kept in Summer, for the smaller scholars, *two months*. Although well conducted, it suffered considerably from absences. The school was re-opened in November, and although it suffered somewhat from the same cause as in summer, it was very efficiently and profitably taught *two and three-fourths months*.

### Middle District.

The school in this district commenced in August, and was in operation *five months*. During a part of the term this school was somewhat deficient in respect to its discipline, but in the latter part, order was restored and well maintained. The younger scholars made great improvement.

### North District.

The school in this district commenced in June, and was continued *five months and two days*. It was governed and taught to the entire satisfaction of the committee, and also, so far as they have learned, to that of the parents. In studiousness, and in good deportment in school, the scholars in this district would not suffer in the comparison with those of any other in the town.

### Plain District.

The school in this district was opened in September, and continued in operation *four and one fourth months*, with a degree of success alike creditable to teachers and scholars; but, before the term intended had expired, the school was informally closed on account of the ill health of the teacher. The committee congratulate the inhabitants of this district — especially the children — in the prospect (as they understand there is one) of a *new school house*.

### South District.

The school in this district commenced in August, and was in operation *five months*. During a part of the term this school was somewhat deficient in respect to its discipline, but in the latter part, order was restored and well maintained. The younger scholars made great improvement.

### Town District.

Each division of the Primary school in this district was successfully conducted and taught by a principal and an assistant teacher, as usual, during the summer and fall. Owing to the unprecedented number of scholars necessarily absent from these schools during the prevailing sickness, especially from division No. 2, and there being a small surplus of money after providing for the terms in both departments and five and a half months each, these schools were continued two weeks each beyond their assigned time, making the term of each *six months*.

The Grammar school in this district has been very successfully taught, and discipline maintained therein, also by a principal and an assistant teacher. The attendance has been better than usual for this school, and within the last few weeks it has been remarkably full for the season; but still, taking the average for the year, the non-attendance has been such as to afford a subject for profound regret. As a whole, the scholars who have attended regularly have made very good proficiency. And the committee exceedingly regret that there has not been a more uniform co-operation on the part of parents with the teachers and committee, more fully to accomplish the objects of the school — They regret that the cases have been so numerous in which scholars have been allowed to be tardy, or wholly absent; that they were allowed, (as in past years) about one half of the whole number, to leave school several days — in some instances *weeks* — before the close of the last term, for the sole purpose, as it is believed, in most cases, of avoiding the closing examinations. In some instances, children have been permitted *wholly to quit the school* because a slight and reasonable penalty had been inflicted for the violation of a wholesome and known rule. The committee must have the charity to believe, that very many of the above cases of absence were unknown to the parents of the delinquent scholars. But we beseech them, as well as all other parents interested, to consider their responsibilities in this matter, and not to attach blame to teachers or committee for failure in respect to their children's advancement, procured by their



From the Chadwick collection, three ivory jagg wheels, one with letter opener.

own inattention. It is *their* duty to send their children to the school-room, *and to see to it that they go thither*;

It is the *teacher's* to take care of, and instruct them, when arrived there, and also to co-operate with the parents, and others, in securing their attendance.

When your present committee were chosen to office, the second term of this school for the year 1847-8, had not expired. Since its close, which was on May 26<sup>th</sup>, this school has finished one term of *five and a half months*, for the year 1848-9, and is now on the last half of the second term.

#### General Remarks 'Facts and Suggestions'

1. The most fruitful source of mischief to the schools, still, is *the frequency and extent of school absences*. And in addition to the remarks we have elsewhere made on this subject, we wish to make a few more here of general application.

In the Abstract of School Returns, buut recently received, is a Graduated Table, as usual, in which all the towns in the State are numerically arranged, according to the average attendance of their children upon the public schools, for the year 1847-8. In this arrangement, of the 313 towns in the State, Edgartown stands No. 305; -- *nearly at the bottom of the list*. The neighboring town of Chilmark, whose population is very sparse compared with our own, puts us en-

tirely to the blush. She occupies the very respectable position of No. 131. To her praise be it spoken. May we strive to imitate the worthy example she has set us.

Our average attendance for that year was a little less than 44 per cent of the whole number of children between the ages of 4 and 16 years. Although it is believed the average attendance has been somewhat better the present year than the preceding one, yet we have to deplore a lamentable deficiency in this respect. To this blighting evil, and in consideration of the means of its cure, the committee would earnestly solicit the attention of all parents and guardians of children and youth. They would also respectfully, yet earnestly, solicit the particular attention and co-operation of the resident ministers of the gospel, and the selectmen, whose duty it is made, co-ordinately with the school committee, Rev. Stat. chap. 23, sec. 8, "to exert their influence, and use their best endeavors, that the youth of their towns shall regularly attend the schools established for their instruction." Nor can they but hope that our Legislature will ere long pass some more stringent regulations than any existing ones for the enforcing of school attendance.

As a community, we have deplored the decline of business among us of late years, and with it, the spirit of enterprise. May we not be significantly taunted by our neighbors, with the singular coincidence of the evil of which we have been speaking, with this depreciation of industrial enterprise, and the direct tendency of the former to perpetuate and increase the latter? ...

2. *A great lack in respect to parental visitations at the schools*, is also still a just ground of complaint. And certainly parents and others cannot reasonably be offended at being reminded of this delinquency in every year's school report, until, by an improved custom, they shall render such a reiteration unnecessary.

3. *The maintaining of good government in the schools*, is acknowledged, on all hands, to be of the first importance. According to the degree in which a teacher succeeds or fails in this, we are accustomed to praise or blame him. We have elsewhere spoken of the duty of parents in securing the attendance of children upon the schools; we may here add that it is equally their duty to support the teacher in his efforts to maintain good government in the same. As there cannot be a good school without discipline, so there cannot be discipline without the countenance and support of the parents and guardians of the scholars. Our duty, then, in this matter, is plain.

