CIVIL WAR

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Edgartown in the Civil War: The Old Man of Company D

As the Town Bid Farewell to Eight Volunteers, Few Saw the Realities Ahead. That Would Change.

by Catherine Merwin Mayhew and John Walter

It was pleasant and cool that Friday in New England, the day they came to say goodbye. In the midday sunshine, 24-year-old Mary Abba Marchant went along with others of her fellow townsmen down to the Edgartown wharf.¹

It was Aug. 29, 1862, and the occasion was overlaid with a sense of adventure and bravado, public patriotism and private fear all mixed into one. The Island had been roiling all summer to the distant drumbeats from Washington: Each town was obligated to provide a quota of soldier-volunteers for the Northern Army, but the quotas had not been easy to fill. With the rebellion of the Southern States in its second year, Vineyarders — like fellow citizens throughout the North — were only beginning to see the outlines of the cataclysm that would engulf them.

This day eight of Edgartown’s “bounty” men — volunteers who had signed up for three years’ duty, in exchange for a $500 signing bonus — were departing the Island aboard the packet boat L. Snow. A “large concourse of friends and relatives” showed up to wish them well.²

The volunteers were a random cross-section of the town: Some came

¹ She made note of it in her journal, which is in the collection of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum.
² Journal of Charles Macreading Vincent, in the collection of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum.

Catherine Merwin Mayhew is the genealogist at the Martha’s Vineyard Museum. John Walter is the editor of this journal. Assistance on this project was provided by Marian Halperin, Elaine Weintraub and Joe Pitt.
from old Island families, and some were of seafaring heritage, and some had wives and children, and some had just started out on life on their own:

- Alonzo D. Ripley, 27, a carpenter, was the last-born son of a prominent Edgartown mariner and shipwright, Jethro Ripley.
- Benjamin Smith, just turned 22, was a watchmaker, the son of Capt. John S. Smith, another mariner.
- Elihu Bunker, a mason, one week shy of his 22nd birthday, was married to a Norton and the father of two.
- Francis Pease, also 21, was a jeweler; he had been married two days before, at North Bridgewater, to a mainland girl.
- John Reuben Ellis, 22, was a bootmaker who had moved from his native Nantucket and married Addie Morse of Edgartown the previous spring.
- Redhead Charles Macreading Vincent, 18, was an apprentice at the Vineyard Gazette.

- Richard G. Shute, 17, small and slightly built, was son of a photographer and merchant, and an accomplished player of the snare drum.

The last of them — the old man of the group — was different.

It was not only his age — 34 — that marked him. Unlike most of the others, he was not a village man; he had been living on isolated Chappaquiddick. Unlike the others, he was not a native of Massachusetts; his boyhood was in New York State. Like some of the others, he had been to sea, and was a family man; but his was a mixed-race marriage, unusual for this time and place. And in one final way, not apparent at this farewell on the Edgartown dock, William H. Harrington stood apart from his companions in Company D of the 40th Massachusetts Infantry Volunteers: Within two months, he would be the first of them to die.

The story of this worldly Washashore and his young Vineyard companions, headed off to war, offers us an opportunity to glimpse the Island of their day.

It was, first of all, still a very small place, and stagnant. Its population was about 4,500, as it had been for 10 years. There were (the census reported) 1,000 families, in almost 900 houses. More than a third of those were in Edgartown, which then included the area that is now Oak Bluffs. And Edgartown — the valuation lists of 1860 said — had 68 shops, eight warehouses, 181 barns. Five hundred sixty-two acres of land were tilled annually. And there were 52,000 feet of wharves.

But the whaling business seemed on its last legs, and the Island's search for another economic engine sputtered on. A newspaper correspondent reported talking with a young Vineyarder encountered on a boat headed out: There were, the young man said, "no business inducements" to keep him at home.5

The farmers of the Vineyard were doing the best they could. They raised oxen, cows, sheep, swine. Dr. Daniel Fisher of Edgartown was growing wheat — 55 bushels to the acre — and others were experimenting with improved yields in corn.

Still, it was hard going. That summer, drought plagued the Island.

There was little in the way of manufacture: Thomas Bradley's shipyard in Holmes Hole was in business, and the brick manufacture at Chilmark dated back years. But an entrepreneurial effort to establish a boot and shoe manufacturing company had failed in just a few years.

The second biggest expenditure in the Edgartown budget, behind support of the public schools, was "support of poor" — annual payments made to citizens who boarded the destitute.

Ties to the mainland were tentative. The Island was, of course, not precisely insular; the comings and goings of brigs, barques, schooners, sloops and steamers from all ports of call precluded that. (In the year 1859, 1,817 vessels passed Cape Pogue Light in daylight hours.)

But steamer passenger service to New Bedford on the Eagle's Wing had become sporadic and unreliable. The paddle wheeler Monohansett was launched, in June 1862, to provide regular service between the Vineyard and New Bedford.

Edgar Marchant's newspaper — the weekly Gazette — brought the outside world in; though most world news arrived in the time-honored fashion of clippings from exchange papers received in the mail. "Two prominent strains of rhetoric run through the period — the Biblical and the classical," the writer Adam Gopnik has said — and it was true in political speeches as well as in journalism. Love of the classics, Christian homilies, the endorsement of patent medicines, advertisements for a book about the dangers of self-abuse — all filled the pages of the Gazette, along with a serialized romance story on the cover.

Religious fervor came in waves; two years earlier, for a period of months at a time, evangelism was at a height and prayer meetings were held in all the churches every evening.

Temperance, too, was a cause you could count on. Lectures on the topic

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3 Charlie Mac, as he liked to be called, was the subject of an Intelligence profile in November 1984, and excerpts from his diary have been published in this journal.

4 He would become one of the regimental drummers. He was so vulnerable in appearance that Abraham Lincoln, on a visit to the regiment and spotting Shute as his carriage passed by, asked: "Do they feed you enough, my boy? Said poor Richard: "Yes."

5 Vineyard Gazette, Oct. 25, 1862. The young man added that he was not going to enlist in the Army because "I have nothing against the Southerners."

drew crowds on winter evenings, and Sons of Temperance chapters in Holmes Hole and Edgartown were active.

In presidential politics, the Island had voted for Abe Lincoln, and watched with trepidation as the South’s rebellion brewed. The Revolutionary War was no further back in time, for them, than we are today from World War I, and the nature of the Union created after the split from England seemed fragile. In the wake of Lincoln’s election, Marchant used an Island metaphor to describe the dangers he foresaw if the Union could not be maintained:

Look at the beach of sand, the single grains of which are the weakest things on earth, but when compacted together, resisting for ages the mighty waves of the Atlantic. Let but those grains recede from our south beach, and what would become of our harbor? The waves of old ocean would rush madly through it, our wharves would be swept from their foundation, and desolation would reign supreme. So with our country. As long as the states hold together, we are invincible, and may defy the world.7

But the center did not hold, and in the early days of the rebellion, 26 Island men joined the Navy, and 12 went into the Army.

**By the summer of 1862, the government needed more.** Edgartown’s selectmen appointed a committee “to facilitate enlistments.”

**Ads appeared in the paper:**

**VOLUNTEERS WANTED!**
**Young Man, Your Country calls you to the field!**
- $100 Cash Bounty from Town of Edgartown to single men.
- $135 Cash Bounty from Town of Edgartown to men with families.
- $25 Cash Bounty from War Department
- $15, One Month’s Pay, in advance.
- $75 Bounty at the End of the War, or when honorably discharged.
In addition to which each volunteer will receive regular monthly pay and his clothing from the government.
Volunteers to the number of twenty, are now wanted to complete this town’s quota. Those who enlist and are mustered into the service of the United States will receive the above generous compensation. Who would not be a soldier?8

Talk of a draft persisted. On August 4, President Lincoln ordered that a census be made of all eligible men between 18 and 45; the enrollment lists were to reflect the potential availability of these men for militia or military service.

The tally for Edgartown showed 349 men in the age group. Seventy-five were exempt for medical reasons (“Joseph Cleaveland, lost several toes; David Davis, Jr., subject to piles; John Mayhew, one arm lame”). The names of another 155 were listed as exempt for other causes, most prominent among them being that the owners of those names were away that summer (“Samuel D. Kidder, shipped for sea; Samuel O. Fisher, goes in a packet; William T. Vincent, in navy”).

Poignantly, there is also one James C. Curtis, a would-be volunteer, who shows up on the list as “rejected, being colored.” Lincoln’s Army was, by explicit decree, all white in 1862. Secretary of State Edwin M. Stanton that August rejected the Wisconsin governor’s suggestion that a battalion of “friendly Indians” might be helpful to the cause: “The President declines to receive Indians or negroes as troops,” he wrote.9

By early August, only four eligible young men — including William Harrington and Charlie Mac Vincent — stepped forward to tell Cornelius Marchant, the town’s enlistment agent, that they were ready to serve.

Gov. John Albion Andrew downplayed talk of a draft. In an appearance at the Camp Grounds meeting that month, Andrew had said: “I cannot believe that this glorious old Bay State of ours shall ever see a conscript son marching to the defense of the liberties of his country. No conscripts in the old Bay State! All are volunteers in the army of the Lord.”

Arthur Railton describes what happened next:

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7 Gazette, Dec. 28, 1860.
8 Town proclamation dated July 31, 1862.
9 War of the Rebellion, Official Records, Series III, Volume 2, p. 299. The ban would be lifted the following year, with the introduction of race-segregated troops. A James W. Curtis of Edgartown — a different middle initial — then joined the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored), and served, though ill much of the time, until the end of the war.
The governor may have believed a draft would never be needed ... but the "volunteers in the army of the Lord" failed to respond to his call. Something had to be done. The three Island towns decided more money was the answer. Edgartown raised its bounty from $100 to $500 for three-year men, and to $300 for nine-month volunteers, plus $25 for their dependents. Tisbury raised its payment from $125 to $500. Chilmark was even more generous, raising its bonus of $100 to $600 for three-year volunteers and $300 for nine-month men. The higher payments worked. All three towns filled their quotas immediately.10

WILLIAM HARRINGTON came from a family that was well established in Stephentown, N.Y. He was the son of Abraim (or Abraham) and Betsy (or Betsie) Harrington, the first of eight children.

His grandfather, Benjamin, was born about the time of the American Revolution, perhaps in Black River, N.Y. Benjamin was an early landowner in the northern part of Stephentown, which drew settlers from Rhode Island and Connecticut. Stephentown is in Rensselaer County; the eastern edge of the town line is on the Massachusetts border. Benjamin served as highway overseer and district “path master,” responsible for maintenance of local roads. Abraim - son of Benjamin, father of William — listed his occupation as “colier.”