4. As the subject of *uniformity in school books*, connected with that of *economy in the expenditure*, is one of much importance, your committee would call the attention of the town to it. They recommend that the School Committee for the ensuing year be specially authorized and requested to make a through examination of the most popular class books in the different departments of study required in the Common Schools, make selections in view of their comparative merits, and open a Schoolbook Depository... It may be specially requested that the same books be used for a series of years — say five at



least — except in cases of very manifest improvement in a new work. The law ... provides that “the books shall be supplied to the scholars, at such prices, as merely to reimburse the expense of the same.” In view of this fact, should the terms of sale be uniformly *cash*, as they should be, the investment would be a safe one to the town, and the amount saved to the citizens in a single year would fully reimburse the expense of the examination.

5. In conclusion, your committee feel still to deplore, as they are assured many other citizens do, the defects of our present system of schools in this town. They refer more particularly to the fact, that our schools are kept by terms in such manner, that each scholar is entitled to attend them only for a few months in each year. The consequence is, that, although there are several private schools, many of the children are necessarily out of school most, if not all of the remaining part of the year. There appears to be no practicable way of remedying this lamentable evil, with numerous attendant ones, but that of more liberal appropriations by the town. The comparative cheapness of the public school system as compared with the private institution, has been repeatedly demonstrated, and still we choose to plod on in the old path, annually expending enough — amply enough — for the education of a comparatively few scholars in the private schools, to extend our public schools through ten months of the year, including the expense of a public High School.

The increase of liberal views, however, together with the fact, as the result of this, that some incipient steps have been taken in two of the districts — the Town and the Plain — for the erection of additional school houses, encourages us to hope that a brighter day is dawning; that the time is at hand when neither parents nor children will be heard to inquire, “*Have I a right this term?*” (which inquiry would be an anomaly in the category of educational questions in any other town in the Commonwealth), but when *all* the children, of proper ages, shall have the unquestionable right to attend school the year round. In the hope of this desirable state of things, and with the view to attain it by progressive steps, your committee recommend to the town to make a more liberal appropriation for the support of schools the ensuing year.

All of which is respectfully submitted,

H. Vincent

H.P. Mayhew

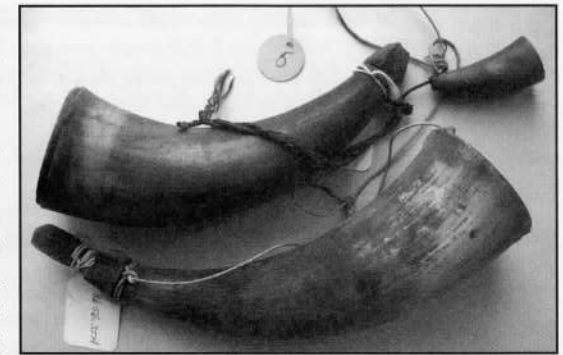
J.T. Pease, *Sup. School Com. of Edgartown*

### The complaints of Nancy Luce, and her wish for the world to end, 1879

Nancy Luce, an Island celebrity of the late 1800s, lived in West Tisbury, and her home on New Lane became a rest stop for sightseeing carriages headed up-Island. She was an artist and poet, but became known for her eccentric devotion to hens, whom she made the subject of some of her poetry, treated as household pets, and buried under marble tombstones.

Like many latter-day celebrities, she found fame did not treat her kindly. She was, Arthur Railton wrote, a victim “sometimes of abuse and scorn,” especially during the week of the Agricultural Fair, when the fairgrounds a mile from her home were crowded with visitors, and she became “an easy target for cruel young men and boys, and even a few sightseers. It is shocking that such behavior went unpunished by the authorities.”<sup>7</sup>

Here, in a letter written when she was in her late 60s, she complains about several visitors to her property. When she died, in April 1890, authorities found two loaded pistols, cocked and capped, inside the house.



Powder horns from the Chadwick collection.

Aug 2nd, 1879

Mr. Jeremiah Pease, Trial of Justice,

I am murdered again, be quick, be quick, take Blackenship girl and put her in Jail, she come again Aug. 1<sup>st</sup>, the other time was July 7<sup>th</sup>, now again stop her from ever coming here again, she has wounded my head again, stop her and them was with her, she and them tried to brake [sic] in, tried to brake the bolt to my door, and she tried to brake my windows, she tried to come over a board fence at 7 feet high, she got up to the top coming over. I met her with a club, I should kild her, if she had not jumped back, they weakened other fence, they threatened me most everything, she threatened me the worst, and damages.

Stop both them sinners drives for Worth, the first one come with GEM Carriage, Savage he come July 18<sup>th</sup>, he affrightened my hens most out the world, he thrashed his hat over my hens, at a dreadful rate, and made noise in my house and hurt my head, and tried to bang the door to wound my head. I got it away from him, keep him away never let him come again. I told him then when he went I told him never to come again, if he did, I would take the law of him, you stop him. You stop both of them dreadful sinners that drives for Worth, I never knew folks so savage as they be never, now Aug. 1<sup>st</sup>, the other sinner come with the Carriage GEM, he abused me at a dreadful rate with his tongue in my sickness, and banged around my house before he went, and [threw] something hard in to a square of out off my window in my grain room, and threatened me he would leave my gate open. I had him shut it, he threatened me, he would come again.

<sup>7</sup> *The History of Martha's Vineyard: How We Got to Where We Are*, by Arthur R. Railton, Commonwealth Editions 2006, page 328.

I kept telling him never to come again, he stayed about 2 hours, he kept telling me I will come, you stop him. Keep them 2 away that drives for Worth, keep away all the Blackenships, and all murders. I wish I never been in this world, I want the world to come to end, to put a stop to sin.

Miss Nancy Luce

### In the age of marketing, a note of regrets, 1935

Interestingly, very few documents in the Chadwick Collection are related to the Chadwick family. One exception comes from late in Mr. Chadwick's life; perhaps he didn't mean to save it at all, but this postcard ended up in the papers that were eventually willed to and archived by the Museum.

By the 1930s, America was well into the mass marketing age; national magazines and the new phenomenon of radio were driving consumers to brand names and products in a way that had been previously impossible. The "Ivory Stamp Club" made H.E. Harris & Co. into the nation's largest stamp company. In a radio series sponsored by Proctor & Gamble, Australian Army officer Capt. Tim Healy recited stories about stamps, and Harris and P&G offered listeners stamp packets for 10 cents and two Ivory Soap wrappers. One to two million listeners responded; but Chadwick apparently wrote to the wrong address.

H.E. Harris & Co.  
108 Massachusetts Avenue  
Boston, Mass.

Dear Sir:

Although we appreciate your recent letter, we regret that we do not have any album to offer in exchange for Ivory Soap wrappers.

We believe that you obtained your Finder letter from the Ivory Stamp Club and would suggest that you write directly to Captain Tim, c/o Ivory Stamp Club, P.O. Box 1801, Cincinnati, Ohio for further information.

We appreciate this opportunity to be of service.

Yours very truly,  
H. E. Harris & Co.

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## The Search for 'Peter Williams,' Son of Sojourner Truth

### A Mystery Brings the Researcher To the Vineyard Museum

by MARY BETH NORTON

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**I**N SPRING 2003, I encountered a mystery in an early draft of a forthcoming book by Margaret Washington, my colleague in the Cornell University History Department. Margaret had been working for years on a biography of Sojourner Truth, the well-known African-American abolitionist and women's rights activist of the mid-19th century. Truth, who was illiterate, was born a slave to a Dutch-speaking family in the Hudson River valley in the late 18th century and went by the name Isabella van Wagenen until she adopted her new cognomen as a mature woman.

From Margaret's manuscript I learned that the great tragedy of Truth's life was the mysterious disappearance of her son Peter during a whaling voyage to the Pacific in the early 1840s. Since I was soon to leave for my annual summer stay on the Vineyard, and I knew that the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society had extensive records of whaling, I volunteered to see if I could learn anything about Peter's fate. The project was all the more attractive to me because, although I have been a long-time member of the Society (now the Martha's Vineyard Museum), I had not previously done research in its holdings of books and manuscripts.

I knew from the outset that searching for the fate of an obscure African-American sailor in the Pacific Ocean would be like looking for a needle in a haystack — perhaps, even like looking for the haystack in the first place — but I was determined to try. In the end, I did find a plausible explanation for his disappearance, and that made the search worthwhile.

MARY BETH NORTON, of Ithaca, N.Y., and West Tisbury, is Mary Donlon Alger Professor of American History at Cornell University and a member of the Martha's Vineyard Museum. She specializes in Early American history, and is the author of *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692*.

This article reports what I found and how I found it, thanks to the resources at the Martha's Vineyard Museum and the New Bedford Whaling Museum.



I began with the information Margaret had compiled.

After they were freed from slavery by New York's post-Revolution emancipation law, Isabella, her son Peter, and her daughters lived in New York City in the 1830s.

The youthful Peter fell in with a bad crowd and began engaging in petty thefts and vandalism, criminal acts that brought him into frequent contact with the police. His arrest records, Margaret learned, listed him as Peter Williams, not Peter van Wagenen. Isabella asked for advice about her troublesome son from various male friends, leaders of the free black and abolitionist communities in New York at the time. They recommended the then-common remedy for a misbehaving young man: send him to sea.

Accordingly, in 1839 "Peter Williams" signed onto the Nantucket whale ship *Zone*, bound for the Pacific under Capt. Edwin Hiller. (Margaret knew from research on Nantucket that the *Zone*'s logbook had evidently not survived.) Three times while on the voyage, Peter wrote letters addressed to his mother, all mailed from Tahiti. Their dates were March 24, 1840; March 22, 1841; and Sept. 19, 1841. (Truth cherished these letters all her life and published them in the autobiography she later dictated.)

The first letter, from 1840, alluded obliquely to some sort of trouble on shipboard, but gave no details. As far as Margaret had been able to determine, neither Peter nor Captain Hiller was aboard the *Zone* when it returned to Nantucket with its cargo in May 1843. She speculated that the disappearances of the captain and the young sailor might have been connected.

A reference book here at the Vineyard Museum library, though, showed me quickly that Margaret's speculation was incorrect. In 2001 a researcher, Judith Lund, published an extremely useful list of all known whaling voyages, their dates, captains, and the location of the logs. (Her book, *Whaling Masters and Whaling Voyages Sailing from American Ports*, was not published until after Margaret had done research on Peter's disappearance, so it had not been available to her.) I learned from Lund's book that Captain Hiller had accepted another voyage shortly after making landfall at Fairhaven, where she probably unloaded her oil, and so he had not been on the *Zone* when she sailed back to her homeport of Nantucket. Hiller had then died on that next assignment.

My initial plan at the Museum library was to search for two different sorts of sources: logbooks of vessels in the Pacific and letters home from sailors. Possibly, I thought, men writing to Martha's Vineyard might report

encountering the *Zone* and might say something relevant about Peter's disappearance. Or a logbook might comment on events on board the *Zone*.

I soon discovered that I could not identify mariners writing home from the Pacific without knowing the names of the ships on which they had sailed and then using the crew lists, for the library indexed letters only by the name of the writer, not by date or place of composition. There was, however, a card file of logbooks in the collection, and I went through that item-by-item, looking for ships that were in the Pacific at the same time as the *Zone*. In addition, a librarian suggested that I e-mail the New Bedford Whaling Museum to see if the reference staff there could help in my quest.

Indeed they could. Several exchanges with Laura Pereira, a librarian there, produced key pieces of information that, when coupled with what I found on Martha's Vineyard, allowed me to solve the mystery of Peter Williams' disappearance. Those key pieces were: first, data from the abstracts of whaling voyages compiled by a New Bedford resident named Dennis Wood; and second, copies of pages from National Archives microfilms of the records of the U.S. consul's office in Tahiti for the dates that I knew the *Zone* was there (March 1840, March 1841, September 1841).