William grew up there, amidst wild and hilly terrain, where the Black and Kinderhook creeks run through the valley between the Taconic and Petersborough Mountains. His family name was among a handful of respected, rooted ones in the town; his grandparents, and four uncles, and at least 14 cousins were all there. In his own house, William was for most of his childhood the solitary boy; he was the oldest child, born ahead of a string of five girls born between 1832 and 1842. By the time John (1844) and Ansel (1845) came along, William may have headed out.

He was certainly gone by 1850; the census that year made note that his sister Percilla was the oldest child at home.

Like so many others, Harrington went to sea.

He is plausibly the William Harrington listed as a greenhand on whaling voyages out of New Bedford in 1841 (he would have been 12) and again in 1845.

A William Harrington is listed as a seaman, with a 1 1/2 ton lay, aboard the Dartmouth, which departed New Bedford for the Arctic in 1851, returning three years later.

And William Harrington is also listed as boatsteerer, with a 1/90 lay, on the bark Cherokee, which sailed from New Bedford for the Indian Ocean in 1855, returning in early 1860.


The Island census of that year was taken in July, and it is in that record that we first have notice of William Harrington on the Vineyard.

In the neat script of the census book, his is the last name listed in the Chappaquiddick household of Bethania Furlong, 55.

Bethania — widow of an Irish immigrant farmer, Matthew — has three sons living with her, Charles, John and Joseph, all teenagers.

There is also Bethania’s daughter, Phebe Rematta; Phebe’s husband, Michael, and three children. And Mary Cleaveland, Bethania’s sister.

Then come the names of Julia Deits, 22, identified as a mulatto, and three children, all mulatto. The youngest of these — listed as William — is reported to be seven months old.

Then the last line: William H. Harrington, 31, from New York.11

Much about how this household came to be, and the dynamics that held it, we can only surmise.

What we know, through town records, is that Matthew Furlong emigrated from Ireland, married here in 1840, and began a family.

A young girl, Julia Jackson, lived in his household. Perhaps she boarded there, or worked as a servant. Later, various Furlongs would refer to her as a sister.

She was there in the 1850 census, 13 years old.

While we have no birth record for her, in her marriage papers, she lists her mother as Sophronia — no last name. She does not name a father, nor town of birth.12

Matthew Furlong died in the fall of 1851, leaving behind 40 acres of land and $277.86 in cash, one old cow, one young cow, one horse, one lamb, and several hogs. His extended family remained together.

Julia was 15 the next year when, on Sept. 19, 1852, she married George H. Deits, a 20-year-old mariner from Rosendale, N.Y.13 That December, he went whaling aboard the ship Hector — and vanishes from our sight. We do not know if he returned with the ship in the summer of 1856; we have no record of his death.

As for William Harrington:

What brought him from the ships to the Vineyard? And what placed him in the Furlong/Deits household, and when? We do not know.

Perhaps there is a clue in the existence of the baby William. He is identi-

11 If his age is correctly reported on his tombstone, he would have been 32, not 31, at this time.
12 There is public record of two "people of color" married Jan. 1, 1815 in Tisbury — Prince Jackson and Easter Umpony [Opany]. Sophronia could have been a daughter, in the custom of the time, if she gave birth as an unmarried young woman, her daughter would have used the name Jackson.
13 The marriage registry identifies her as "Julia Ann Furlong." Alternate spellings of George’s name, in various records: Deitz, Deets, Deites.
fied in the 1860 census as "William Deits," but for the rest of his life he will use the name "William H. Harrington Jr." Does the name connect him to his biological father? Not if our William Harrington was aboard the Cherokee all those years — but we're unsure he was.

On Nov. 29, 1861, Julia gives birth to another baby, another boy, who will be called Abraham Lincoln Harrington;¹⁴ and then, on July 20, 1862, she and William Harrington are married, one month before he joins the 40th Massachusetts volunteers.

Before we move past the fact of that marriage, we should pause to note it was outside the norm.

The marriage of a white man and a woman "of color" (black, mulatto, colored, Indian — the terms were often used interchangeably) plays against the complicated backdrop of 19th century race relationships on the Vineyard and in New England as a whole.

Slavery existed in Massachusetts until the end of the 18th century. In its wake, freed blacks were left to fend for themselves (against tough odds) in a world where jobs were few — and prejudices were the rule.

Creating crews for the whale ships on Nantucket and the Vineyard famously "engaged every part of the ... population: English, Wampanoag and African,"¹⁵ but even there color lines were not erased: the cooks and stewards were almost exclusively Africans; few officers were. "They make excellent seamen," an 1859 article in the Atlantic Monthly said of the Vineyard's Wampanoags, "and sometimes rise to the rank of officers, although few white sailors are sufficiently liberal in their views to approve of being commanded by 'a nigger,' as they persist in calling these half-breeds."¹-six

The popular magazine's use of "the N-word" suggests the accepted language of the day. It is a harsh reminder of ways in which even the "liberal" North was not ready to propose equality among all men. It was acceptable to tell stories, in dialect, about black people, in which the joke revolved around stereotypes; the Gazette printed such anecdotes. And the Vineyard was, of course, as it had been for decades, predominantly European, white, and Protestant. "Island whites, like most northerners, were opposed to the spread of slavery ... but were not abolitionists," says Railton.¹⁷

It is true that "amalgamation," as interracial coupling was called (the term "miscegenation" did not come into use until 1863), was a fact of life on the Cape and islands, particularly as it became a matter of survival for the declining Wampanoag populations and the smattering of freed blacks. On Nantucket:

By 1850, when the federal census began to divide the nonwhite population into black and mulatto, one in seven nonwhite people on Nantucket were classified as mulatto rather than black. This included the teenaged children of the Barber family, whose head of household was a black man with an Irish wife.¹⁸

But for many years the unions that created such a mixed-race population do not appear in official records. That was because they were legally forbidden. A 1786 law — the Act for the Solemnization of Marriage — prohibited any clergyman or public official from joining in marriage "any white person with any negro, Indian or mulatto, under penalty of 50 pounds, and all such marriages shall be absolutely null and void."

That ended in 1843, when the law was repealed — Massachusetts was the first state in the union to permit mixed marriages.

And so when the Rev. William W. Hall performed the marriage ceremony for Julia Deits and William Harrington on a Sunday in 1862, he did so legally. The wedding notice appeared in the Gazette.¹⁹

Harrington and the other Vineyard men were formally inducted into the 40th Massachusetts Regiment on Aug. 26, at Camp Stanton, near Lynnfield, Mass. Their recruiting officer gave them scraps of paper for the town treasurer, authorizing payment of the recruiting bounties, and they were granted a furlough to take the papers home. As a married man, Harrington's bonus would have come to $525.

Three days later came the sendoff at the Edgartown wharf.

¹⁴ The baby's birth is registered with the town — a son of Julia Deits, "illegitimate, colored." His name is recorded as William, but that has to be a clerk's error, for we have seen William exists in the 1860 census. Instead, this is the boy who will be called Abraham Lincoln, and who — like William — uses the surname Harrington for the rest of his life.
¹⁶ Atlantic Monthly, September 1859, page 292.
¹⁷ Railton, page 190.
¹⁸ The Other Islanders, page 65.
¹⁹ It identified her as "Mrs. Julia Deits."
On Monday morning, Sept. 8, Harrington and his friends left Camp Stanton, knapsacks on their back, and marched to Boston. They arrived at 1 p.m., going first to the Maine depot, and then the Old Colony Railroad depot, where they took the train for Fall River. "We were well received all along through the streets of Boston, by the people of that goodly city," said Charlie Mac Vincent.20

At Fall River, at 6 p.m., they boarded the steamer Bay State.

Sailing from Fall River at 8, and traveling overnight, they entered Long Island Sound and arrived at Jersey City. They boarded a train at Jersey City — plied with coffee and bread by the local citizens — and traveled through Newark, Trenton and Princeton to Camden. There, a ferryboat carried them to Philadelphia, where, Vincent reported, "we received the most enthusiastic reception I ever witnessed."

We were taken to the Volunteer Saloon, the first of the kind established in the United States, and were furnished with a bountiful upper of meat, both corned beef and ham, bread, butter and cheese, hot coffee and tea. On our route from the saloon to the cars for Baltimore, we were greeted by the ladies and gentlemen, more especially the ladies, with the shaking of hands, and sometimes kisses and "god bless you's." I think I am perfectly safe in asserting that I shook hands with 500 women.

The train took them overnight to Baltimore, where the reception was less warm — Maryland being a tense border state, and Baltimore having been the scene of an 1861 attack on soldiers by ruffians. (On the train, each man was issued 10 rounds of cartridges, as a precautionary measure.) But they marched through town without incident, and entrained for Washington.

Arriving in a rainstorm, they bunked in a jerrybuilt wooden structure, half finished. On Thursday — it was dull and hazy, with rain again — Harrington and others of the regiment left the capital via the Chain Bridge and marched eight miles into Virginia, to Fort Ethan Allen. Their camp was on a hill by the side of the Potomac. On Saturday, Sept. 13, the sun was out, and it was fairly hot, with a good breeze blowing. Vincent wrote a letter home with his writing paper laid out on Richard Shute's drum. He reports he and the others are

in good spirits, animated by the consciousness of having done our duty in volunteering for the cause of our country and the cause of humanity and justice. I feel determined to do my duty to the best of my ability, feeling confident that all will yet be well — the country restored to its original stand among the nations of the earth, puri-

fied of the foul iniquity that tarnishes the escutcheon of this boasted land of liberty. Strangers will no longer fling it in our face that in this "glorious land of liberty" the human race is enslaved by its fellow man, but all will be right, our national honor vindicated, the "stars and stripes" be an emblem of freedom, indeed, and everything lovely and fair to behold.

By the time those words appeared in the Gazette, news of the battle at Antietam had shaken North and South alike. On Sept. 17, opposing troops faced off in the first major battle on Northern soil, near Sharpsburg, Md. The result was a nominal victory for the North — but at terrible cost. It was the bloodiest single day in American history: 23,000 casualties. On Sept. 22, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in the rebellion states as of the coming Jan. 1.

At Fort Ethan Allen, men of Company D were alternating on picket duty, and had regular drilling and occasional target practice. The routine quickly became monotonous, and rumors boiled that they would soon move, but each rumor proved false.

Harrington was in the midst of things. He was "a great favorite with his fellow soldiers," the Gazette said later.21 Certainly they razzed him about his age; he compensated with exuberance and energy. He was a cheerful

20 These and following quotations from a letter of Charles M. Vincent, printed in the Gazette, Sept. 19, 1862.

21 Gazette, Dec. 5, 1862.
soul, and his companions liked being around him when the hours dragged. He was "an open-hearted, generous companion and a brave soldier." He had a gentle smile, an easygoing manner, and was thoughtful of others. All this was noted, and remembered.

On Saturday, Oct. 11, the company marched to Munson's Hill to support a battery, and on Saturday, Oct. 18, they moved another four miles northwest to Minor's Hill, passing through Falls Church, a village of 30 or 40 homes where the church was now in use as a hospital by the Union forces. Here, they pitched their tents in a valley, padding the ground with straw. They were awakened at 4 in the morning with a false alarm — the regiment was placed under arms because a rebel attack was expected. It did not materialize.

On Oct. 15, Harrington wrote a letter to a friend in Edgartown, subsequently printed in the Gazette. It is the only sample we have of his writing, and across 150 years, it allows us to hear his plain-spoken voice, and his optimism about the cause.

We left camp Ethan Allen on Saturday last, and are now encamped at the foot of Munson's Hill. On the hill there are breastworks that were thrown up by the rebels, and were mounted with wooden guns. Perhaps you remember of reading an account of it sometime since. There are a great many troops in this vicinity, causing quite a warlike appearance. We are encamped close by the Leesburg turnpike, which makes it very pleasant for us, as there is a great deal of passing both of soldiers and citizens. Yesterday we went down to camp Ferguson, where the Massachusetts 1st are encamped. They are about two miles from Alexandria and have a very good view of the city. Fairfax Seminary is but a short distance from them. It is a beautiful brick building and is now used as a hospital. There are a number of very pretty buildings near it, which are used for various purposes. The boys of the 1st are enjoying themselves nicely. As yet the regiment is not full. The distance down to camp Ferguson is about four miles, so we have a very pleasant walk of eight miles. We are now accustomed to marching, so don't mind it much. I like a soldier's life very much, as do all the other boys. We still continue to be gay and happy, and know of no reason why we should not be so, for we do not want for anything except a chance to get a shot at some of the rebels. Our boys are well and wish to be remembered to you.

We expect to be home very soon, for we all think the war will soon end. Of course it will if the 40th has a chance to show its courage. Our Lieut. Colonel says he would not be afraid to place this Regiment before 10,000 rebel cavalry, so you can judge of what the Regiment is composed.²³

²² Gazette, June 2, 1871.
²³ Gazette, Oct. 24, 1862.

They were placed in the Second Brigade of Abercrombie's Division, along with men from Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York. On Saturday, Oct. 25, there was a grand review of the brigade.

A rainy and cool autumn turned, in late October, to frosty nights. The men began to think of mittens and boots, in short supply. Snow fell — to the depth of seven inches — in the first part of November.

And William Harrington's brief career as a soldier was drawing to an end.

All autumn, the men of Company D struggled with illnesses of various sorts. While still in Camp Stanton, Pease and Ripley had suffered intestinal distress. Pease was again ill during the first week at Fort Ethan Allen. Vincent was ill following a vaccination shot, and again, with a cold and diarrhea, in early November.

Harrington also became ill in that month, and reported to the field hospital. It was typhoid fever.

He died on a Friday, Nov. 28. The shock to the men of Edgartown — that one of their number was already a victim of the war — was palpable. Vincent wrote in his diary:

Today for the first time in our Company we have been visited by the angel of Death, who has taken one of our best men here, and laid his icy fingers on his lips and sealed them for ever on this earth. Poor Harrington has gone to his long home. He would have been the last man in the whole Company that would have chosen to be the first to pay the debt of nature, which we must all sooner or later pay. He had lost so much flesh since he was taken ill that he did not look at all natural. The boys talk of sending his remains home where they may have a Christian burial. I understand that funeral services will be held tomorrow. Poor fellow, he has gone, and in this event we are forcibly reminded of the uncertainty of life. A few brief fleeting years are all that is allotted to man. It should be the imperative duty of every man to improve them to the best possible advantage, but few of us, alas! the number is very limited, act according to the dictates of their better judgement. It is lonesome enough about here for the boys.²⁴

²⁴ Vincent's journals and letters are part of the collection at the Martha's Vineyard Museum. The sense of shock and discouragement expressed here would, over the next months and years, grow. The regiment was 1,000 strong when it set off from Camp Stanton. By a year later, though the Massachusetts 40th Volunteers had been involved in no serious battles, injury, disease and death had whittled their numbers to 300. Throughout 1863, while assuring family and friends back home that he and his fellow soldiers were only occasionally "blue," Charlie Mac would increasingly use words such as the "cursed rebellion" and "the unnatural and unholy war" to describe the conflict. As for how to end it? "Talk about giving up to secession!" he wrote on Jan. 5, 1863. "Never. There has been too much precious blood spilt and valuable lives lost to have been in vain."
Funeral services were held the next day in the company street, directed by the chaplain. Afterward, hats off, the men marched by the open casket one by one. The body was then placed in an ambulance for return home.

The Edgartown men chipped in 67 cents each to send a telegram, and deliver his trunk here.

It cost $60 to send the body home. The company captain borrowed the money, and the men from Edgartown told him they would help him defray the cost, and reimburse him on the next pay day. For that, Smith, Ripley, Bunker, Ellis and Vincent contributed $6 each. Pease contributed a smaller amount. Shute promised to pay up later.

The remains were met at the wharf on Thursday, Dec. 4 — two months and a week after the exuberant farewells there. A delegation of citizens off-loaded the coffin, and accompanied it to Town Hall, where three ministers presided at a service. He was buried in the Pease's Point Way cemetery, under a tombstone giving the details of his military service.

Under the heading “Obituary,” a fellow company member, anonymous, wrote an appreciation that appeared in the Gazette a month later:

A deep gloom pervades our Company. The dark, cold messenger of Death has been in our midst, and with his icy finger marked his victim, and on his swift silent wings borne away one of our members to the mysterious realms of eternity. Yes! Harrington has left us. He who only a few days ago was with us in the fullness of health, enjoying our sports, sharing our sorrows, and cheering our dull hours by his pleasant gaiety, is dead; his kind words and winsome smiles are gone from us forever. We have met with a loss that we can never regain. Never can we find one who will so fully command the love and respect of the company as did he. His kind nature drew to him the affections of all; we esteem him not as a friend only, but as a brother, ever ready to share our hardships, alleviating our burdens and stimulating within us new zeal by his kind manner and pleasant address. We cannot too deeply mourn his loss. During his whole life he has aimed not for his own happiness alone, but has endeavored to increase that of others. Forgetful of himself, he was ever mindful that none should suffer when he had the power to mitigate their sorrow. When our country called for defenders, he stepped forth ready to do and to die in defence of that flag which so long has waved in triumph over our loved land, and though it was not his lot to fall on the field of battle, amid the roar of artillery and the din of musketry, yet he has as freely been an offering sacrificed on his country’s altar, as though he had fallen in the smoke of strife, and his bones left molding on the field of carnage. He is the gainer, we are the losers.

He has thus early reached the end of his journey. His task is done, and full well he has fulfilled the mission assigned him. Though his life has been brief, he has left his impress upon the hearts of all his acquaintances. The solemn finger, Time, can never blot from memory his many kind acts, nor can the tongue of slander dim the luster of his name. Ever with us in life, in death he is not forgotten.25

Seventy years later — in 1934 — his name went on a plaque presented to the Town of Edgartown by the Wilmon W. Blackman Relief Corps, in memory of Civil War veterans. “William Harrington,” it says, one among 70 names of Edgartown men. You can see it still, on a wall in the Town Hall.

One of the other men of Company D died in the war — Benjamin Smith, on Aug. 15, 1863, also of typhoid fever. The other six lived to come home.

Julia’s sons, William Junior and Abraham Lincoln Harrington, went to sea. Both returned to the Vineyard. Abraham worked as a laborer, and lived with his mother for many years. And of William Junior, there is this footnote:

When he died in 1907, he was buried next to the old man of Company D — a man who left home when the boy was just three years old, and who never returned. The boy could have had only the slightest memories of the man; with Harrington’s generous, playful nature, may we hope they were especially happy ones? How wonderful that, at the end of the younger man’s life, they came back together again: They rest today in the Edgartown graveyard, under modest stones covered in lichen, across from a clutch of Silvas and Mayhews and Vincents. William Senior, the adopted Vineyarder, is on the left; William Junior, a native, on the right. An American flag marks the soldier’s grave.

Julia did not remarry. After the war, she bore two other children — Elmer, in 1867, and Lillian, in 1870. Eventually she moved into a home on the Edgartown-West Tisbury road, and died there, at age 86, on June 16, 1922. She had outlived all but one of her children, and spent the last winter of her life with her grandson, William Deitz, in Rosindale, Mass.

“Everyone in Edgartown knew Mrs. Harrington, and every one liked her,” the Gazette said.26 “Her many years rested lightly upon this remarkable old lady, who could walk astonishing distances with apparent ease. She was also a noted berry picker.”

Her funeral was held at the Baptist church. There were many flowers.
Culture, History, Current Events

It's All Reflected in Minutes of the Triad Club, A Women's Group in Oak Bluffs for 70 Years

by Susan Wilson

Twelve ladies met at the home of Mrs. Marshall to organize a club for literary work. ... The name of the club adopted by vote is 'Triad Club' the name indicating three purposes, Information, Improvement and Sociability." Grace P. Smith1 writes this inaugural entry into the club minutes book on Feb. 28, 1908. Cottage City has officially been incorporated as Oak Bluffs for just a year. The price of a cesspool pump-out is $1.25, and a teacher at the Oak Bluffs School earns between $30 and $40 per month.2 Horse-drawn vehicles and early motorcars share the road, and the 17-year-old Civil War monument stands at the foot of Circuit Avenue. A list of jurors selected from the town rolls lists only men; women do not yet have the right to vote.

Within its first few meetings, the Triad Club adopts the clover as a perfect icon of the three tenets of the organization, establishes an elected calendar committee to plan the program for the upcoming year, and weakens the bylaws before committing them into print. In an era when women serve as adjuncts to their husbands, and home entertainment consists of poetry readings, piano recitals, singing duets, little homegrown plays or tableaux vivantes, this small group of Oak Bluffs matrons sets about creating a society that will extend the narrow confines of their home and heart. They plan the Triad Club to bring them culture, learning, history, current events — and fun.

1 Mrs. E. Roland Smith.
2 Town Report of Cottage City, 1904.

How I Spent My Summer, and Other Topics

The founders of the Triad Club sought mutual improvement and recreation much as the short-lived (1880-1883) Lyceum did.

The women gathered “fortnightly” in each other’s homes at 2:30 on Friday afternoons.

First, there was the business portion of the meeting, followed by presentation of “papers.” In the early months of the club, from February through May of 1908, these papers tended to be of the “all you ever wanted to know about northern countries” variety, and it’s easy to imagine that the presenters were using information and materials close at hand.

After the papers were presented, the ladies all participated in a group discussion called Roll Call, where everyone was expected to chime in on such topics as How I Spent My Summer, Patriotic Quotations, or Helpful Hints. (Later, a fine of one dime would be levied against members unprepared for Roll Call.)