Wood had carefully recorded all scraps of information about New England whaling vessels that made their way back to New Bedford—from newspaper articles, reports of encounters with other ships, letters, and so forth. Using his data and the consular records, an atlas at the MVHS, and the information Margaret had uncovered, I was able to plot the *Zone*'s voyage in considerable detail. I also located a logbook at the historical society—that of the *Braganza*—recording an encounter with the *Zone*, which was sailing in company with the *Benjamin Tucker* in December 1841. I contemplated trying to find letters from the *Tucker*'s crew members, but since I had already learned that ships tended to sail with each other only for a very few days, I concluded that such an effort would probably provide no useful information.

Intriguingly enough, the Wood abstracts showed that the *Zone*, although a Nantucket ship, had sailed from and returned to Edgartown, presumably because by that time whaling vessels had become so large that the entrance to Nantucket harbor had become too shallow. This fact gave me hope that I would find Vineyard sailors on board, and that they would have written informative letters home that would have ended up in the library. But a search in the library's indexes turned up nothing written by anyone on the *Zone*'s crew list, which I was able to obtain from Laura Pereira.

The consular records did reveal the nature of the trouble to which Peter had alluded in his first letter: There had been a mutiny aboard the *Zone*. At the captain's request, the consul meted out punishment to the offending



sailors, but unfortunately the miscreants were not named, nor were the details of the mutiny explained. Further, "Peter Williams" was not among the American sailors listed by the consul as having been discharged from any ship in Tahiti.

I decided to see if I could locate the logbooks of any vessels that were docked in Tahiti at the same time as the *Zone*, in the hope that a writer on some other ship might have commented on the mutiny or another event on board the *Zone*. So I created a table of the vessels in Tahiti in March 1840, March 1841, and September 1841 by augmenting the consul's records with data from Lund's book. With that information, I located at the Museum library letters a Vineyard captain had written to his wife from Tahiti in March 1840 — but he mentioned only his desire to see her and passed on news of a few members of his crew, saying nothing of the *Zone*.

That left one more possibility at the Museum, the log of the whale ship *Almira*. She had been in Tahiti in July 1840, February 1841, and August 1841. I was prepared to go to Falmouth or New Bedford to look at other relevant logbooks I had identified, but the contents of the *Almira*'s log made it unnecessary. Capt. Isaiah Tobey observed on Sept. 25, 1841, after he noted that his ship had been in Tahiti for 41 days: "Most of our time had from 5 to 10 of my men Sick at one time had 13 men off duty being Stormey & wet and all of my men vascinated [sic] with the Cine [kine] Pox." He then noted that because of the illness of his crew he had to hire between 10 and 18 local men to work on repainting and recaulking his ship.

This entry told me was that there was a smallpox epidemic in Tahiti in September 1841, for a cowpox (*kine pox*) vaccination immunized a person against smallpox. I assumed that Peter had never been vaccinated, but asked Margaret for confirmation. She replied that she was quite sure that he had neither been vaccinated nor survived a previous bout with the deadly disease, which would also have conveyed immunity. (To be certain that my conclusion was correct, I asked Lisa Norling, a former student of mine and a whaling expert who has researched at the Historical Society, to look at the relevant logbooks I had identified at the Whaling Museum the next time she was in New Bedford. She informed Margaret and myself that other logbooks also mentioned the epidemic.)

Thus the mystery was solved. "Peter Williams" had caught smallpox on Tahiti shortly after he wrote his last letter to his mother. Captain Hiller, against whom the crew had once mutinied, had probably not shown the care for his men exhibited by Captain Tobey, who had paid for local workers to replace the labor lost while his crew recovered from the vaccinations he had arranged.

Peter had undoubtedly died after the *Zone* left Tahiti and had been buried at sea. It is unlikely that anyone, except possibly Captain Hiller himself, knew that "Peter Williams" was the son of an obscure former slave named Isabella van Wagenen. The captain left the *Zone* before she returned to Edgartown, so no one in Nantucket or on the Vineyard knew whom to notify about Peter's death. Hiller's callous inaction in Tahiti suggests, too, that if he had known Peter's identity, he would not have tried to contact Peter's mother before he sailed off on his next voyage.

I can only wonder how many more New England sailors died in that smallpox epidemic in Tahiti, leaving other mothers to mourn for the rest of their lives without knowing what had happened to their sons, just as Sojourner Truth did.

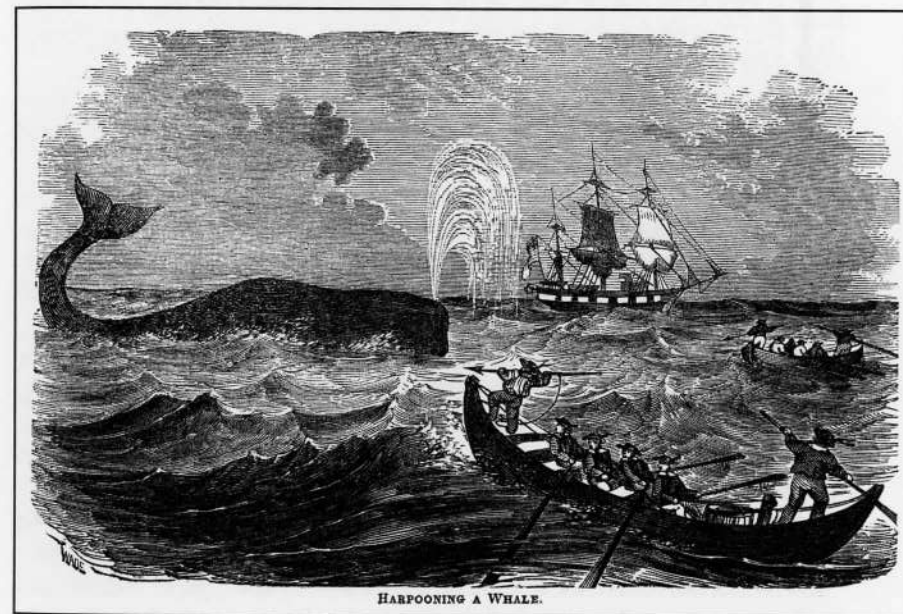


Illustration from *The Arctic Whaleman*, by the Rev. Lewis Holmes, published by Wentworth & Co., Boston, 1857. In the collection of the Gale Huntington Library.