Then, the “Information” and “Improvement” portions of the afternoon over, the social portion of the afternoon commenced: the Hostess Half Hour. The hostess shared with the assembly music, pictures or objets, providing some entertainment. Sometimes this came in the form of showing off a collection of shells, reading poetry selections aloud or listening to the gramophone, “...after which dainty refreshments were served and the meeting adjourned.”

The minutes of the meetings recorded it all: the business meeting, the topics of the papers and how they were received, the events of the Hostess

3 Preamble to the Constitution of the Cottage City Literary Society, 1880, Collection of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum.
4 Minutes of May 21, 1909, May C. Gorham, secretary.
Half Hour and the very important refreshments. Thus: Information, improvement, and sociability.

A report of the club's meetings appeared in the local newspaper. The reports are likely the work of the club secretary, as they often mimic the minutes word for word, and the clippings were glued into the minute books.

**At First, a Roster of Married Women**

It was predominantly married women who made up the club roster during its first few years. Their husbands were active as selectmen, school committee members, fence viewers and businessmen providing services and supplies to the town.

In 1908 the club minutes refer to members only by their married names unless they are widowed or single. So it is “Mrs. F.W. Chase” and “Mrs. J. E. Eldridge” who appear in the program booklet as the first elected officers of the Triad Club. Nevertheless, on the very first page of the minute book covering the period 1908 to 1914, the founding members sign their names, and reveal a bit more of themselves: Susie Chase, Charity Gorham, Adalyn Ripley, May Gorham, Eunice Hamblin, Florence Dean, Elizabeth Rice.

Mrs. Frank Weston Chase was the first president. In her history, "Sixty Years of the Triad Club 1908-1968," Dorothy M. Look writes that “Mrs. Chase is the wife of a prominent dairy farmer in Farm Neck, and was raised in Katama.” Born in 1863, Susan Jernegan married Frank Chase in 1884. They farmed 300 acres at Farm Neck, and called their home "Woodside.”

The first vice president was Anna E. Marshall, wife of Frank A. Marshall, a “pioneer businesswoman and powerful factor in the growth of Oak Bluffs.” Mr. Marshall had made his fortune as, among other things, a news dealer.

Mrs. Edmund G. Eldridge, the former Sarah Mayhew, was among the charter members, serving as hostess for the Dec. 4, 1908, meeting and presenting a report on "New Year's Customs at Home and Abroad" on Jan. 1, 1909. Mrs. Eldridge was known as "a distinguished singer," and frequently entertained the Triad Club.

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5 The clippings are unidentified.
6 Women of the period were mentioned in print rarely, often only as survivors after a husband's death. Even after first names begin to appear in the Triad Club's program booklets after 1914, the women are always referred to in print by their married names.
9 Mr. Eldridge was a justice of the Dukes County District Court for 28 years, founder of Eldridge and White General Insurance in Oak Bluffs, and served as a selectman in Oak Bluffs.

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A musical treat was enjoyed by all as Mrs. E.G. Eldridge who read her paper on "Songs New and Old" furnished beautiful and appropriate illustrations for her paper by singing a number of delightful solos. They were as follows: Scotch Song — "C'moin' thro' the Rye," Irish song — The Old Plaid Shawl," African or Negro Melody — "Mighty lak' a Rose," Modern Song — "A Memory," Popular encore song — "Dearie," Patriotic Song — "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The bylaws were revisited annually, dues were set (50 cents per year in 1908) and membership was limited to 20. Guests could attend and their appearance was duly noted in the minutes. After attending several meetings as a guest, Miss Emily Worth was admitted to the club on Dec. 18, 1908. A single woman, a schoolteacher, Miss Worth was also a skilled musician. For 50 years, she was the organist at Trinity Methodist Church in the Camp Grounds, where she lived. Her name appears several times in...
clippings as having performed piano solos on special occasions hosted by the club, including the annual Gentlemen's Night. From 1922 until four weeks before her death in 1939, Miss Worth was the Oak Bluffs correspondent to the Vineyard Gazette. She also managed to include clerking in the Post Office and in an insurance agency on her resume. On Jan. 7, 1910, she presented a paper on Greece, and on March 22, 1918, presented "Our Wild Birds." If you want something done, ask a busy woman, and Miss Worth served the club as secretary-treasurer from 1913 through 1917 and again in 1923-24.

Club minutes record the comings and goings of the membership.

Regretful acceptance of the occasional resignation is always recorded in the minutes and the secretary is charged with sending a letter to the departing member — but rarely noted is the reason for the resignation. From the minutes of March 27, 1925, after the secretary's report was read and one correction made: "...Then Miss Emily Worth gave her resignation from the club, much to the surprise and disappointment in losing a valued member, Mrs. Hayden and Mrs. Dean tried to persuade her to reconsider, but in vain."

Almost from the beginning there was a waiting list of women wanting in. When a slot opened up, a woman was nominated in the order in which her name appeared on the waiting list, and the membership voted to accept the new member, who was then notified by letter. Occasionally candidates whose names were put into nomination didn't make it into the club. By the annual meeting of 1910, the bylaws were amended to revise the process of election.

Section 2: The election of new members shall be by ballot, names to be presented at any regular meeting, action on same deferred until the following meeting. The person receiving the majority of votes cast shall be declared elected. In case of only one name being voted upon, four votes in the negative reject.

The subjects of papers for the October through May 1908-09 season included: "Education in New England," by Mrs. W. S. Gorham; "Modern American Writers," by Mrs. G.A. Burgess; "Our Country's Outlook," by Mrs. E. Roland Smith; "Washington, D.C.," by Mrs. Adalyn Ripley; "Adventures Afloat," by Mrs. Lucy P. Smith; "Home Economics," by Miss Mary Welch (who presented this topic from time to time, much to the delight of the attendees who, in the minutes, expressed a deep desire to remember everything that Miss Welch imparted); "Panama," by Mrs. E. Ro-

11 Obituary of Emily Worth, Vineyard Gazette, Sept. 27, 1939.
12 Minutes of March 27, 1925, J. E. Buzzell, secretary.
13 Minutes May 13, 1910, Mabel A. Mayhew, secretary.

land Smith; "Origin of Our Island Names," by Mrs. Christopher Look and "Distinguished American Women," by Miss Rice. Others spoke on various states and regions — Texas, Alaska, the "Middle West." Regarding a paper on "Island Lights," secretary Lucy Smith noted in the minutes: "The first paper of the afternoon by Mrs. Mackay, subject, Our Island Lights was very interesting and instructive and listened to attentively. After the reading several members gave interesting accounts of visits to Gay Head light 16, and we learned that for once the name of Senator Wm. M. Butler was more effective than his presence and words."

One Paper Reprised After 25 Years

Lucy P. Smith must have been one of the more interesting presenters. Over the course of 40 years, she spoke frequently on her unique personal experience as a whaling captain's wife.

Born Lucy Vincent in 1842 in Edgartown, married to Capt. George A. Smith at the age of 17, Lucy Smith sailed with her husband from New Bedford with their three-and-a-half-year-old son Freddie along for the journey "that might take months, even years...." She was with her husband when he rounded Cape Horn, and lived in Honolulu with Freddie while Captain Smith sailed to the Arctic. 17

Mrs. Smith enhanced her initial presentation of Nov. 6, 1908, with "views" of Hawaii afterward at the Hostess Half Hour.

Twenty-five year later, Mrs. Smith presented the same paper to the club at its annual meeting, April 14, 1933. Wrote secretary Mildred W. Penney: "From out of the dim past of 64 years ago, Mrs. Lucy P. Smith gave us an intimate glimpse of life on a whaling voyage that lasted over a period of five years; a gem of recollections from her over rich store of experiences."

Although the paper was read by Mrs. Penney, the author was in attendance and the group presented her with "...an Easter gift of a box of candy and card by the president." 18

The club met October through May, breaking for the summer, when presumably, then as now, everyone was too busy.

Subjects of Discussion Broaden

The inaugural winter of 1908 notwithstanding, over the course of the years the scope of subjects presented as papers was broad and eclectic.

Two papers were given at each meeting. Geography, social issues, poetry, oration, art, science, home economics, literature and religion are but a few of

14 In 1908, the first order Fresnel lens, now on the campus of the Museum, was still in place at the Gay Head lighthouse.
15 Minutes of March 26, 1909, L. P. Smith, secretary pro tem.
17 "Sixty Years of Triad," Dorothy Look.
18 Minutes of April 14, 1933, Mildred W. Penney, secretary.
the topics explored.

On May 9, 1919, Mrs. A. C. Smith presented "Beginnings of Mormonism": "A well arranged paper upon a subject which some of us had given but little thought, and was exceedingly interesting and instructive to the finish." The meeting that afternoon was followed up with a reading by Mrs. Frank Chase on the "Natural Wonders of Utah."19 Mrs. Clara Norton's paper on socialism, Oct. 27, 1919: "... was one of great interest to us and presented to us in her usual pleasing style."20

The Triad Club was essentially nonpolitical, although often patriotic, and there were topics that touched on world events. Often papers touched on social issues: anti-vaccination, and the "Problem of Child Labor." Some tackled the role of the United States in world affairs: "Our New Possessions," "The American Navy and Its Achievement" and "Our Government."

A newspaper article glued into the minute book and dated Dec. 30, 1908, details the first annual Gentlemen's Night given by the club:

Last evening... when the husbands and gentlemen friends of the members gathered at Oriental Hall, with fear and trembling lest they might be assembling to listen to a lecture upon "suffrage" or a like subject. All were agreeably surprised... The hall had been arranged with great taste as a drawing room, and its cheerful appearance gave promise of a pleasant "at home."21

They may have dodged the bullet of suffrage that night, but women's issues were coming.

The calendar for the year 1911-12 is akin to a Year of the Woman. Papers were read on "Women as Philanthropists," "Women as Poets," "Women as Educators." Another reading discussed "Women in Agriculture," and, on March 22, 1912:

22 Minutes of March 22, 1912, Elizabeth H. Rice, secretary.
23 Mrs. Lottie Hatch.
26 Minutes Nov. 22, 1918, N. W. Look, secretary.
The Massachusetts State Federation of Woman's Clubs invited the Triad Club to become affiliated with the other woman's Clubs of the state. This move was long debated because it was felt that such an alliance would have much to offer but that transportation problems would prevent our taking advantage of the opportunities. ... Although by our geographic situation we are often unable to take as active a part in State and National Federation affairs as would be desirable, yet we do help to further spread the ripple of achievement in civic, educational, cultural and other areas that emanate from the larger bodies of the Federations.

Such clubs proved important cultural and social outlets for women whose lives were circumscribed by family, church and the expectations of women of the time.

Lives of the members of the Triad Club, of course, were even more circumscribed by the facts of life on an Island. In the minute book of 1940, there are several references to "declining the invitation" to attend meetings of Barnstable, Wareham and Falmouth women's clubs, as well as an invitation to participate in a meeting of the Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs in Boston. What the minutes don't specify is why these invitations are dismissed, "with regret"; but of course the travel limitations of the time meant a trip to an afternoon tea was an all-day commitment. Steamship sailings were far less frequent than they are today. Often trapped by family responsibilities, these ladies were equally restricted by boat schedules.

Wrote Dorothy Look in "Sixty Years of the Triad Club."

When your calendar committee asked me to give you a résumé of the life of the club and I sat down to consider the origin of the club, the people involved, and the time when it was organized, I considered the charter members and how they were women rebelling against the circumscribed lives they led, partly due to the times they lived in, and partly due to the insularity of their locale.

Here and there in the minutes are glimpses into the times. On Nov. 8, 1918, "The Triad Club met with Mrs. A. F. Marshall November 8. This being our first meeting but by Calendar should have been Oct. 11th. On account of the influenza epidemic the previous meetings were postponed."

And, sometimes, glimpses into the personalities of the membership. On Nov. 21, 1918, "Everyting looked so good and tasted so good that one or two members were immoderate in the amount consumed. One member, being rather plump, and not having as much room as she could use to ad-

vantage, filled all present with a feeling of awe as well as admiration by her skillful manipulation of knife and fork. Bertha H. Matthews, Sec'y.

It was, of course, a more innocent time: "Mrs. Adalyn Ripspear presented 'The Mystical Subject of Legends.' Beginning with our own Hiawatha and so on — not leaving out the Swastika which has become so familiar to us through its popularity as a decoration for jewelry...."

A Slow Evolution

Each year a little calendar book was published containing plans for the year ahead, including a roster of members, the bylaws, the topics and dates of upcoming meetings and events like the Gentleman's Night and the annual Tea, speakers and, always, a motto. The frontispiece of the 1913-14 calendar book says:

Real knowledge, like everything else of value, is not to be easily obtained. It must be worked for, thought for, and more than all, must be prayed for.
— Thomas Arnold.

Through the first half of the 20th century, the club evolved with only a few changes.

Dues rose in 1924 to $1 per annum. In 1924, the bylaws were amended to enlarge club membership from 20 to 25. In 1933, the Triad Scholarship fund was created, and more and more often there are donations being made to charities on the Island and off.

The Pledge of Allegiance became part of the meetings.

The names of outside speakers begin to be listed in the calendar books. In 1937 Captain Ralph Packer presented a talk entitled "Petroleum Age" and editor Henry Beetle Hough (1937) and author/reporter Joseph Chase Allen (1938) were among the guest speakers.

During the meeting of Nov. 24, 1939, the club took up the cause of bringing a kindergarten to Oak Bluffs, sending a letter to the school board "asking them to keep in mind our former petition for a kindergarten and the present need of one in our community."

In 1941 the club was supporting war relief "through a local agency" and sending $1 checks to the local boys in service, Leslie Landers and Alton Noyes among others.

Self-assessment was an annual task.

A review of the club's 1938-39 year by Mrs. Estelle Leonard is written in a whimsically nautical tone, alluding to the club as "the good ship Triad."

28 "Sixty Years of Triad," Dorothy Look.
29 "Sixty Years of Triad," Dorothy Look.
30 Minutes Nov. 8, 1918, N. W. Look, secretary.
31 Minutes Nov. 21, 1918, Bertha H. Matthews, secretary.
32 Minutes of March 18, 1910, Mabel Mayhew, secretary.
34 Minutes Nov. 24, 1939, Marion B. Morton, secretary.
Our first stop was at "Garland," where dwelt a former captain of our ship. While there we were invited by a Mrs. Morton to hear a talk on Radio Facilities of the Island. It seems Mr. Royal Daggett, an amateur radioman had played quite a part, at the time of the Hurricane. We were impressed by what abilities could be made available, in emergencies of this kind, on a small island.  

An undated and unsigned sketch entitled "Triad Club Claims Uniqueness (Written at the request of the old buzzards)," likely written in 1939, describes the essence of the club, then 30 years old, as one of the smallest of island organizations, limited to a membership of twenty-five, but it is an active institution, and claims uniqueness in both its [sic] operation and achievements. The president has no duties except to preside at the meetings, there is no concerted drive made for funds and the annual dues of the members are but a dollar, yet this little club holds its figurative head high in the federation of women's clubs [sic] and points to its' annual record of good works with justifiable pride.

The writer goes on to enumerate the various Island and national organizations that the club has supported during the past year including: "Girls Scouts, Cancer Clinic, Braille Press, M.V. Hospital, World War veterans, Seamen's Bethel, Dental Clinic, in the town school, Mass Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and the emergency 'Royal Daggett Fund,' so called, presented in recognition of service by Mr. Daggett as a radio operator." This also included the annual scholarship of $50 to "some graduate of Oak Bluffs High School ... the only conditions being that the students must have attended advanced school on the mainland for one year before making application for the fund." The writer summed it up as: "The club feels, that considering it's [sic] small membership and the absence of benefits, soliciting or other pronounced efforts to raise money, that it is operating in keeping with the tenets of the institution, Information, Improvement, and Sociability."

The history of the club was important to its members and there were celebrations of milestone years. Secretary Nancy W. Look recorded in the minutes of Oct. 28, 1918: "It being the 10th Anniversary of the formation of the Triad Club reminiscences were related by Charter members and other members."

On the 50th anniversary, in 1958, members celebrated with a program in which a recreation of the first meeting of the club was presented as a play. Dressed in costumes loaned by the Martha's Vineyard Little Theatre, the current members portrayed the club's founders in the play, written and directed by Edith Crozier, entitled: "As We Were." Mrs. Joseph L. Mayhew, the last surviving member of the original roster, was there to witness herself being portrayed by Mrs. Richard L. Pease. Ayn Chase remembers being a new member, suddenly faced with memorizing a script. "I did it," she recalls, "and I memorized all their lines." 

Dorothy Look provides a comprehensive look at the organization and some insights into its longevity.

Over the years, despite obstacles, the Triad has grown in scope of interest and breadth of outlook. Causes donated to have broadened to include more and varied needs. Very few changes have been made in the Constitution and bylaws...Dues have increased to 85-annually, but aside from the scholarship benefit, the Club has managed not to be burdened with constant money-making demands.

Barbara Murphy, whose mother Mary Thomas (Mrs. Wilson Thomas) was a member, recalls the flurry of activity any time the Triad Club met at her mother's house. The children were enlisted to get the house ready and then sent upstairs, out of sight, out of mind, to hope that there would be some of the "dainty" refreshments left once the gathering was over. "My mother was proud to be a part of the Triad Club," Mrs. Murphy says. "She was a member of the Homemakers' Club of Oak Bluffs, too. But to her, membership in the Triad Club was very special."

A Franklin Folger cartoon (1960) found in the program booklet of the 1970-71 year shows a housewife standing on a stepladder dusting the molding above her windows. She says to her quizzical husband: "You just don't know my women's club."

**Changing Times**

If the original purpose of the club was to inform, inspire and provide society for women whose lives were home and hearth, by the second half of the 20th century, the makeup of the club and its structure had begun to reflect changing times.

Meeting times went from three o'clock in the afternoon on Fridays to eight o'clock at night, and more and more of members were working wom...

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35 Mrs. Estelle Leonard, "Résumé of 1938-1939: Taken From the Logue of One of the Seamen."  
37 Ibid.
en. Marion Morton (Mrs. Benjamin Morton), who joined in 1936, worked at the Martha's Vineyard National Bank; Ayn Chase (Mrs. Paul Chase) had her craft business in the Wesley House Hotel; Jane Votta (Mrs. Louis Votta) was the town clerk.

In 1974, the club resigned from the State Federation of Women's Clubs. Dues levied by this organization had gone up from $18 per year to $50. Given the small number of active members, the rise in dues could only be managed with difficulty.

A discussion followed as to whether to meet this added cost by increasing individual dues, or to try to add to the club's income by means of fund-raising activities in the community. Neither plan brought much response. ... It was pointed out that Island members are non-participating in the over-all organization's off-Island meetings because of weather and transportation difficulties ... the members might prefer to use available funds for such purposes and meeting Island needs and increasing the amount of the scholarship.43

At the same time a more civic sensibility had emerged, evidenced by contributions to the Red Cross and the scholarship fund, financed in part by the "dime" collection at every meeting and on holidays. Sunshine cards were sent to the ill and to new mothers.

Still, the Triad did not consider its purpose to be that of a fundraising organization. Fundraising was done among the membership, including those fines for not participating in Roll Call and occasional auctions. In 1974, dues were raised to $7 of which $2 was earmarked for the scholarship fund. That year a princely $100 was awarded to student Tom Chase, now of the Nature Conservancy.

At the annual meeting April 1, 1977, the club voted to try meeting once a month on a trial basis for one year and "...there were no new members. We had 2 resignations. There are no names on the waiting list at present."44

A Feb. 10, 1978, report of the Membership Committee says:

Ann [sic] Chase reported two new prospective members, Gisele Hebert and Elizabeth MacDonald, who will be invited to attend our next meeting. Letters were also written to Marguerite Cook who is not at the moment free but asks we keep her in mind; also Ann Ross who would like to participate but Fridays are not a good night for her. Patricia Corey and Ruth Hurley did not acknowledge our letters.45

And on Oct. 20, 1978: "Meeting cancelled. Speaker not available at the time. Also, lack of members who could attend."46

43 Minutes Jan. 11, 1974, Louise Traver, secretary.
44 Annual report April 1, 1977.
46 Minutes of Nov. 14, 1980, Helen Gallant, secretary.
47 Minutes of March 14, 1980, Helen Gallant, secretary.
Helen Gallant had died very suddenly. She was a loyal member of Triad for over ten years and a good friend to all of us. We will miss her.48

There is no record in the minutes of the actual dissolution of the club, but Ayn Chase recalls: “We had lost our enthusiasm. We were worn out.”49

In 1981 the nation and Island were different than they had been in the insular world of 1908. The Iran hostage situation had preoccupied the country. Anthony (Tubby) Rebello had been returned to his position of selectman in Oak Bluffs. Assertiveness training was being offered to women. The need for women to gather and inform one another about far-reaching topics had been replaced by the need to work outside of the home, and by the easy offering of information and news on television. Membership in such a club was no longer a privilege but a burden.

Today these clubs seem a quaint relic from the days when women, once they had married, ceased working outside the home; the image of petits fours, white gloves and hats is all that is left of a generation of women who sought to improve themselves, expand their limited horizons and have some fun.

Where did they find their information for all those papers? The libraries, certainly. Home collections of books, personal experience, clippings from off-Island newspapers? The Triad Club pre-dates the Dukes County Historical Society. This small collection of women bent on self-improvement were autodidacts. In our information-saturated world, it is hard to recollect a time when research, study and discourse were harder to come by. It was a time when Information, Improvement and Sociability stood as a motto for a group of Oak Bluffs matrons intent on improving their insular Island lives. They did it with study, presentation and “dainty refreshments.”