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# Radio Days: In the Summer of '41, News of 'A Friendly Isle Offshore'

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by PHIL HORTON

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IN THE SUMMER OF 1941, as the Vineyard enjoyed the last days before war descended upon America, a roundup of Island news was broadcast weekly on Cape Cod radio station WOCB (1240 am).

The author of the scripts, Phil Horton, identified himself on air as "your neighbor ... on a friendly Isle off-shore," and the program was sponsored by the Vineyard Cordial Shop, an Oak Bluffs retailer of wine and spirits.

It wasn't the Island's first experimentation with radio. In the summer of 1938, the "Martha's Vineyard Island Hour" aired on WHDH, Boston (850 am); it was an hour-long program aired three times a week, which included music, historical information about the Vineyard, and commercial advertisements.

But WOCB was closer to home. The Cape's first radio station, it began broadcasting just that year. An affiliate of the NBC Blue network, it was, like its network, geared toward news and talk. (Decades later, bought by part-time Vineyarder Ernie Boch, WOCB became WXTK, 95.1 fm. Today, owned by Qantum of Cape Cod, it operates out of Hyannis.)

Phil Horton's scripts were conversational and informal, a cross between the kind of news carried in the news columns of the *Vineyard Gazette* that year and the items found in the traditional town columns of the paper. Horton had at least one scoop: The arrival of the Charles Lindbergh family for a yearlong stay at Seven Gates Farm apparently went unrecorded in the *Gazette*.

Copies of the full scripts have been given to the Martha's Vineyard Museum. The following are excerpts.

## June 28, 1941

Already a record-breaking number of people have arrived on the Island for the summer season. Usually July Fourth opens the season, but one boat along this week brought over 1100 people, and the cars unloaded resembled a parade of a motorized unit. Margaret Webster, a Broadway producer, was among the incoming throng. Of the course the Cagneys

and the Denys Wortmans are here, having arrived a short time back. Miss Katherine Cornell manages to come on weekends for a flying trip and a breath of salt air at her estate at Herring Creek.

The Fourth will at the present rate of arrivals be one of the busiest holidays of all, and practically all closed restaurants and inns, shops and markets formerly displaying the sign "Closed for the Winter" now read "Open for Business." A parade by the Gen. Goethels Post, Tisbury American Legion, promises to be quite showy as preparations predict, with a couple of bands, bugle and drum corps, floats, ex-soldiers, soldiers and draftees down for the weekend.

To the weary climber of the famous Gay Head cliffs comes this encouraging bit. The old Not-a-Way house, which for many years has been running as a restaurant and hotel, is now county property and will be used as a rest room and gathering place for visitors. White shoes caked with multi-colored clay will most likely be quite clean on leaving this old scenic spot of the Wampanoags, for at last there will be a comfortable place to sit down and scrape off the clay.

Sheep raising now is no minor industry of the Island. Already nearly half of all the plains now boast new tenants in the former home of the last surviving heath hen. Sheep seem to thrive here and the wool just seems to ooze out of their flesh. Old-time spinning wheels are being reconditioned and one young Vineyarder was recently caught wading through heaps of yellowed love letters once belonging to his grandmother. She was in love with a stalwart young man who once worked in the old mill, now the home of the Garden Club, where ladies with lorgnettes and dainty fingers plot and plan to keep out billboards and other detrimental signs. The young man thought somewhere in those missives of hate, love and revenge there might be helpful hints of how the old-time wool business was a success. ... Charles G. Norton last week sheered several bales of wool for shipment to the mainland ... the amount per sheep would make one's own wool stand on end.

The new road at Menemsha Bight, which is about to be finished, will be an added drawing card to this famous fish port. The road provides the very best of driving right to the edge of the beach with ample parking space. Again our summer visitors have been considered.

## July 4

This year the strings of a beautiful old Steinway piano will remain silent. Sunday afternoon concerts at the MacArthur bungalow, which for many, many years have delighted hundreds of Islanders, now will be no more. One who brought to the Island great singers and composers of the past,

such as Nordica and Henry Hadley, will not return, for with the death of Mrs. Pauline MacArthur late in the spring the Vineyard finds an empty space that can never be filled.

For some time now, the opening of Tashmoo Lake to the sea has been aired with pros and cons. It now seems very much decided that this beautiful lake will be opened good and wide ... so wide in fact that there won't be any bridge for Miss Katherine Cornell to cross on, to arrive at her estate just beyond the opening. Another road has been planned for Miss Cornell; she will not have to swim after all.

Either due to the draft or the shortage of men or for some other reason, two local girls in Vineyard Haven now are busily engaged as clerks in one of the grocery stores. This store boasts the only women grocery clerks in town. When a worried housewife rushes into the store and laments that she has ruined the dinner, she will be happy to find two women who can calm her fears and offer helpful, quick suggestions.

### July 11

Perhaps one of the largest numbers of sheep ever to be imported on the Island arrived this week from Texas for the Charles G. Norton sheep ranch. There were 249 of the woolly critters in all; Island boat officials were almost stumped when it came to handling these gentle fuzzy wanderers. If the Island sheep business continues to grow and these importation of western sheep to stock our hills continue, it might be a good idea for the Steamboat company to employ a shepherd and a couple of cow-punchers.