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'Bearing Witness'

When Five Vineyard Women Joined the Fight for Civil Rights

by LINSEY LEE

A Vineyard branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was started in November 1963, and Henry Bird, rector at Grace Episcopal Church, was among other civil rights activists who journeyed to Williamston, N.C., to protest conditions there. In the spring of the following year, five Vineyard women drove to Williamston to deliver food and clothing to poor black residents—a trip that, famously, ended up with the women taking part in a brief civil rights protest, and getting arrested for it.

In 1993, oral historian Linsey Lee interviewed each of the five who made the trip. Portions of one interview, with Nancy Whiting, appeared in the 1998 book Vineyard Voices. This summer, the Oral History Center exhibit at the Martha’s Vineyard Museum is “African Americans and Civil Rights Voices,” which combines portraits, excerpts of interviews and archival photographs; portions of the interview with Polly Murphy are included there. Now, for the first time, Ms. Lee draws on the recollections of all of the “Vineyard Five” to retell the story of a remarkable week in their lives.

The “Vineyard Five” are Peg Lilenthal, Virginia Mazer, Nancy Smith and Nancy Hodgson (now Whiting). — Ed.

POLLY MURPHY: Henry Bird, the minister at Grace Episcopal, had gotten very involved in the whole civil rights movement, and he went with a group from Boston to Williamston, North Carolina. This was the early 60s and civil rights were very much on our minds. It was things you saw on television, things you read; people were getting more and more aware of this, the terrible injustices that had been there right along.

LINSEY LEE is Curator of the Vineyard Oral History Center at the Martha’s Vineyard Museum. She has been collecting oral histories from Island people for more than 20 years.

48 Minutes of March 13, 1981, Margery Hillner, secretary pro tem.
49 Interview with Ayn Chase.
And I think maybe Kennedy's death, in November of '63, heightened everybody's awareness and emotional feelings.

NANCY WHITING: All the people I knew here were following Martin Luther King's course, enormously interested and hopeful about it. King's relationship of politics and religion and non-violence was really terribly exciting. Henry Bird was following the Southern Christian Leadership movement very closely. He and Paul Chapman from the Vineyard started going down to Williamson, the place that we wound up.

These were people we knew, we saw them here. None of us belonged to Grace Church at that time, but we really wanted to do something concrete.

When I say we, I mean Virginia Mazer — she's my closest, oldest friend here. She had just come to the Vineyard with her husband, Milton, who started the clinic at Community Services. The clinic opened in November '61, and I was its only employee for the first couple of years. Virginia and I always talked about what was happening to the world. Virginia had been active in protests in New York against bomb shelters.

And Nancy Smith and Polly Murphy. They're sisters. Nancy wasn't living here then, except in summer.

Peggy Lilienthal was the really the wildest of us. She was very dramatic and that was her mode of being. Certainly Virginia and I were on the shy side, and tended to be understated and oblique in our natural states, but we were also passionate about fairness.

VIRGINIA MAZER: I got to know Henry Bird because when my daughter was in high school she wrote an essay on freedom and won a prize. The first time I ever laid eyes on Henry, he came on a motorbike up that dirt road to bring her the prize. He was so ardent and so young, it was terribly touching, and here he came, proudly, to bring her the award. From then on, I guess, he had caught me. So we always were part of his group.

PEG LILIENTHAL: Of the five or seven or eight of us, only Virginia had been actively involved in protests. The only thing that I had done so far as civil rights was concerned was that when I was young, when my children were small, we were living in St. Louis. I remember talking to an African-American woman who told me that the drugstore where we bought all our medicines, which also had a lunch counter, would not serve people of color. I remember calling up the owner and telling him that I was very disturbed to hear this and he said, "Well, from time to time we try to serve people of color but the white people always complain." He said, "I'm a businessman. I can't buck the trend." I said, "Well, I'm not going to buy anything more from you until you decide to buck the trend. When you do, call me up." I boycotted various stores in St. Louis, but this was just something that I did on my own.

WHITING: Kennedy was assassinated in November. Well, that was when we organized the Island NAACP. We went ahead and did it that day.

The person who really helped us was Kivi Kaplan. He was the chairman of the board of the national NAACP, and very active and helpful telling us how to go about it. The group's original cast was an odd mix, us good liberal kids, a few blacks — the Tankards were very involved — the clergy and some people from the Jewish community.

MURPHY: Henry Bird arranged for a group from Williamson to come up here, right around Christmas, a whole bunch of adults and a group of children and teenagers, and they came up and there was a big meeting in the Old Whaling Church and they sang freedom songs. They came and stayed with us, you know, people who had room to put them up, for a couple of days. Most of these people were, sort of, veterans of a battle that was going on in Williamson. It was a very ugly situation down there, a lot of violence. Black people had difficulty registering to vote, they couldn't eat in restaurants, they were getting shot at.

There was an organizer down there, a black man named Golden Frinks, who Reverend Bird was very enthusiastic about, and he was working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference under Dr. King, and one of the things they did was have a boycott of white stores. So we began to collect canned goods and clothing and things like that to send down to support them in their boycott.

The high school kids here began Can Dances, where everybody for admission would bring some cans of food to be sent down to Williamson. How were we to get it down there? At some point we just decided, "Well, we'll stick it in the car and drive it down."

Virginia Mazer's from the South — she's from Jackson, Mississippi — and for her watching television and the bombing of the little girls in Birmingham, this was just agony. Her feeling was: "I can't just sit here as if it weren't happening, I need to do something." So I would say she was, really, the one that was the impetus behind it. And we all agreed with her.

So we ended up taking two cars, and all the canned goods and clothes and things, taking them down to Williamson. By this time it was late April.

WHITING: For a whole year before we actually went, and certainly for a year after, our relationship to these people in Williamson kept growing. They came to visit us. We raised a lot of money, and they came on a bus and they stayed in our houses and we had a prayer meeting in the Old Whaling Church.

There was a man named Golden Frinks, King's organization leader. He
was funny, a marvelous salesman, very attractive, jazzy kind of guy. He urged us to come, told us how they were having boycotts for unfair labor practices. So people were not working and they had no money for food and clothing. He said how much help it would be.

I can remember packing my suitcase. It was supposed to be that we weren't going to jail. We were just going to take the food and the clothes. That's when I started in on packing and what to take. I thought to myself, "Well, I'll just take my harmonica along. I might just need it." And I knew perfectly well that I was thinking about being in jail and my harmonica would be a handy thing to have.

We knew it was dangerous. We certainly knew that. We knew we might go to jail. And we didn't know if we would come back alive.

I certainly thought it through very carefully before leaving. But quietly — I didn't talk to anyone about it. And what I wound up thinking was that I wouldn't want my grandchildren to know that I had a chance to influence people in this way and turned it down. And that's the way we decid-
ed. The day before we left, I was winding things down at the clinic where I worked in Edgartown. My mother lived next door to me up-Island. My children were 14 and 16. I found myself over at the bank, arranging to give my mother authority to sign my checks.

LILIENTHAL: I had never been south in my life at that point, even though my family is Southern. My mother was born in Alabama; my father in Georgia, and my family essentially was culturally Southern.

On subsequent trips south for the civil rights effort, I wondered whether in fact there were any of my relatives in the places where I went. It passed through my mind if they had known I'd come down to do what I was doing, they might have come running out of their houses and killed me. It was a rather sobering thought.

My husband was terrified, of course, at my going off. We had four children, and it wasn't just the children. He loved me, he still does, and, of course, he was worried. But it was something that we talked over and decided that since my own feelings were so strong, he wouldn't have stood in my way, any more than I'd have stood in his way.

WHITING: On the trip down in the cars, we didn't talk about much. We were careful with each other and with ourselves. Superficially, it was just a little trip. Just take the stuff down. We didn't talk about what we were about to do.

I was with Virginia a good part of the time and she was the most scared. Rightfully. She knew the South. She was raised there. I was too stupid to be scared in the sense that she was. Not stupid, but I just — I knew her, and I read her emotions. In the time when I was with her, I was reading her Emerson's essays, especially the one when he goes to jail, On Civil Disobedience.

Nancy Smith was very quiet, very quiet. She's not a big talker. And I was raised that you're supposed to make conversation. I remember trying various ways and she just couldn't talk. Finally, getting out a package of peppermints — I remember, I feel it in my mouth, the terribly deep silence and the taste of the peppermint — and offering her one. And she accepted it.

Nancy's son Woolcott was on the Freedom Rides — he was one of the earliest ones. At one point he went to prison for a month. So Nancy — no wonder she didn't talk much. She was terrified.

So when we were eating those peppermints and she was so quiet, she wasn't fooling around. It's often true in my experience of families that aren't formally religious that politics takes that place, and their deepest values center around politics. They really mean it and they really do it. And theirs was that kind of a family, you see.
NANCY SMITH: We lost our way on the way down. That’s a terrible way to drive, I mean with two cars following and five people and not one the leader. We just took forever getting there.

LILIENTHAL: It was a long trip. This was a big thing for some of us, even to go off-Island!

We discussed the fact that once we got over the Mason-Dixon line we wanted to be very careful that we didn’t stay — although we were white women and could have stayed in any hotel — anywhere where our black sisters and brothers couldn’t stay. So there was a lot of talk about logistics. As a matter of fact, we stayed with Michael and Binny Straith in Virginia on the way down.

On the way back, I remember one kind of amusing incident. We did stay in a hotel and I remember that two of us went into the hotel first and asked whether this hotel was integrated, and the woman looked at us in a rather confused manner and I guess she said yes, and we only realized later when we were up in our room about to collapse into bed that probably she didn’t even know what integrated meant.

On the way down, I don’t really remember any discussions about fear until perhaps we got close to where we were going and then we were aware that probably someone — some officials — were going to be on the lookout for us and, as a matter of fact, they were.

At the approaches to Williamson, we were followed by a police cruiser. They followed us all the way into the black community where we were staying and then circled the block and parked in front of the house. I remember that Henry Bird told us to look out for the police, that they were watching for Massachusetts license plates.

WHITING: When we got outside Williamson, there was a place that Henry and Paul had said was the last safe place before you went into town to call ahead and say we were coming. And there were some supplies they needed. They needed sugar. I remember buying a hundred pounds of sugar, and calling Michelle, my daughter, on the Vineyard, whose birthday it was.

Then we got going on something called Pleasure Highway 13. It had banks on either side and there were stories — true ones, I’m sure — about how the whites would run black people off these roads and dump them in the swamp. And we kind of knew, once we got on that road, the fat was in the fire. We had two cars and we were supposed to be unobtrusive — these five white women with Massachusetts license plates. Virginia, in her anxiety, had switched the button and her lights were on, just to add to the general anonymity.

We were utterly aware that we were being watched as we came into town. Sort of the vigilante scene.