When it rains in Vineyard Haven it is not uncommon to see a bridge across one of its streets. Tuesday's rain again brought out the portable bridge. Since the town is built on the side of a hill, whenever it pours most of its side streets are veritable rivers. Center Street has the biggest flow of water and so when the tide gets too strong out comes the portable bridge from under the linden tree, much to the amusement of summer residents, but truly a lifesaver for the native who knows its winter merits. We yet look forward to one of our summer folk casting for trout from its rugged rails ... However, it might not do for Capt. Robert L. Jackson of Edgartown to try it. For though he's been a fisherman on the water for nearly 50 years his neglect to get a license for fresh-water fishing cost him a small fine in the local court this week. Ripley might take notice.<sup>1</sup>

### July 19

Along the waterfront activities are becoming more and more widespread. In Edgartown, a big school of porpoises attempted to upset the

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to "Ripley's Believe It or Not," a staple of Sunday newspaper supplements.



The dedication of Dutcher Dock, August 22, 1941.

Edgartown Yacht Club race just outside the harbor. Right in the course of the 18s, these splashing critters churned up a goodly bit of the shallow water. The return of the *Yankee* with many Girl Sea Scouts aboard was again a welcome sight, tied up for a night at a local dock in Vineyard Haven. Also for the same span of time, *Tabor Boy*, the cruising yacht of the Tabor School, made its first appearance of the season. There have been numerous races among the different yacht clubs of the Island during the past week but contenders for the Ware Cup found racing weather none too pleasant in pursuit of this prized token. Choppy seas and a northeast wind kept keels popping into view and skippers drenched with plenty of salt water. At Edgartown many guest yachts arrived from nearby off-Island ports.

On Aug. 29 another Vineyard novel will be published. This time Mr. Henry B. Hough, author of a bestseller of not so many months ago, will give to the public his latest work, *That Lofty Sky*. Also on Aug. 22 will be the dedication of the Dutcher Dock at Menemsha, with Mr. Dutcher's widow and Governor Leverett Saltonstall attending. This dock, named for Rodney Dutcher, who was a well-known Washington correspondent, has already proved its usefulness not only to fishermen who come into the historic Menemsha basin, but to yachts and smaller craft seeking a tying-up place during choppy weather.



## July 27

Among the arrivals this week were Spencer Tracy to visit the James Cagneys and Geoffrey Parsons, chief editorial writer of the *New York Herald Tribune*, who stopped with his family at Chilmark for a few days.

Dwight Weist of NBC, who announces the "March of Time" and many other important programs, arrived by plane Friday to act as narrator for the presentation of the Opera Martha. Leon Barzin, conductor of the National Orchestral Association, also arrived from New York to play an important part in the Music Festival.

## August 2

To many an old Islander, the showing of a group of paintings by the late Arthur W. Freedlander at the Art Guild this week brought back pleasant memories of a man who had become deeply attached to the summer life of Martha's Vineyard for many years. Mr. Freedlander's name brings back memories of Innisfail and Tom Karl ... concerts at the MacArthur Bungalow and the Freedlander School of Art. This exhibit of paintings by one who inspired many an artist and who centered in the art life of the Vineyard for over 30 years is not only appreciated by all but a distinct challenge in what can be done. The exhibition was loaned by Mr. Freedlander's widow for a week.

Another exhibition of paintings by James Gilbert of Chilmark was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. McAllister Coleman. Mr. Gilbert, who hails from Kansas and has been a resident of the Vineyard for several years, is well known for his portraits of Vineyard old-timers, among them being one of Captain Zeb Tilton, who skips the famous *Alice Wentworth*.

Over 40 men who have volunteered in forming a state home guard group got together for the first time on Tuesday night at the Tisbury Gym. A serious hour of drill was carried out... and though a few skinned heels and bumped noses were highlights of the hour, the group when in trim with uniform and all promises to make a showing well worth viewing.

## August 9

Topping all coming events is the Cavalcade. This is something that the Island people present for an Island cause. Katherine Cornell will again be captain and pitcher for a softball game, whose team will include such people as Thomas Hart Benton, Denys Wortman, Bill Bonthron, Francis Hackett, and our own Joe Allen, novelist and fish page editor for the *Vineyard Gazette*. Many famous artists will be at work sketching and there will be a variety of booths and events that will interest everyone from far and near. The Martha's Vineyard Hospital will receive the proceeds of this

great show. Don Van Ryper is the hardworking publicity man, one among many who are working hard to out-do last year's event. Don keeps the printer busy... and there is hardly a nook a handbill hasn't been darted into. Incidentally, speaking of Don, the Von Ryper Boat Model Shop has recently completely redecorated their show room on Beach Road. Yachtsmen and landlubbers alike find something new and something to talk about in two very clever maps which have been made to cover two sides of the display room. One is a New England coastal map, showing all the lightships in their proper position on the New England coast... these are cleverly illuminated. The other map which certainly deserves mention is a hemisphere defense map.

Up in Chilmark we learn horses are still kept busy and they even trot along the road, gallop and sometimes run away. Mr. Henry M. Look, who is a kind gentleman and 66 years old, is now recovering from an accident caused when his horse ran away with his farm wagon, overturning it. However, it wasn't entirely the horse's fault for the story is that first it was bumped by a car... and then the horse took flight, hay went flying east and west and finally upset, much to the grief of Mr. Look.

Arriving in Vineyard Haven this week were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hotchkiss and two children. They recently arrived in this country from Baara, Iraq, which has been their home for several years. Mrs. Hotchkiss was formerly Mary Bell Clark, a leader of the young social set of the Vineyard.

## August 16

Martha's Vineyard this week had the honor to add the names of Col. and Mrs. Charles A. Lindbergh to its already extensive list of famous visitors. The Lindberghs visited friends at Seven Gates Farm in West Tisbury.... Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, formerly a minister to Norway, has returned to the Vineyard for the remainder of the month.... Down at Herring Creek, Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontaine have been guests of Katherine Cornell. Not only house guests had the pleasure of being at Miss Cornell's home this week, but the tour of homes, for the benefit of the Martha's Vineyard Art Workers Guild, which took place on Wednesday, made it possible for many people to visit Miss Cornell's home, which was among several opened for this benefit. Lonely Herring Creek road was well policed by a special bevy of cops for the occasion, and even though one had to walk nearly half a mile over the dunes at the end of the road before getting to this home, nevertheless all who ventured forth said it was certainly worth the while. Over \$550 was taken in by the tour for the Guild's benefit.

Over in Oak Bluffs, where there is always something going, three soldiers from Camp Edwards, on an outing, decided to make it a bit more

exciting and borrowed a fire truck for a nerve-shattering ride down a one-way street — over a one-foot wall and finally crashing into the Public Library. Needless to say, the three young men were apprehended ... and spent the night in the jail at Edgartown.

All week at Vineyard Haven a sandsucker has been busily pumping out the sand forming the point of land at the north end of the breakwater. When this work is finished, which will be only a few days more, there will be a deep channel through which boats can pass, and to the glory of yacht club racers, a great saving in time. The hard pull in getting around the breakwater will be eliminated. Besides the sandsucker being an object of curiosity that brought out many interested spectators, the Tisbury fire department on Thursday night put on a drill that lined one side of Main Street with about 400 people. Direct pressure in about a dozen hoses shot streams of water into the air to about twice the height of any Main Street building, and slightly dampened about 100 of the onlookers in the first row.

### August 23

Bill Colby, who plays the doctor to sick yachts and sailboats and who has widened his business with the Lobster Pound, reports that already he has had to turn away many who came to his establishment in hopes of digging into a lobster dinner. Not only does this place of Bill's serve as an eating place but also it truly is the home of the Vineyard's first aquarium. One can watch many varieties of saltwater fish swimming peacefully about... and also witness at close range the action of hundreds of lobsters that peacefully crawl and claw, unmindful of their destined fate.

Over in Oak Bluffs are the Flying Horses... this year just one year older than last, but just as popular as ever. No one seems to know how long this merry-go-round has been running, and as far as your news-gatherer can find out, they are now in 50-odd years of turning round and round.<sup>2</sup> The old gas light fixtures are still kept shined and the horses themselves though somewhat braced with reinforcements of iron still are bright and glossy as they used to be. If anything should ever happen to the Flying Horses, mothers would have a problem on their hands, and a difficult solution, they never would find a substitute for the Flying Horses. Mr. Turnell and his wife are running this establishment for their 29<sup>th</sup> year ... and sometimes it is good to give a short tribute to a man and his wife who have given so much enjoyment to children, many, many years for only a nickel.

### Sept. 6

Labor Day, that fatal day for most summer resorts, terminated the stay of several thousand Island guests. About 4,000 were seen rushing toward

<sup>2</sup> Built in 1876, the Flying Horses were brought to the Vineyard in 1884.

the boats on Monday ... and by night when Island boats had completed their extra trips, one truly believed that summer was over.

### Sept. 13

Martha's Vineyard still is in the act of quieting down, more and more each week, after a very active summer. This week had a bit more excitement than usual for this time of the year. The weather was warm and especially suitable for bathing. Cars again were seen parked along the Bend of the Beach down Edgartown way and across from Segekontacket Pond. Chappaquiddick beach also boasted a group of swimmers, as well as the various town beaches, and sailboats darted back and forth across the bays and harbors. Fishing perhaps took the lead, though, and news of tut-tog being caught off the West Chop dock saw a goodly group of excited fishing folks lined around the edge of the wharf. The Vineyard Haven dock was rewarded most of the week with the famous tinker mackerel. So far no blues are biting. Though each boat leaving the Island has a larger percentage of passengers than the incoming ones, those staying late feel a bit more lucky, because this is one of the most ideal times of the year.

Sunday night's boat, which departs at 9, or a little later, brought out the fact that "he who is on time usually is late." Several people arriving on the dot of 9 found they were left, and on comparing their watches with one another, insisted they still had a half-minute. Legs that several years ago might have been active in Harvard or Yale sports found that even a record-breaking sprint down the dock was all to no avail. However, a private boat came on the scene ... and the rest of the story is ... they did make the Cape Codder before it pulled out of the station.

Last week, making jelly was mentioned in these topics. Somehow your reporter finds it difficult to skip this latest bewailment of one housewife and her jelly trouble. She entered a certain package store and said, "There isn't a jelly jar left on the Island. Anyhow, I've just scorched my grape jelly, so give me a bottle of gin." And, speaking of jelly, it might be well to mention that there are simply tons of grapes and beach plums just waiting to be picked... They are free to the gatherer...and this is a bountiful year.

In Oak Bluffs much credit is due their civilian defense chairman for his work in not only organizing but also training. Many bombings have been carried out, and the organization has outlined problems to be worked out, and real war situations are created and handled with efficiency. The other Island towns, though organized somewhat along this line, have much to do to compete with the already well-organized group in Oak Bluffs.

The most recent draftees to be inducted into the service from the Island



are Theodore Meinelt, art teacher in the Tisbury schools, and Robert Collins, who has for some time been engaged in a florist business in Edgartown. Both men were accepted and made members of the Army on Saturday.

### Sept. 21

At Vineyard Haven, the USO headquarters, which have just opened in the space formerly occupied by the Mary Lynn shop, in the Red Men's block on Main Street, will be open to receive donations of various kinds for the boys in service. Mr. George Sears, who has much to do with the USO, heads the organization with several committees in the various towns.

Down in Edgartown the other night three young children who are all under 10 years of age, failed to show up for supper. Their parents, becoming alarmed, appealed to the local fire department for aid in finding them. The chief of the department, who knew the children and who also knew they never missed a fire, thought that if he had the whistle blown they might appear. His thoughts were correct, for as soon as the alarm was sounded right on the scene appeared the missing children and the nervous parents were able to hasten home their wandering fold.... Also in Edgartown this week, Philip Norton was elected president of the newly formed Edgartown Chamber of Commerce. Extensive plans are underway for advertising the town and an information bureau is planned for Main Street.