LILIENTHAL: It was an area where there had been a number of lynchings, the Klan was very strong, the poverty of the people was just — it was Third World poverty.

You could go into the black sections of town during the day during the harvest season or the planting season — this was tobacco and cotton country — and not find an adult there. The landowners sent in buses before dawn to pick people up and brought them back after dark.

These were long hours that the people worked, and very, very hard work, and the only people that you found in the community during the day were children. Sometimes there would be either an eight- or nine-year-old taking care of the infants and toddlers.

It was a community that was so terribly, terribly poor — when I think of the people who were thrown away! We’ve thrown away generations of people of color in this country. People who had no education or not much education I found to be extraordinarily intelligent, extraordinarily — how can you say? Politically savvy in a way that white middle class people just simply weren’t and, for that matter, aren’t, in this country to this day.

We’ve just thrown away such riches that you wonder, when will we stop doing it? We’re still doing it.

WHITING: The black people were so nice. They warmly welcomed us and fed us, and they had a church, which is where they met every night.

We were there with them. The church had bullet holes in it and we thought it was kind of scary. They prayed and sang, and they asked each one of us to say something, which terrified me.

I remember saying that I felt so happy that they would let us come and let us in — obviously it was going to make trouble — and being terribly moved, as we all were. And feeling a kind of warmth and comfort I’d never felt before in my life. It was palpable, like the glow of a fire or a light spreading, that kind of thing, so that being together somehow made it all right. Amazing.

Each of us slept in a different house that night. They talked about nice, plain things. So easy to be with. The women said they wanted their kids to have a chance to be up close to us, to touch us. Because they’d never been around white people, and school integration was coming. These kids were going to have to go to school, and white people in school in the fall, so they were very eager for that. It was totally unpretentious and somehow being together did burn off the fear.

It was the fear they lived with every minute. This was their lives.

MAZER: We stayed in black houses, and the night we got there they took us to the church for a meeting at the black church with bullet holes — I remember that’s when I really began to be scared.
MURPHY: There was a woman named Sarah Small, who had come up to the Vineyard and had spoken, and had won all our hearts, and we went to her house.

MAZER: She was a marvelous woman. She was the spearhead down there and her doors were wide open, and I remember she said, 'I never lock my doors. If you lock a door you lock fear in with you.' I've never forgotten Miss Sarah.

They were so goddamn brave. Ours was just such an upper-class, little effort and here were these people that had dedicated their lives to this and been in jail endless times. They were so dear. They were so comfortable and comforting.

MURPHY: Eventually Golden Frinks came over. Now we had decided we should go down as ladies — I mean no jeans, you know, we all had hats and gloves, very alien to the way we lived here, but we thought, “This is how we should do it.” And I remember he came in and he said, “Hmmm... ladies,” he said. “I haven’t had any ladies before...” and what was the best way to use us. And really we were there to be used.

We went to a meeting in a church and they divided us up, among them, the black community where we stayed, and they sent us out on voter registration work, where you went and knocked door to door in the black community, and cars would drive by with whites in them, and we’d practically climb the trees. But we did that, I guess while they were deciding what would be the best use of us, and he asked us how we felt about going to jail and it was decided that we should picket the local Sears Roebuck.

SMITH: Golden Frinks was a dynamic, handsome black man, tall and completely without nerves of any kind. He just seemed to dare people to take a stab at him.

We had gloves and hats and he just said, “Oh, beautiful ladies, how can I use you?” So immediately he put us on a picket line with signs and we picketed Sears Roebuck, which refused to hire black people, and that’s when we were arrested.

MAZER: When it was arranged that we would picket, we’d been out on the pavement probably five minutes before we were arrested. That was the plan. See, they needed publicity. They needed something to happen so we went to jail. We only stayed overnight, night and a day.

MURPHY: So they had made placards for us that said Sears discriminated, and we went out and walked around in front of the store. The whites walking by looked at us with real hate. You know, I’m sure people have disliked me from time to time, but I’ve never experienced hate like that.

And before long, the police arrived. What we were arrested for, technically, was picketing without a permit.

The police took us to the jail.

We learned afterwards it was right next door, but they took us around driving and going over train tracks when a train was coming right at us. The train wasn’t coming very fast, but they were trying to intimidate us. It was a bumpy ride around; much longer than it needed to be. When we got to the jail, the sheriff there was like something out of a bad movie, he just seemed beside himself with rage: “What were we doing down there?”

And I, I know Virginia and Peggy, too, attempted to sort of talk to him about race. One of us, when he said, “Why have you come down here?” said, “We’ve come down to love you . . .” or something like that, which didn’t go over well.
We were split up between two cells. A couple of young black women — really girls, they must have been in their early twenties — who picketed with us went to jail with us. I think they’d been through this routine quite often, because the people at the jail made some crack about one of them going to jail again.

MAZER: What held our spirits up were the young blacks who went with us. They’d been to jail so many times they knew how. The sheriff and the cops were pretty nasty to them: “Well, here you are again! Haven’t you got anything else to do?” They were terribly dignified: “No, sir. This is what I want to do.”

WHITING: I remember as we got out of the police car to go into the jail, there was then a great crowd of white people. That was my moment of truth about hatred, looking into the eyes of hatred. It was just terribly shocking. I realized that they would kill us the first chance they got. They absolutely detested us.

I’m a middle-class kid. I’d had various personal tragedies in my life, but I’d never seen that before, and I was astounded. I never forgot and I never will.

I’ve tried to swing around to the other side, thinking what it must be to feel that way, what a terrible thing it is for the hater, but at that moment I just hadn’t seen it before, and there it was, just sheer, sheer hatred. And it — you can’t exactly say it was frightening. It was astounding.

They wanted to know what our occupations were. They knew the name Lilienthal from the TVA dam. They knew they had somebody connected with somebody important, and that made them nervous, so that was Peggy’s contribution. And they came to Virginia, and she said she was a television writer. Nancy said she was a writer. Polly was a housewife, and I was a tax collector. They just could not figure out what in the world we were doing there. It was comical, it was so crazy.

LILIENTHAL: We were locked up in a cell that had bars on three sides. It was quite large, with a little toilet in the middle, and the police would come and run their Billy clubs around the bars to keep us awake.

I guess it was the Klan that staged a noisy car honking demonstration around the jail practically all night, but we were all so exhausted we slept pretty well.

Then we were bailed out, again rather hysterically — the chief of police or sheriff, whoever he was, screaming at us about barging in on Southern affairs because they’d never had any trouble with you-know-who until we came.

MAZER: We went to jail on May Day, May Day of 1964. We each paid five hundred dollars bail.

MURPHY: We got bailed out by our assorted husbands at home, and came out the next afternoon with the group of black people waiting to greet us, and they took us and we had a lovely dinner that they had prepared.

SMITH: Golden Frinks met us when we came out of jail, standing there in his Sunday garb, and took us all to a big Sunday dinner.

MURPHY: And then we left by, sort of, the back way.

I think they managed to convey that we were going to go one way — they were speaking on the phone, which they felt was tapped — and then it was arranged we went around another way.

There was a big long bridge that went over a sort of chasm, a deep, steep valley and a long bridge across it, and a man in a little house on the bridge. When we went across the bridge, the man in the house did a double-take, and rushed in to the little house, presumably for the phone. But we got away safely, and that was really all there was to it.

SMITH: On the way back we stopped at Peggy Lilienthal’s in-laws, at David Lilienthal’s house in Princeton, and they were pretty chilly and not very approving. Peggy was a very militant lady and Virginia always compared her to Joan of Arc. She sort of looked like Joan of Arc. I think she was younger than the rest of us, with sort of bobbed hair and a tall girl. So she was determined. She really forced us on her in-laws. She called up and said on the way back we were coming to spend the night and David Lilienthal Senior did say he didn’t think this was the way to do it. That’s as close as he got to criticizing us.

Back on the Vineyard, they had a big welcoming committee for us, all our children and friends were all at the dock with signs and we felt like heroes or something. Shirley Mayhew had a big supper for us and a lot of our friends were there and all our children were there and we talked. We didn’t tell them how many times we got lost driving down.

WHITING: I know that when we came back — I was at that time the tax collector in West Tisbury and I thought, “I don’t know if this one’s going to fly.” Of course, I’d been elected, duly elected, but I thought, “Well, there is such a thing as impeachment.”

And the first time I walked into the office, which was then the old police station, after we got back, there was Nelson Bryant, the chief selectman, and Charlie Tucker. “Listen, tell us about it. What was it like?” They were all excited. I was just stunned. We were prepared for the worst. And some people were horrified, but we didn’t see them.

It was terribly radical thing for us to have done this at that time, from here, a sort of apolitical sort of place.
summer. We had an NAACP rally here, and Roy Wilkins spoke at that meeting. Golden Frinks came up here, and I remember he flew in to the airport, and all of our teenage children, who had never met him but by this time were saturated with our stories, just ran across the tarmac and threw their arms around him and hugged him. He was very charismatic, an interesting man.

LILIENTHAL: When the children, the teenagers, came up to stay with us during the summer of ‘64, some of them stayed at Henry Bird’s and some of them stayed at our house. The kids came because they needed to get away from the tensions in Williamston.

A lot of these kids had done sit-ins, some of them had had hot coffee thrown in their faces, some of them had been beaten up. They were such courageous kids! Two of Sarah Small’s children came up. I think we had at one point five of these children between the ages of 12 and 16 staying at our house.

This trip up to the Vineyard was really to give these kids an opportunity to be kids and to get relaxed because the pressure was just so great. It also, you know, could be that Sarah intended for them to get used to being around white people, because these kids went back to Williamston and integrated the schools that fall. You have to understand that these kids had never really been around white people at all.

That summer, these kids were really the only people of color visible in Edgartown. A lot of the summer families had servants of color, but you never saw them on the street; they were the invisible summer population of Edgartown.

But our kids were visible and it took me a long while to realize that some of the people in town were crossing to the other side of the street. I guess even then I was so naive that it never occurred to me anybody would be the least bit upset by what I was doing.

Now that I think about it, I remember when we made that first trip to Williamston, while I was gone my younger son was ambushed and beaten up by a bunch of older boys and it was because of what I did. This was really a very hard thing for me to accept. It really made me hesitate before I went again. It’s one thing if you risk yourself, you put yourself on the line, but when you put your kids on the line, it’s a good deal harder.

On the other hand, I guess I came to terms with it, because I did go back. But this business of semi-ostracizing that went on in town was surprising.

There also were people who really came through.

I remember that Nancy and Arthur Young, for example, who were then at the Carroll apartments ... We had the kids here in the middle of their summer season. Nancy called me up and asked me if the kids from Wil-
liamston knew how to swim. Well, of course, they didn’t. They had never been in a swimming pool in Williamston and these kids didn’t have the opportunity to go to the beaches.

So she said, “Why don’t you send them down to the Carroll apartments and we’ll have the lifeguard teach them how to swim?” Well, we were thrilled and the kids were just ecstatic.