### Sept. 27

Col. Charles A. Lindbergh returned to the Island this week after a short trip to the mainland. Col. Lindbergh's family is here on the Island for a rather long stay and the children have been enrolled in the public schools.

Over 100 women turned out on Wednesday night for the first of a series of lessons in a course for air-raid wardens, which was held in the Tisbury Town Hall. Miss Hope Gray, a recent graduate of the air-warden school in Boston, is in charge of the course.

Speaking of air raids: The sheep on the ranch of Charles G. Norton in West Tisbury really thought they were back with their relatives in England when Dave Raub's plane suddenly developed engine trouble and was forced to make a quick landing on the ranch Wednesday. However, Mr. Raub, who was accompanied by his wife, brought the plane down in a perfect landing ... and after due repairs, was able to continue on to Nantucket, his homeport.

And so Phil Horton closes his last letter of Vineyard topics, which have been brought to you each Saturday for the past three months by the Vineyard Cordial shop.

## In Memoriam Dorothea R. Looney 1920 - 2007

OUR SPIRITED REGISTRAR, Dorothea Looney, passed away on March 28 from injuries suffered from a fall. She brought her organizational skills, active curiosity, and remarkable memory of things and people to the Museum for more than 20 years while serving as our Registrar, all as a volunteer.

Trained as a statistician who also had a law degree, Dorothea was a longtime employee of Polaroid. She bought a home in Edgartown in 1969 and moved to the Island full-time upon her retirement in 1982, bringing her energy and broad interests to a variety of organizations including, fortunately for us, this one.

Her penchant for details, her remarkable memory, and her passion for solving "mysteries" made her ideal for a job she clearly loved doing. Chief Curator Jill Bouck, with whom Dorothea worked closely, said that because donations had been recorded in so many ways over the years, Dorothea faced many challenges, which she relished. She was a true detective of the past, persistently pursuing and solving important mysteries here. Uninterested in the options provided by our computer database begun in 2000, Dorothea enthusiastically continued updating and organizing our old card system, providing a true "hard copy backup."

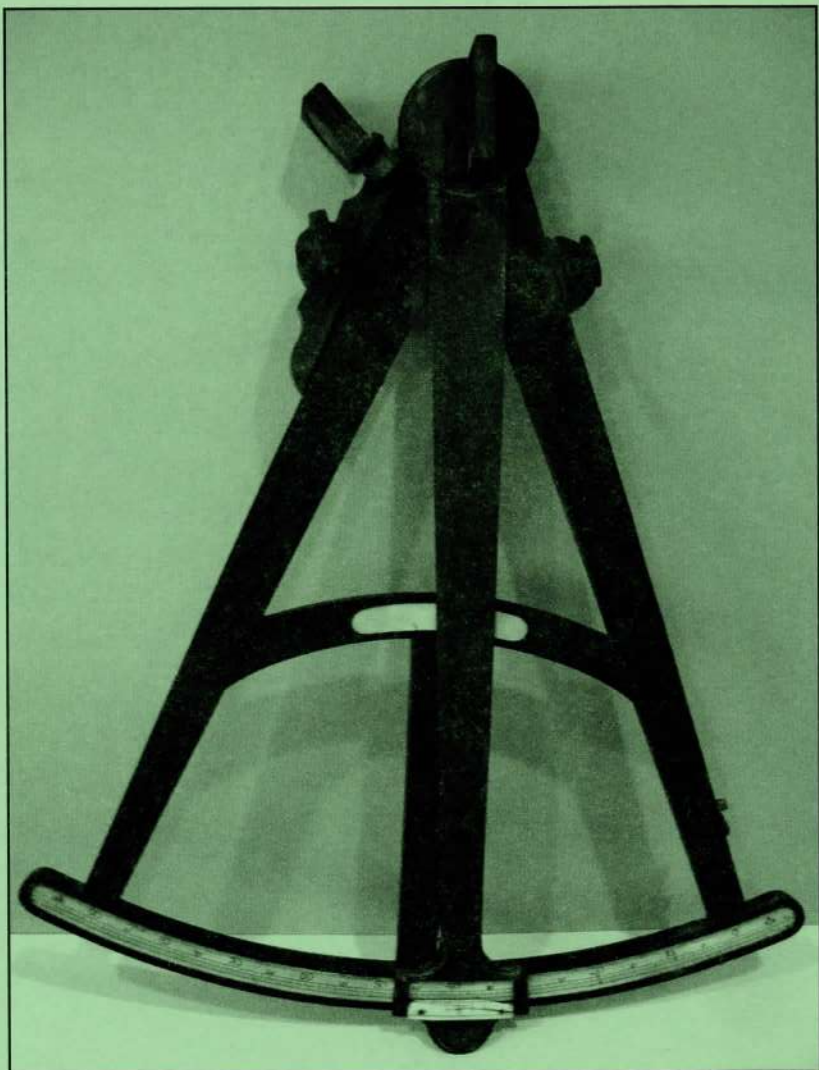
She was also a keen observer of people and human nature, and one of her many contributions was her knowledge of the people who had been here before. She served as a repository of our institutional memory and, because of her sense of humor and insights, she brought these people alive in all their memorable human dimensions so one felt as if one knew them in the same way one knows our contemporary colleagues.

While we will miss the important work she did, we will miss her spirit, energy, and character just as much. As Jill said: "She had a great sense of humor, quick wit and honesty that never failed. She was an Irish storyteller in the best sense and a true student of human nature and life who lived life fully. We miss her terribly."

We benefited greatly from her work. As always here, we have the responsibility of remembering the names of those who came before us and gave us the opportunity to do the work we do. That list now includes Dorothea Looney.

Matthew Stackpole  
Executive Director





From the James Chadwick Collection at the Martha's Vineyard Museum, a wooden quadrant 17 inches tall, with brass and ivory fittings, three glass filters and mirror. This quadrant was brought from Nantucket to Edgartown in 1810 and was described as old at that time. See pages 115-126.