They went down two or three times a week for a couple of hours with the lifeguard, and I think that the Youngs did have some repercussions. They had some complaints from guests; they may have had some people who even checked out. But it was wonderful for the kids and it was a courageous act on the part of the Youngs. I’ll always remember them for having shown that solidarity with the kids and with us. It was one of the high points.

MAZER: And then on the Fourth of July, we decided we’d join those Edgartown folks in the parade. It was American Legion and everything. We were really scared of what would happen. Edgartown was pretty lily white, so we decided to march, and we did. We walked up. We had an old Land Rover and then Bob Tankard was in the front of the march with a flag, and curiously there was a little ripple of applause, which was so good.

WHITTING: That was the Mississippi summer when they killed those civil rights workers. And the whole New York and Boston intellectual community was right there with our NAACP efforts. They were in this from wherever they were off-island, and it really grew.

We began to concentrate power and money and authority. It was just when the movement itself was snowballing.

The civil rights bill passed into law, and Roy Wilkins came that summer. And Kingman Brewster — I remember at the NAACP rally finding myself astonished to be sitting up there in the Tabernacle in chairs alongside Roy Wilkins, Kingman Brewster, Kivi Kaplan, all these important people. There we were at this wild, bigger-than-life kind of thing — the last of hope. I keep thinking of that. Hope for the notion that a person or group of people can have a real influence and effect on the course of events. I don’t think any of us feel that way anymore. Everything’s so big and so impersonal and so global, so computerized.

MURPHY: A term that was used a lot at that time was “bearing witness” and I think we did that. I think that what we brought, maybe, was the knowledge of support from beyond their immediate, small world of Williamston. I mean we were one little group of many groups that went different places in the South, and I think it helped.

It just seemed logical at the time, sort of putting our money where our mouth was, you know. And here we weren’t living with — not to say there wasn’t discrimination here because there was and is, but not the kind of frightening thing there was in the South.

Oh, I don’t think we felt we made a big influence. I think we all felt very humble, you know, we made a small gesture but accumulated small gestures had some small meaning. I think we all felt very humble. We came back to a safe environment, leaving our friends in an environment that wasn’t safe.

But I think we all have feeling of gratitude that we did this, you know, that we saw what we saw, and that we did go down. It meant a lot.

LILIENTHAL: It changed my life. After this trip I went down again for voter registration work. I also made another trip with a group from Massachusetts, testing the Civil Rights Act in ’64.

Certainly Henry Bird took enormous risks. He really ventured into the unknown, because he felt that this was something he needed to do. I think each of us women felt exactly the same way: that it was something that we needed to do. It needed to be done, we could do it, and so we did.

MAZER: Then Henry — people will deny this — lost his job. I looked up the church records the other day. It’s not definitely stated, but, see,
Edgartown Episcopalians were terribly uptight. “We’re not ready for it. Someday, but we’re not ready right now.”

It was terribly hard for Henry and Hildy. They were so young! They were so vulnerable. I can see them now. They looked like children, and they had adopted a black boy, Isaac, and then they adopted a little girl, whom they named Sarah for Miss Sarah. People thought he was crazy.

He went to Maine to work with the fishing people.

WHITING: I think we felt we’d been empowered, we’d been strengthened. That’s one of the great pleasures of it, because you really lose your self-consciousness. It was done. You were a part of something. That changes your own boundaries.

LILIENTHAL: The thing that I think about is the memories that I have of being in churches down South in the Sixties, and being in a circle and singing freedom songs and then shouting, “Freedom now!” and I think, gosh, how naive we were! We really thought it was coming and it was coming soon, and here we are how many years later and we’re still so far away from it that it could make you weep.

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The News Comes to Michigan State: When My Mother Was Arrested

by WOOLLCOTT SMITH as told to LINSEY LEE

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I didn’t know my mother was going down South and I had no idea this was happening. I was listening to WOAR in East Lansing, Michigan, the college radio station. They played music, and at the break of the hour they had the AP wire feed that a student would read, and I was listening to it and the wire feed at nine o’clock in the morning on that Saturday was that five white women from Martha’s Vineyard had been arrested in Williamson, North Carolina. I knew immediately that that must be Nancy and Virginia and Polly and Peggy; I didn’t know Nancy Whiting was along, but I learned later that the fifth one was Nancy Whiting.

Now, it was ’64 and telephone communication was expensive, and I was a poor graduate student at Michigan State. So I waited ’til 7 p.m. to make a night call to my father, in his small house on Seth’s Pond. I called 0831 and the phone rang and rang and rang. The Vineyard operator told me that the phone was never going to answer. And I said, “Well, I’ll place a person-to-person call to my uncle, Stan Murphy.” And so I called to my uncle’s house on Middle Road and the phone rang and rang and there was no answer there. So I called Dr. Mazer’s home in West Tisbury and the phone rang. There wasn’t any answer. It was fairly nerve wracking, especially since I had some experience in the South myself.

And the Vineyard operator then — everything was done by personal communication with the operators, and the operators in the evening were high school women, so there was a little bit of giggling and a little conversation in the background — and somebody said, “Well, maybe you should call David Lilienthal’s home in Edgartown.” David had two little children at the time, so it was logical that he might be there.

So I called, and, sure enough, he picked up the telephone. And he reported that things were well, and they had lawyers on the case and everything was fine. The other husbands of the women in jail were all over having a very nice dinner at Dr. Nevin’s, prepared by Barbara Nevin. And they were going to be out late because they were in a rather “good mood,” since they knew their wives were safe. (I assume that’s why they were in such a good mood!)

And the next day we learned again through telephone that my mother and the others had been released and were on the way back up north. At Michigan State, I would just let it leak out, bit by bit. You know, I’d say to my mathematician buddies, “I have to check whether my mother’s out of jail yet or not…” I was very proud.
Fifty Years Ago in Vineyard Schools:
A New Building and ‘Woodpeckers’

by Chester V. Sweatt

It was in the spring of 1957 that plans were finalized — and accepted in town votes — for the creation of an Island-wide Regional High School. It had taken years of discussion; as far back as 1954 various committees had picked out a site, imagined the curriculum, and forecast a student body of 450. Then, 50 years ago this summer, bonds were issued for the construction of the school; the building would open in 1959.

That was the center of attention in education locally. But it was a time of change in national educational circles, too: On Oct. 4, 1957, the Soviet Union began the Space Age with the launch of Sputnik, an unmanned satellite, and across the United States concern spread that the country was not prepared to compete on this new frontier.

These broader issues are reflected — a neatly-packaged time capsule — in that year’s report from the superintendent of schools, printed in the town annual reports.

A story is told in the Ozarks of a traveler who was astonished to see a herd of hogs dash in one direction, listen a moment and dash elsewhere. Being puzzled, he asked a nearby farmer why the hogs exhibited such strange behavior. “Derndest thing I’ve ever seen,” said the farmer. “For months I’ve been calling them hogs to feed by pounding on the feed trough with an ax handle. A few days ago a bunch of woodpeckers landed here and started pecking on every dead tree around. I’m telling you, it’s driving my hogs crazy.”

There are so many woodpeckers calling attention to what they consider is wrong with American schools that it behooves all of us to consider who is talking and why, lest we overlook the true call of the ax handle.

In this time of national confusion and doubt, it would seem wise to review the policies and beliefs upon which our school system is operated. Several such beliefs in time with the call of the ax handle are listed below:

1. Schools are for all American youth.

I believe America has grown strong because of universal education. Now that the pupil population has increased so dramatically and that the problem of providing facilities and teachers has become so acute, we must be careful not to lose this American dream of instruction for all youth. We must not let our fears of Russian competition stampede us into ill-considered educational ventures.

A recent editorial in the Boston Herald advocates rationing of education, on the ground that we not have and will not have the necessary facilities for all. It further states that to meet the Communist challenge we can afford no waste of education on the less able and qualified.

In one form or other this argument has been presented since the fight for free public education began and carried to its logical conclusion would well mean the end of our democratic ideals.

2. The American school system has produced a country of many firsts.

The present hysteria about Russian science development has much in common with the emotions of the fans of a football team that has just lost a game after winning a long string of victories. However, would anyone think that a coach were sensible if he dismembered the team at once and began re-building with new material? I doubt it.

We Americans have just lost a game or better a portion of a game. We have to face up to the fact that there are brains in other countries as well as our own. The Russian challenge must be met and will be, but I doubt if we want to break up our structure yet.

In the attempt to place the blame on the schools for Russian victory let us not be too quick to copy Russian schools. The Russian scientists who produced the winning satellite are not products of the present Russian school system.

3. A constant search for ways to fulfill the American dream of education for all youth is much more sensible than the present hysteria.

Granted that the weapons race with Russia is of vital concern to America, it must never be forgotten that science alone cannot make America...
strong. The many other cultural areas must be kept strong for they too are a source of strength. Science alone cannot give us the will to excel or the will to struggle on when the road is rough.

"There is no royal road to education." The many over simplified generalizations are only snares and delusions. America is so large that whatever one says about schools he can find it illustrated somewhere. There are good schools and inferior schools. There are schools that enjoy the solid support of citizens and schools that do not. Some schools have delinquency problems, others do not. To over generalize these problems is just plain foolishness.

4. Children must work harder if we are to have quality education.

Ours is an active fast moving age and there is so much available to so many that people have to make choices. There is not time to do everything.

So it is with children. There is not time for young people to engage in the many activities available to them and at the same time do high quality work in school. For example, too many of our pupils give their greatest drive to the ownership and support of automobiles to the detriment of their studies. Parents would do well to help their children to make more intelligent choices.

5. It is the duty of the school to help every child achieve up to the level of his ability.

I believe that we are justified in expecting a high level of achievement for able pupils. To receive top grades a pupil must work hard and produce. It may be well added that a pupil will have to work harder to come to get top grades.

I believe we are equally justified to take less able pupils where they are academically and encourage them to make all the progress possible.

Failure thus becomes a matter of not making an effort to do one's best. I also believe one's best is usually more than we think it is.

A two-day institute was held for the Island teachers last September. This was made possible through the cooperation of the Island school committees. The State Department of Education gave us valuable assistance in planning the program and securing instructors.

The program was divided into three areas: use of visual aids, teaching science in the elementary school and teaching reading in the high school. All teachers attended the meetings and requested further programs of a like nature.

Teachers are making greater use of visual aids this year. Membership has been increased in the cooperative film library in the State Department of Education thus making films available to us.

We have made excellent improvement in the teaching of elementary science. Pupils show great interest in science and the quality of work has improved.

Credit is due the staff for their fine cooperation and also to both the staff and School Committee for their fine team work.
It’s August – Let’s Go to the Beach!

Howes Norris Jr., Virgil Sherrill, and May Brown enjoy a summer’s day in 1905.
(Photo from files of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum)